A series of anarcho-queer engagements about LGBTQ+ teacher identity in STEM disciplines

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Abstract

Even in social and professional contexts in which workplace diversity is considered a positive contributing aspect to institutional success, the experience of LGBTQ+ employees has repeatedly been shown to be marked by the adoption of defensive strategies to smooth their way within heteronormative workplaces. STEM disciplines have notably been recognised as stridently masculinist and heteronormative. This research set out to explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ teaching academics in STEM. The commitment to anarcho-queer praxis informed the methodological and interpretative strategies, the ethic of open engagement with collaborators, the refusal of specific research questions, and the adoption of an auto-ethnographic approach to reportage. The series of open engagements with a purposively recruited cohort of collaborators revealed consistent feelings of vulnerability within their work environment, which was exacerbated in classroom situations. Collaborators could relate such feelings back to historic homophobic experiences, albethey of different levels of severity. In response to such feelings, collaborators adopted impression management behaviours in their professional contexts, corroborating the findings of other researchers into the workplace experiences of LGBTQ+ people. Such feelings and behaviours persisted despite the recognition of specific protections afforded by institutional policy. Recommendations focussed on creating an institutional culture to negate the need for LGBTQ+ people to adopt defensive strategies are presented. A framework for supporting open autoethnographic research is presented. Structuring Openness in Autoethnographic Research (SOAR) defines a process integrating four spaces, the Theoretical space – revealing the theoretical network supporting the project, the Contextual space – framing the ethico-relational and social context, the Conceptual space – providing focus within which open engagements can occur, and the Analytical space – defining the approach to data. It is presented as a methodological development arising from the research, which is of use to researchers embarking on similar projects and of value in assessing the quality of qualitative research.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have helped me realise my ambitions, both personal and professional, over the course of this project. Firstly, I must thank my collaborators for their willingness to trust a stranger, for their honesty and for their commitment to the project. Helen's support and encouragement kept my enthusiasm for the project going during times when it seemed events conspired against it. I was lucky as a student to have been taught by Alleyn D., who was to me the provocative and supportive teacher that I would like to be for those I teach – and I thank her for her example. My supervisory team have been encouraging and critical. Their insights and support helped me realise, and improve, my vision for this piece of research. The amazing Alice helped me edit early drafts 'without mercy'. At the same time, she recognised what this is about, and her response to it all helped maintain my commitment and belief in what I was doing. My partner has been a voice of reason when the emotional and intellectual load of it all seemed overwhelming – constant, reassuring, supportive and calming.

Most of all this piece of work is a tribute to my wonderful, supportive parents. They have been an anchor in my life, and weathered the travails of my life with me, unquestioning in their love, unceasing in their support, and unbounded in their encouragement.

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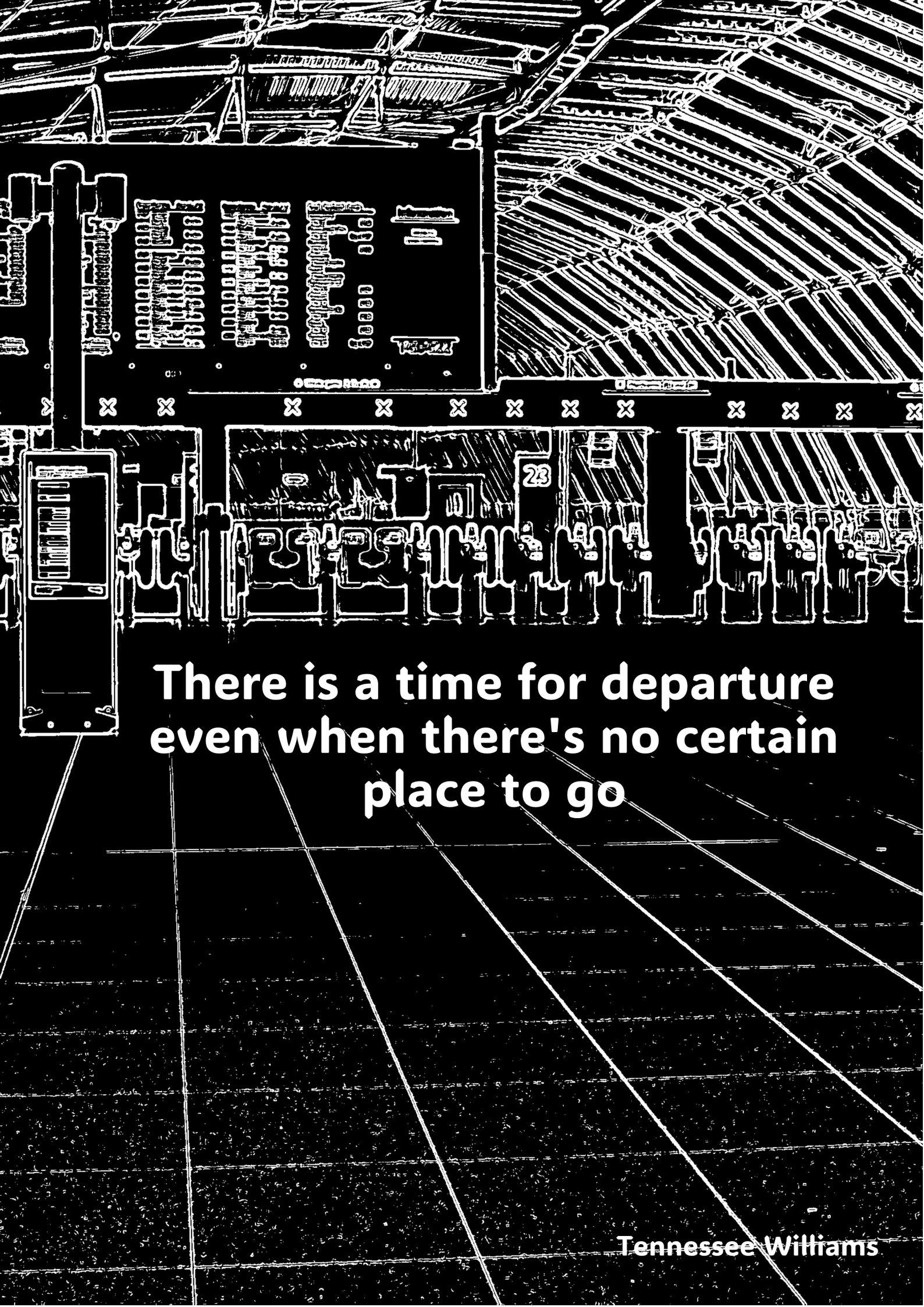


There is a time for departure even when there's no certain place to go

Tennessee Williams

A personal declaration

What right do I have to engage with issues of equality and diversity? I am a white, cisgender male – I represent who the patriarchy was both made by and made for. What's more I grew up in South Africa during apartheid, benefitting profoundly from the disproportionate state support that a small number of white South Africans enjoyed, at unfathomable cost to most of the population – black South Africans.

My parents were married until the death of my father. My home life was stable, emotionally, and financially, if not particularly wealthy. My parents believed in education and supporting their children to excel. They instilled a love of books and reading in me, right from an early age, for which I am extremely grateful.

Whilst my childhood was very happy; my adolescence was less so. I survived five frequently violent, and sometimes brutal years, in a boys boarding school. There is no doubt I developed tremendous resilience from this time, alongside a quite profound self-loathing (clichéd, I know). I experienced a loss of confidence, and a loss of joy. There are incidents that haunt me still, and incidents I have told no-one. My survival of this period is down to the support from my parents at times of especial crisis, and, importantly, the support from the few teachers who recognised a vulnerability or difference in me. Through their time, they gave me momentary spaces where I felt heard and valued – I can't say recognised, as at this point in my life, I do not believe I was ready to recognise myself.

My sister and I are the first generation in our family to go to university.

What no-one expected – what I could not begin to understand during my childhood, and which I could not bear to recognise or articulate during adolescence – is that I am gay. That's one, single entry in the 'cons' column of a profoundly privileged life. But what does that one negative entry mean, and does it qualify me to speak of / to oppressive power? I have not experienced the intersectionality of prejudice that many, or even most, other queer people do, I recognise my privilege and know that I cannot speak of or to all queer experiences of oppression – and that is not the intention of this endeavour.

Through this project I hope to provide a space for people to think about their professional experiences as queer teachers in STEM disciplines. The research that is presented in subsequent chapters, has been undertaken with a commitment to open collaboration, as a discursive endeavour between equals. It is founded on an ethic of caring for each other and ourselves, and a commitment to compassionate engagement and transformative exchanges.

I will try to live up to this ambition.

Introduction

In 2020, there was a series of tweets by Australian writer and activist, Alexander Leon, which went viral. Although I had developed this endeavour before they were published, it encapsulates some of my own experience and some of the motivation for initiating this project.

> *"Queer people don't grow up as ourselves, we grow up playing a version of ourselves that sacrifices authenticity to minimise humiliation & prejudice. The massive task of our adult lives is to unpick which parts of ourselves are truly us & which parts we've created to protect us. It's massive and existential and difficult but I'm convinced that being confronted with the need for profound self-discovery so explicitly (and often early in life!) is a gift in disguise. We come out the other end wiser & truer to ourselves. Some cis/het people never get there. All of this is to say - be kind to yourself. Discovering who you really are is an enormous task - it doesn't happen overnight, nor does it happen without some hiccups along the way. Be patient, be compassionate, be vulnerable and exist loudly. And most of all - be proud!"*
>
> *Alexander Leon on Twitter in January 2020*

The impact on LGBTQ+ [1] people of having to develop an authentic personhood in an intrinsically hostile context is well documented (Amnesty International, 2023; Human Rights Campaign, 2023; Bradlow *et al*., 2021; Mind, 2020; Bachmann and Gooch, 2018). Despite the apparent progress in rights for queer people such as anti-discrimination legislation and marriage equality [2], our lives and work experiences are invariably impacted by heteronormative hegemonic power.

[1] See Appendix I for notes about terminology.

[2] Progress is not universal. Marriage equality exists in only 34 countries (Human Rights Campaign, 2023). The rights of queer people are, in many jurisdictions, contested and tenuous. Same-sex relationships are illegal in 64 countries and attract the death penalty in seven countries (Amnesty International, 2023).

Stonewall's report [3] into the health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people in the UK (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018) presents some of the impacts:

- Fifty-two percent of respondents had experienced depression in the past year, a further 10% thought they 'may' have experienced depression.
- Reported rates of anxiety and depression were 64% for LGBTQ+ people in lower income households. In Black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBTQ+ younger people (18-24) the rate of depression is 62%. In comparison, anxiety and depression in the general population has a prevalence of (only) 16%, according to the mental health charity Mind (Mind, 2020).
- The incidence of drug and alcohol misuse are up to 26% higher in LGBTQ+ people than heterosexuals.
- The reported rate of self-harm is 52%, considerably higher than heterosexual respondents (35%).
- In a review of published research, Parker and Harriger (2020) found that the LGBTQ+ population had greater risk of both sub-clinical and full-syndrome eating disorders in comparison to their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts. For example, 54% of LGBTQ+ adolescents had been diagnosed with an eating disorder during their lifetime.
- Suicidal ideation is higher in LGBTQ+ people (44% vs. 26%), although actual suicide rates parallel the UK national rate.

Accessing support from healthcare professionals is often an additional cause of stress for LGBTQ+ people, many of whom report a lack of understanding (25%), inappropriate curiosity (25%), have witnessed discriminatory remarks (23%), been outed in front of other medical professionals or members of the public without their consent (10%), or been pressured to access services to change their sexual orientation (9% for younger BAME people) (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018).

[3] The publication forms part of a series, which are based on a YouGov poll of over 5000 LGBTQ+ people across England, Scotland, and Wales.

There has also been a marked increase in LGBTQ+ hate crime over the past five years; 112% up for sexuality related hate crime and 186% for crimes against trans individuals (Stonewall, 2023).

Queer at work

Research has repeatedly shown that LGBTQ+ people consciously limit the boundaries of self-expression in the workplace – even when workplaces have anti-discrimination policies, and even when they are recognised as gay-friendly by the LGBTQ+ people who work there (Benozzo *et al*., 2015; Ozturk and Rumens, 2014; Priola *et al*., 2014; Willis, 2012; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009; Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger, 2009; Adkins, 2000). This self-censorship plays out in a privileging of being perceived as 'normal', at the cost of living authentically. Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger (2009) describe the interaction of such spaces and behaviours as "the gay friendly closet".

In 1991, Judith Butler asked, "So we are out of the closet but into what?" (Butler, 1991, p.16), which led Benozzo *et al*. (2015) to examine the value of coming out in the workplace. They focussed on three elements. Firstly, they examined the persistent presence of discriminatory behaviours and homophobic attitudes in organisations. Secondly, they questioned the idea that coming out has the power to challenge prejudice – which implies a 'moral' imperative to come out and creates a hierarchy which valorises those who do and denigrates those who do not. Finally, they confronted the categories of difference that coming out reinforces, and which maintain the illusion that categorical thinking is non-problematic.

Fassinger (1995) recognised the construction of dual identities, allowing non-hetero academics to distinguish between a public (professional, assumed heterosexual) identity, and a private homosexual identity. Covering strategies to remain closeted, such as avoiding any discussion of relationships or refuting the need to acknowledge their sexuality were used by participants in Barnfield and Humberstone's (2008) study. Such internalised homo-negativity, driven by normative stereotypes of same-sex sexuality, are elemental to fostering, indeed nurturing, heteronormativity, and

homophobia in the workplace (Cox *et al.*, 2010). The brutality of such hegemonic discourses is that they have made us complicit in our own oppression.

Researchers have emphasised the business case for equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives (Igboanugo, Yang and Bigelow, 2022; Hur, 2020; Mattheis, De Arellano and Yoder, 2020; Mor Barak *et al.*, 2016). However, research also reveals that despite implementing specific policies and initiatives LGBTQ+ people often feel constrained in how they are able perform their professional identities.

Ironically, it is often narratives of acceptance / tolerance [4] which render the lives of sexual minority staff invisible. Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger (2009) coin the term 'the gay-friendly closet' to reflect the experience of research participants who, despite being out in gay-friendly workplaces, report that they still downplay their homosexuality, or conform to stereotypes of how LGBTQ+ people are "expected to look, act and work" (p. 29). Their research sits in a context where activism has reduced the incidence of negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people. Despite this many of their respondents claimed their acceptance as 'normal' alongside their invisibility ('no-one-knows-I-am-gay' narratives).

Alternatively, they complied with traditional social models, such as being in a long-term monogamous relationship. One respondent felt that bringing her partner to work events, would be 'ramming it down somebody's throat', and, articulating a need to 'tread lightly', erased her lesbian identity, within a context she described as 'not homophobic'. Other respondents felt their acceptance was contingent on their choice not to 'overplay' their homosexuality – not 'camping it up'. Some respondents worked in businesses specifically offering services to a gay and lesbian clientele. Here, there was less pressure to be 'normal', except, notably, in contexts where clients are not gay – then there is a need to 'not act too gay'. Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger (2009) use the binary normal/visible to characterise these discourses – where 'normal' is privileged over 'visible'. The urge to invisibility was sometimes

[4] These may be institutional anti-discriminatory policies or legislation enacted at a national level.

associated with feelings of vulnerability, the threat of harassment, and avoiding gay-bashing. For lesbian respondents, visibility often resulted in unwanted sexual advances from heterosexual male co-workers. Collectively, these choices constitute "rigidly defined workplace performances" (Adkins, 2000, p.212). Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger (2009, p.41) conclude that respondents in gay-friendly workplaces are "constrained by the same incoherent logic that characterised the heyday of the closet".

In a qualitative, interview-based study in the UK, Rumens and Kerfoot (2009) found similar strategies of limiting the expression of aspects of personal identity that were deemed incongruent with normalised concepts of professionalism. The same discourse of selective coming out (strategic visibility) and fitting in recur. Participants frequently suggested that (homo)sexuality and professionalism were not mutually exclusive, but how it is expressed could be problematic. One respondent noted that 'the hospital is not ready for a camp doctor', going on to suggest that men enacting gender-transgressive behaviours set themselves up as 'legitimate targets for vilification' (Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009, p.777). The tensions between negotiating a professional identity while managing perceptions so they are situated within the bounds of acceptability, echo the normal/visible binary presented by Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger (2009). Gay /lesbian respondents acknowledged that acceptability in the workplace is contingent on self-censorship, selective revelation, and/or assimilative compromises. Although their adaptive behaviours legitimised heteronormative discourses around sexuality and professional identity, they still felt that being out at work, even to a self-limited degree, was a positive situation.

Judith Butler's (1991) question about what awaits outside the closet inspired Benozzo *et al*. (2015) to question the value of coming out in the workplace. Their critique has three key foci:

- firstly, the persistent presence of discriminatory behaviours and homophobic attitudes in organisations,

- secondly, that the idea that coming out has the power to challenge prejudice implies a 'moral' imperative to come out, creating a hierarchy which valorises those who do and denigrates those who don't, and
- finally, that the categories of difference 'coming out' reinforces, maintain the illusion that categorical thinking is non-problematic.

Coming out is seen as performative, constituting an identity which did not exist prior to the declaration, itself dictated by a heteronormative context. Declaring oneself to be gay, creates a visage of identity which becomes a measure of individual 'authenticity', so cannot be betrayed. Consequently, identity discourses are reified, and one accepts being defined on the subjected side of the asymmetric hetero/gay binary. Additionally, 'out' only exists until the next heteronormative encounter. As an alternative to coming out as a gay individual, some of respondents came out by declaring a same-sex relationship. While violating heteronormative expectations, this still confirms the heterosexual matrix, positioning the homosexual Other – recognisably different, yet compliant with conventions about how valid lives are led. A third coming out, focusses on enacting identities that claim 'normality'. Claiming 'normality' within a same-sex relationship impugns transgressive enactments of sexual identity and entrenches the rules to which the 'normal' gay claims exception, e.g., camp, flamboyant, promiscuous.

These narratives parallel those of Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger (2009), and Rumens and Kerfoot (2009). Benozzo *et al*. (2015) conclude that coming out involves entering a problematic new space – a space you occupy by declaring yourself a stranger within it. This space becomes extant through and within heteronormativity, and strongly signals the effective functioning of heteronormative discourses, whilst simultaneously validating problematic, essentialist conceptions of identity.

Research about coming out in an HE context emphasises the risk that it entails, both personally (social exclusion, ridicule, or threat) and professionally (career limiting, or devalued *[queer]* research). Fassinger (1995) suggests non-hetero academics construct dual identities, distinguishing between a public (professional, assumed

heterosexual) identity, and a private homosexual identity. Participants in Barnfield and Humberstone's (2008) study used covering strategies to remain closeted, such as avoiding any discussion of relationships, or refuting the need to acknowledge their sexuality. Cox *et al*. (2010) see such internalised homo-negativity as driven by normative stereotypes of same-sex sexuality, which are elemental to heteronormativity and homophobia.

In one of a few recent studies about LGBTQ+ HE teaching identities, Rothmann (2016) examined gay male academics' negotiation of the hetero/homo binary in South Africa [5]. The research had four foci, personal background, academic background, private gay identity, and professional identity. Seven of the ten participants chose to remain closeted in their work context, despite over two decades of legislative protection from discrimination. Reasons for this choice included:

- rejection of proclaiming their sexuality as heterosexual colleagues did not have to proclaim theirs,
- fears of job losses/career sabotage,
- doubt that revealing their sexuality would provide any (pedagogic) benefit,
- concerns about creating difficult power relations with students, and
- avoidance of public identification.

Participants who reflected, rather than disclosed, their orientation through the inclusion of homosexual content in their curricula, still adopted impression management measures e.g., not acting flamboyantly, and enacted masculinist gender performances. Participants who disclosed their sexuality, did so through both curricular elements and deliberate visibility. Disclosure only happened after careful, self-reflexive processes, and happened gradually "to avoid unnecessary alienation from their heterosexual colleagues and students" (Rothmann, 2016, p.50). Value in disclosure was framed in discourses of 'role models' and 'diversity'. Only one

[5] Sexual orientation is specifically mentioned in Chapter 2 of the Constitution of South Africa (1994), the Bill of Rights, as a category against which discrimination may not take place.

participant felt his conduct as an out academic was part of a political response to hegemonic thinking in general, and heteronormativity specifically.

Toynton (2016) suggests that queer invisibility can be considered as either an abandonment, or an application, of power. He acknowledges that invisibility can happen at both an institutional level, and from the personal educator and student perspectives. While students have the right to remain invisible, he questions whether educators have the same right. Kumashiro (2015) suggests that educators may have an obligation, for fundamental educational reasons, to be out to their learners. Toynton (2016) sees this as an element of the debate around safe places for queer students. As an activist educator, he suggests that there is an obligation to make the heteronormative visible – but he sees this in no way indicative of personal 'queerness'. In the context of current debates around decolonising the curriculum, this obligation should extend to heterosexual academics too.

Research shows that STEM workplaces are more likely to be dominated by masculinist norms and be more strident in their anti-LGBTQ+ biases than other working environments (Cech, 2022; Cech and Waidzunas, 2011, 2021, 2022; Cech *et al*., 2017; Bilimoria and Stewart, 2009). The broad stereotype of a scientist as straight white male persists (Sansone and Carpenter, 2020; Nassar-McMillan *et al*., 2011) which translates into masculinist expectations of/in the workplace. This includes gender-based assessments of competency within the technical/social binary identified by Cech and Waidzunas (2011).

Cech *et al*. (2017) found that STEM LGBTQ+ employees often feel isolated, and that they need to work harder than hetero colleagues to convince others of their competence. Their research also showed that LGBTQ+ employees in STEM federal agencies in the US report experiencing discrimination, have perceptions of a lack of support, and report lower job satisfaction. This holds true even when employers have anti-discrimination policies in place. Such experiences are consistent across all organisational levels, and age groups. Only slightly more than half (52%) of 1,427 respondents to Yoder and Mattheis's (2016) survey of LGBTQ+ people in STEM

reported being out to most of their colleagues. LGBTQ+ STEM academics were no more open than non-academics in their relationships with colleagues. Such experiences were not reduced for employees with supervisory roles, nor did younger LGBTQ+ workers have better experiences than older LGBTQ+ colleagues. LGBTQ+ STEM academics were no more open than non-academics in their relationships with colleagues. Collectively this suggests that heteronormativity may act more perniciously in STEM workplaces than others. Students and faculty in STEM disciplines also report higher levels of fear of harassment and physical violence on campus (Partridge, Barthelemy and Rankin, 2014), suggesting that such attitudes may be encountered even before professional employment.

Critical pedagogy and the promise of transformation

Critical pedagogies are all anti-oppressive and move beyond considering education as having a primarily vocational focus. Kumashiro (2000) proposes that such approaches require engagement with four elements,

- education for the other
- education about the other,
- education that is critical of privileging and othering, and
- education that changes students and society.

Paolo Freire is regarded as one of the most important critical educationalists of the 20thC (Giroux, 2010). Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996) urged educators to encourage '*conscientizacao*' – conscientizing students to understand how power is enacted through the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge. It also aims to equip students with the critical analytical skills and self-awareness to confront and challenge the knowledges presented in the classroom. This vision stands in contrast to Giroux's (2014) observation that current HE is rarely seen as the civic, political, and deeply moral practice that it is. He characterises the modern classroom as a dead zone, devoid of critical thinking, self-reflection, and imagination. Freire's vision of education promoting a more socially just world by enabling self-agency in learners stands in opposition to education that reinforces and shapes

students to prevailing ideological constructs. A key element of critical pedagogy is its insistence that ideological neutrality is illusory. "Whose side are you on?" is Michael Apple's (1996) challenge to educators, and educational praxis, in oppressive social and economic contexts. Freire has a distinctly Marxian perspective – responding to the inequities associated with capitalism. However, a critical educational lens can, and has, been turned on other hegemonic discourses.

Weiler (1991) presents three feminist critiques of Freire, she questions:

- firstly, the essentialising of the 'oppressed'
- secondly, the failure to confront the social and institutional power relations embedded in the teacher position; and,
- thirdly, the assumed universality of the goals of liberation and social transformation.

These criticisms coalesce around a failure to consider the subjectivity and lived experience of both learners and educators.

bell hooks (1994) extends the ideal of conscientizing students to one of pursuing self-actualisation through '*engaged pedagogy*' which focusses on well-being, corporeality, and desire in the classroom. These can be read as incorporating a response to Weiler's (1991) critiques. hooks (1994) positions liberatory education in the intersubjective experiences of teachers and learners, acknowledging both the subjective and performative reality of educational instances. Additionally, hooks's pedagogy demands a commitment to the wellbeing of both learners and educators.

Constructions of classroom authority are a further concern – embodied in the dilemma of hierarchical (masculinist) control set against responsibility to learners, which hooks (1994) addresses through the ideals of togetherness and equality. These cast the educator as a learner – an equal participant in the process of creating an emancipatory environment. She uses the phrase '*academic growth*' to characterise the product of education – emphasising that participation in HE should be transformative.

Taken alongside the commitment to well-being, this becomes a pedagogy that is responsive to Weiler's (1991) three critiques of Freirean pedagogy. In *Teaching to Transgress* hooks (1994) insists that engaged pedagogy is not a way of thinking about teaching but a way of doing teaching – it is feminist, transformative, and subversive of traditional classroom hierarchies.

In the same way that feminist pedagogy is not solely about re-cognising female learners and teachers, queer pedagogy is not solely about making queer learners and teachers visible (Mbisi, 2013; Meyer, 2007). Queer pedagogy is educational activism against heteronormativity. The focus is not on assimilation of queer people within normal society, but rather on confronting the imperatives by which normalcy is established (Britzman, 1995). The concept of performativity (Butler, 1999) is key to understanding the queer theoretical basis of queer pedagogy. Performativity describes the process by which subjectivities are established through the repeated forcible citation of norms (Kohli, 1999). Repeated performances of 'normal' heterosexual behaviours constitute both the norms themselves, and the subjectivities realised through their performances.

Queer pedagogy not only acknowledges the subjectivities of learners and teachers within oppressive contexts as other radical pedagogies might, but it also confronts how those subjectivities are constituted by such oppressive contexts. An inevitable conclusion of this position is that 'identity' itself is performative. This is an anti-essentialist position opposed to identity politics. While identity-based politics have often been used to further the political cause of minorities, it has come to be regarded as problematic, focussing on gaining acceptance and assimilation into 'normal' rather than challenging what 'normal' is. Taking on this challenge to normative, hegemonic ideas is the defining characteristic of queer theory and praxis.

Whilst the political aspect of queer classroom praxis is readily accessible, the queering of the moments of learning is perhaps more complex. Concepts like the pedagogies of desire, pedagogic eros, and vulnerability (Letts and Fifield, 2017; Chinnery, 2015; Luchies, 2014; Zembylas, 2007) are more challenging due to the

libidinal and emotional associations of these key terms. I understand these elements to reflect an affective turn in pedagogy, which is closely associated with hooks' (1994) idea of engaged pedagogy that focusses on well-being, corporeality, and desire as elements of classroom experience of both teachers and learners. Jannat (2021, p.2043) describes pedagogy as "a reciprocal communication between teachers and students which involves the exchange of ideas, intellectual debates and conversational interactions... where...students and teachers...ignite each other's aspirations" – linking the idea of eros with the Platonic ideal of love and the relationship between a mentor and mentee. Hull (2002, p.19) argues that eros encompasses our "desires for beauty, wisdom, and even immortality" and sees this is practiced by igniting love, desire, and aspiration in the classroom "because passions are real, and they can be important to a person's learning experience" (p. 20). This approach to learning requires a level of personal relating that runs counter to more traditional hierarchical pedagogic relationships. Whilst recognising that teaching erotically (Jannat, 2021) is not the sole domain of queer educators, the fostering of such relationships may in fact be more challenging for queer teachers because of the level of personal revelation required in developing such intersubjective, collaborative learning relationships. The teacher's role shifts from being a transmitter of knowledge and situates it in a more complex and ambiguous space – where the fixed roles of teacher and learner are unshaped through (com)passionate engagement, opening a "space in which teachers and students are able to gain a new sense of interconnection and intersubjectivity with others" (Zembylas, 2007, p. 344).

To be open to being affected, to engage in the kind of relationship discussed above, requires making oneself vulnerable – "open to being touched, moved, and potentially wounded" (Chinnery, 2015, p.2). The inherent reciprocity of queer teaching relationships requires a willingness of teachers to make themselves vulnerable. In a context where teachers may already feel vulnerable because of their sexuality, this is a big ask. I would argue, though, that it is their personal vulnerability that could provide an empathetic foundation for their student relationships. The potential impact of these tensions will be intensified or ameliorated by the level of institutional

comfort LGBTQ+ educators feel at their place of work. It is in within this context of transformative praxis that the proposed research is situated.

An aim for this endeavour

My reading of the literature about the workplace experience of queer people, and of those in STEM, in particular, suggests that for many the struggles, so succinctly described by Alexander Leon at the start of this chapter, do not end in adulthood, nor with educational attainment, nor on achievement of professional success. Within professional contexts that purport to be inclusive, and have implemented socially progressive workplace policies, many professional lives are characterised by selective disclosure, self-censorship, and assimilative compromises. Living authentically as a queer person in a heteronormative world is a perpetual struggle. The voices of criticism that came from others as we grew up, often come from inside ourselves, as we seek to reconcile a desire and need for validation with codes of acceptability and normalcy outside of which we exist.

It was only at the age of 49, that I felt able to make a commitment to becoming visible – having been convinced by Toynton's (2016) argument that while LGBTQ+ students have a choice about visibility, faculty have a responsibility to be visible. Kumashiro's (2015) pedagogic argument for visibility reinforced this commitment. This project is part of the process of my becoming visible. Visibility is an integral element of creating 'safe places' for queer students (and colleagues). But it sets up a dilemma for queer educators – trapping them between empathy with potential hostility, and an enabling visibility with a risk of alienation.

I cannot know the level of comfort other queer people in my organisation experience, but my level of discomfort has increased since this choice, echoing the findings of Partridge, Barthelemy and Rankin (2014). I regard my visibility as a political act, and I choose to live with the discomfort of constantly coming out – in the hope that it will make things easier for other queer people...in some way...at some point.

This thesis will explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ STEM academics. The aim is not to develop any generalisable truths, but to present their stories and reflect on the ways

in which they manage their professional relationships with colleagues and students. Evidence from previous research suggests that during this exploration some themes may be encountered, such as, professional identities of LGBTQ+ academics within institutional, disciplinary and workplace contexts, the influence of social/institutional/disciplinary normative constraints, the action of heteronormativity higher education contexts, academic's 'teacher' performances and relationships with students, and dissonances between personal and professional performances of identity. However, I am reluctant to cast-in-stone any specific individual objectives as it runs counter to the principle that this research project is, in the first instance, responsive to the collaborators' concerns. I am not asking them to corroborate my thinking or others' research. This project is to provide a space for them to discuss and reveal their experience, thinking, and priorities. It is hoped that the findings may contribute to greater awareness of the experience of LGBTQ+ STEM academics, and perhaps inform debate about workplace polices, and enhance the fostering of inclusive cultures within HE institutions.

The rest of this thesis is presented across five chapters. "Gayja uu", the next chapter presents a history of religious, legislative, and social hostility to LGBTQ+ people. The theoretical foundations of the project are presented in the chapter entitled, "I would like, if I may, to take you on a strange journey". It presents the evolution of my theoretical thinking about the project and situates it in the context of my own life story. This is followed by the chapter called "Stepping out of the page, into the sensual world" which details the process of putting the preceding theoretical discussion into practice. It covers recruitment, research ethics, and the development of the methodology as an emergent element from the theoretical and ethical commitments of the project. The data and analysis chapter, "Spilling the T" follows. The engagements are presented, alongside more detailed descriptions of the analytical approaches to each of the series of engagements. Links to the wider research underpinning this thesis, and theoretical resonances, are presented in the "Sensemaking" subsections linked to each set of engagements.

The final chapter, "Our eventual fate will be the sum of the stories we told…" presents conclusions, recommendations, and reflections from three perspectives. Firstly, workplace experience is shown to remain a negative and problematic element in the lives of LGBTQ+ STEM academics, in many countries, at an institutional and individual level. The research revealed the disturbingly low threshold that LGBTQ+ people often have when considering the workplace experience – simply feeling safe and protected from explicit homophobic abuse. The impact of this 'gay friendly closet' (Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger, 2009) on individuals is significant, and the cost to employers usually underestimated. A positive workplace culture is repeatedly identified as desirable, but how it should be created and by whom was shown to be an issue which the collaborator's institutions had not resolved (Prasad *et al.*, 2011).

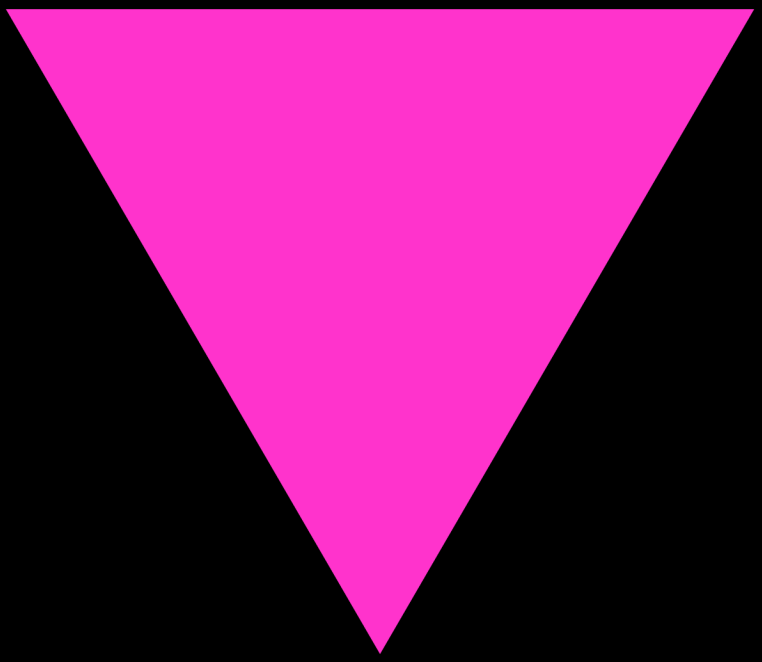
Secondly, the methodological process, shaped by an anarcho-queer approach, allowed the development of a framework within which qualitative research can be developed. It was initially a response to my personal concerns about maintaining rigour and quality within the project itself. I later realised that it is more broadly applicable and makes a useful contribution to the vexed concerns around assessing the quality of qualitative research. Through a systematic process of defining the key spaces withing which all qualitative research takes, the theoretical space, the contextual space, the conceptual space, and the analytical space(s) are explicitly defined. As well as supporting the practical aspects of (open) research design, the Structuring Openness in Autoethnographic Research (SOAR) framework allows researchers to present the context, concepts, and processes to which an assessment of quality of their research should respond.

Finally, I reflect on my personal position and experience of undertaking this project. For me it has been a transformative process, both personally and professionally. The preparatory research consistently highlighted the discomfort, compromises and constraints that characterise LGBTQ+ people experience in the workplace and how such experiences are often heightened in STEM contexts. The engagements with collaborators revealed the personal costs of these experiences, and how heteronormative ideals pervade even liberal higher education contexts, intensifying

and extending the complexities of professional contexts, and adding emotional stress and labour to their daily lives. These realizations have made me realize that there is a need for greater activism, especially in the broadly assimilative, homonormative social context where LGBTQ+ issues are becoming increasingly depoliticised.

Gayja vu

the uncanny feeling that we have experienced this oppression before



This chapter is focussed on a LGBTQ+ history. I believe very strongly that knowing our history is important to all queer people, as it tells not only a challenging story characterised by hostility, but also offers exceptions to this, and examples of resistance. Within the context of this project, a queer history provides a lens though which to refract the reported experiences of participants in both past research and this project.

Queer in history

A broad history will be presented across a series of four timelines. Episodes linked to LGBTQ+ people meeting in what would be considered 'safe spaces' today, as well as how that, ironically, increased their risk of harassment and arrest will be explored in more detail. This history will be contextualised in more recent acts of defiance and homophobic hate crime. It would be remiss not spend time examining the history of gay men and women during the horror of the Holocaust and its aftermath. The concurrent histories of the AIDS epidemic and Section 28 in the UK will be explored, as they resonate very strongly with current expressions of homophobia.

Crime and punishment

Sodomy was considered a capital offence across Europe until well into the 19th century, and executions for sodomy continued well into to the modern period. An ongoing Wikipedia project (Wikipedia, 2023) lists 712 executions of homosexuals from the 13th to the 19th century. Globally, 70 countries still explicitly criminalise male homosexuality, 42 explicitly criminalise female homosexuality (although lesbian women are targeted in jurisdictions where it is not illegal), 11 can impose the death penalty (6 actively do so), and 15 countries explicitly criminalise transgender gender identities or expression (Human Dignity Trust, 2022). The timeline presented over the next four pages, presents the evolution of the criminalisation of, initially, homosexual acts, and later, homosexual people. It also presents key moments where the understanding of homosexuality changed – eventually progressing to decriminalisation in many but not all countries in the world.

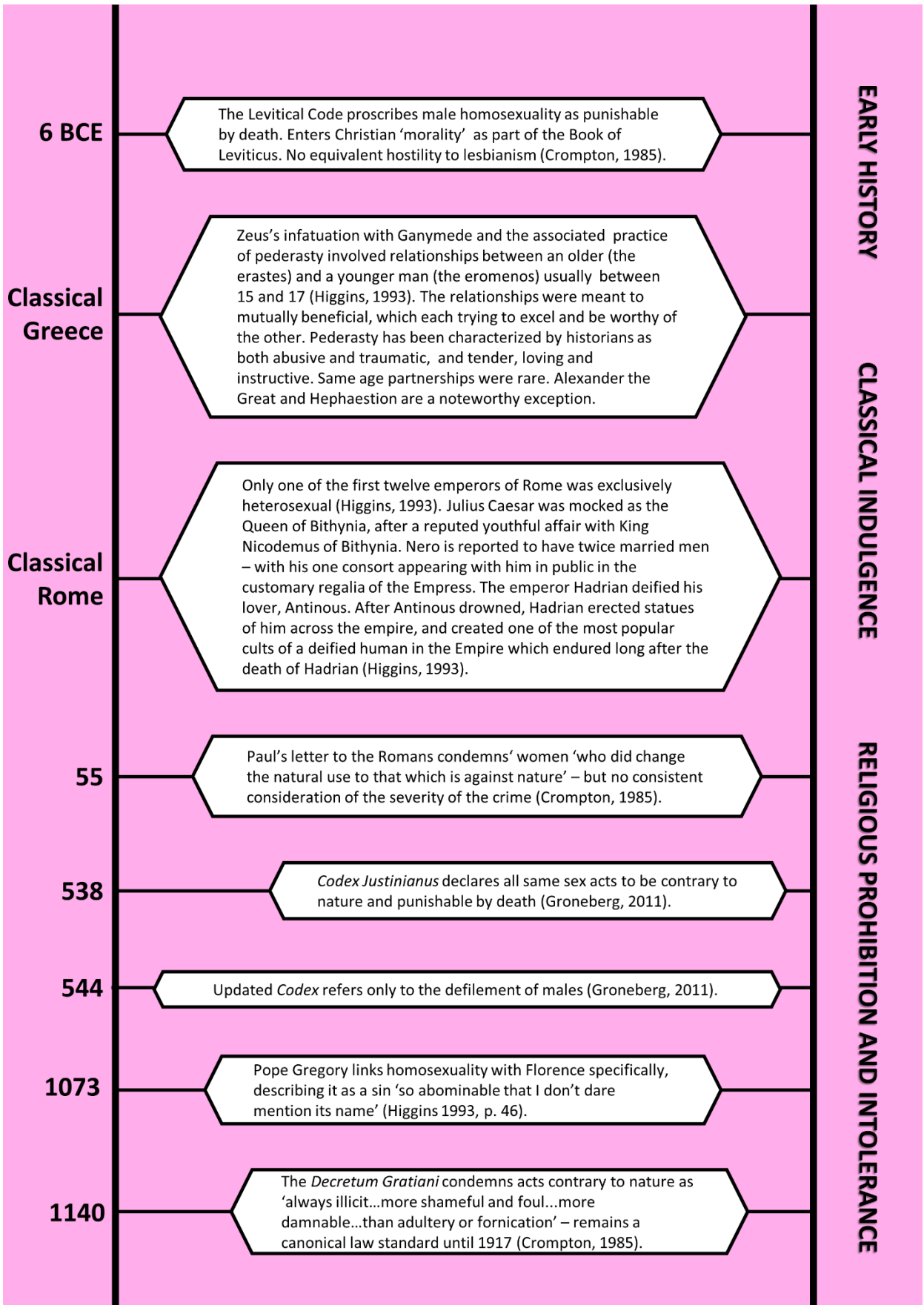


Figure 1: LGBTQ+ timeline from 6BCE to 1140CE

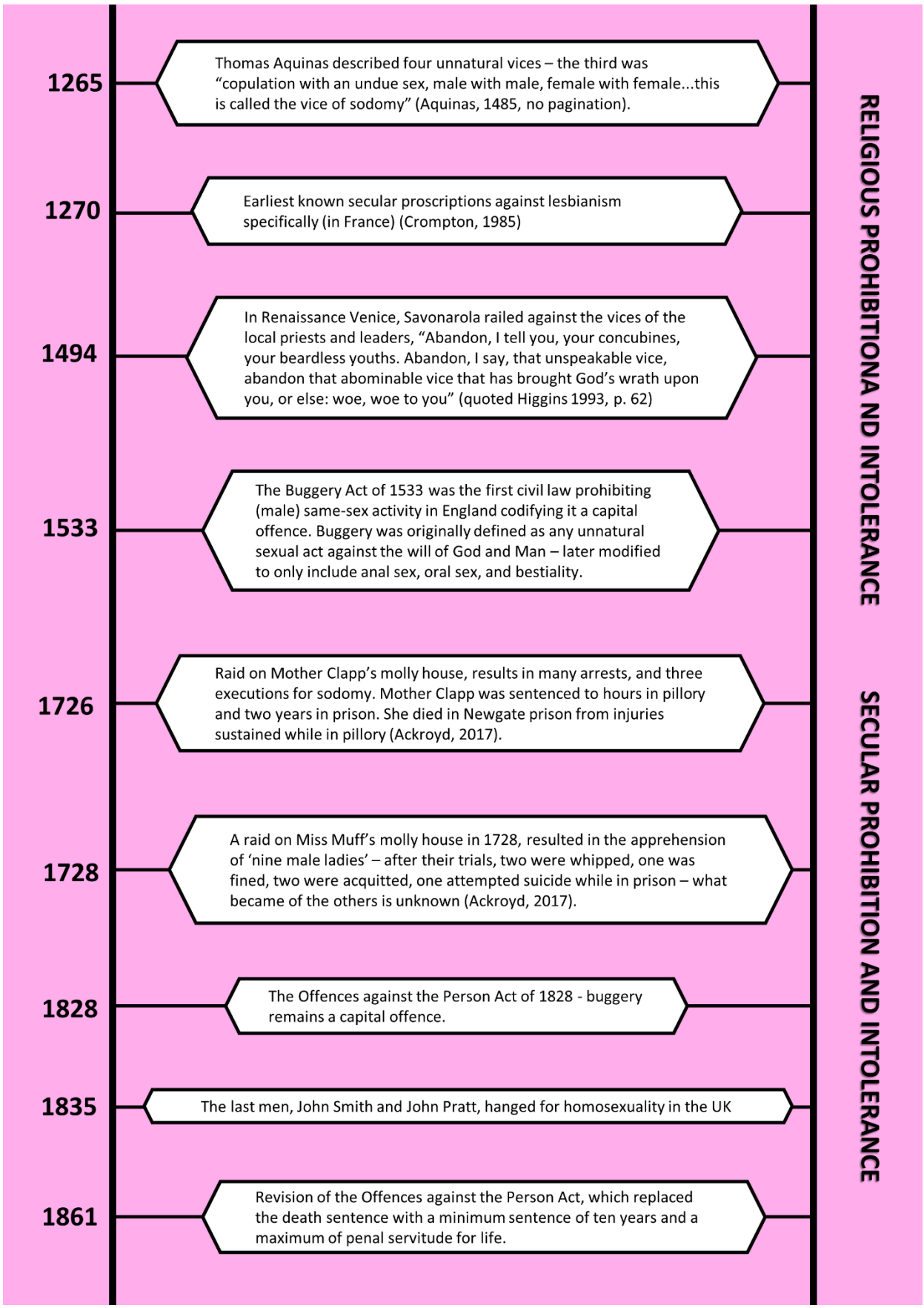


Figure 2: LGBTQ+ timeline from 1265CE to 1861CE

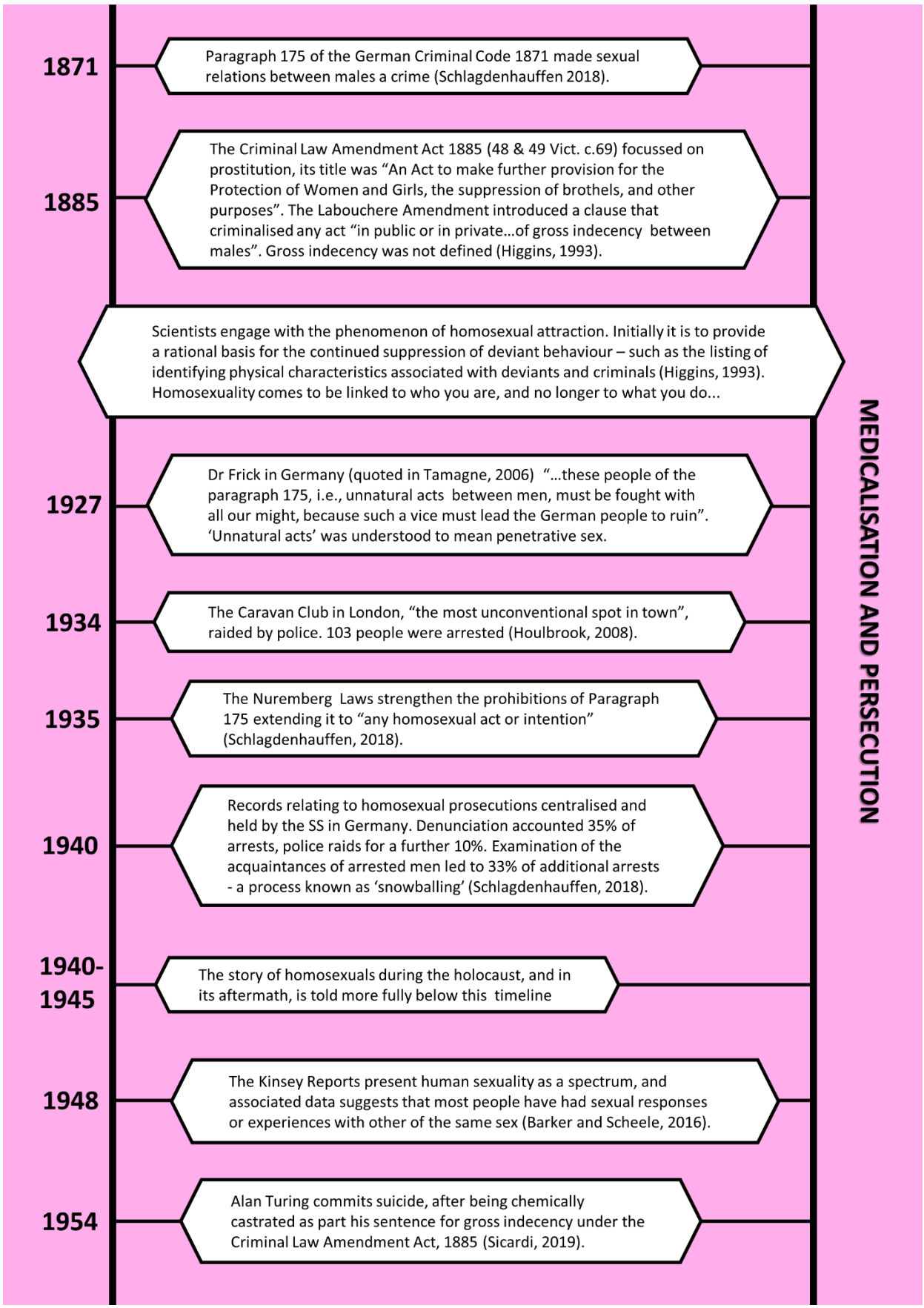


Figure 3: LGBTQ+ timeline from 187CE to 1954CE

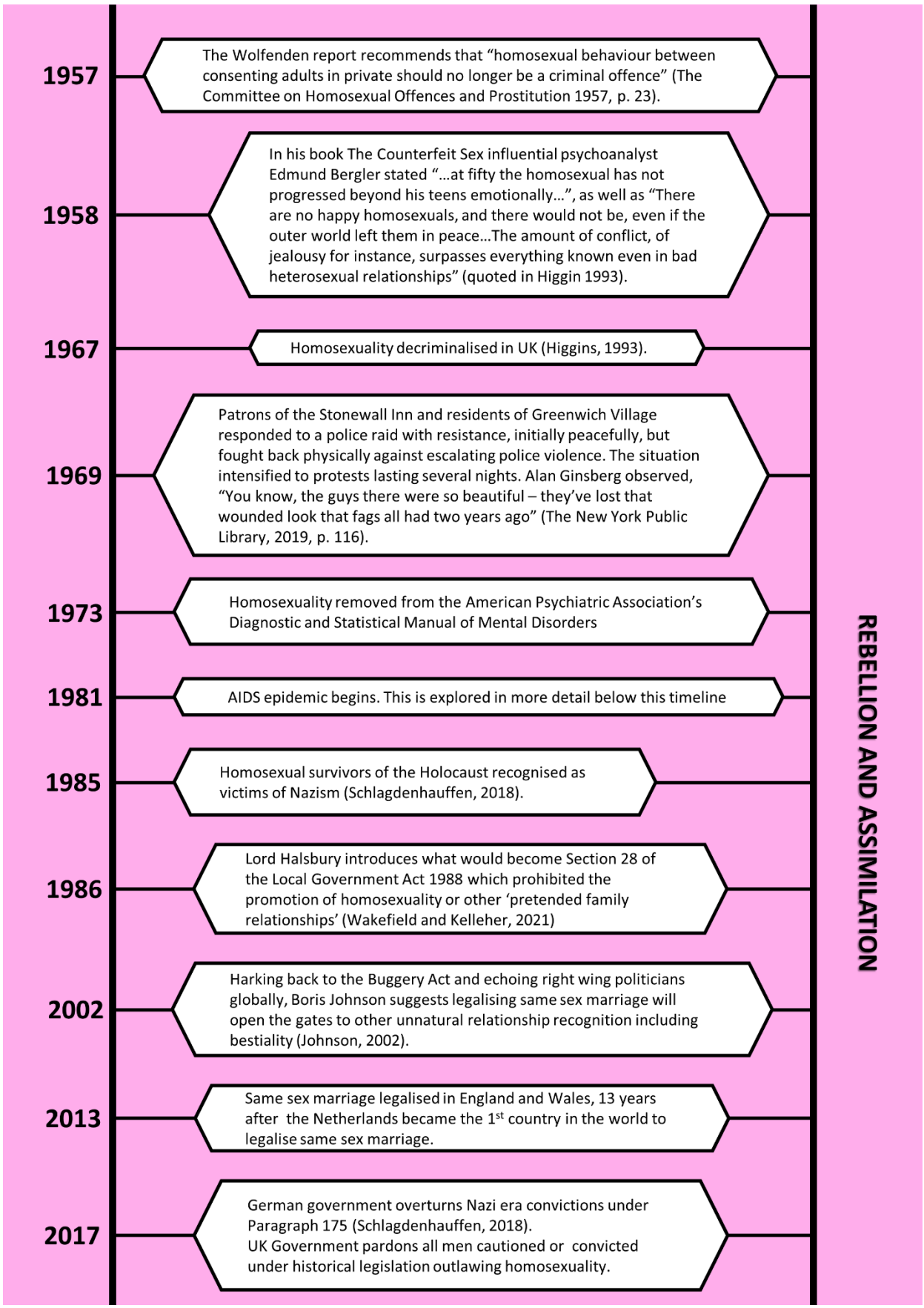


Figure 4: LGBTQ+ timeline from 1957CE to 2017CE

Homosexual holocaust

One of the historic contexts where the perceived threat of homosexuality was responded to with exceptional brutality was the Third Reich, in the run-up to and during the Second World War. Charges against gay men were brought in terms of Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code – which notably only punished male homosexuality. Information about the full extent of homosexual persecution in Nazi Germany is described by Schlagdenhauffen as "sketchy" (2018), primarily due to the destruction of the records of the Reich Central Office for the Combatting of Homosexuality and Abortion by the Nazis at the end of the war. This means that the traces of gay and lesbian victims of Nazi oppression can only be found if they are in police, justice system or concentration camp records (Schlagdenhauffen, 2018).

It is estimated that 100,000 homosexual men passed through the Nazi criminal justice system, with between 5,000 and 15,000 sent to the concentration camps. Condemnation of homosexuals was progressively enacted in Nazi Germany, through increasingly severe legislation, increasingly 'efficient' police and Gestapo, and an increasing willingness of people to report homosexual men and women. This came after a period during which Berlin was considered the homosexual capital of Europe – although even before coming to power, Nazi hostility to homosexuality was clear, as evidenced by the excerpt from a speech by Dr Frick presented in the timeline presented in Figure 3.

The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 strengthened the prohibitions of Paragraph 175 extending it to "any homosexual act or intention". Records relating to homosexual prosecutions were centralised – by 1940, 41,000 such records were held by the SS. Half of all homosexuals in concentration camps between 1940 and 1945 were there after police arrests rather than action by the Gestapo. Mortality of homosexual prisoners was considerably higher than the general prison population (60%), probably due to the harsh punitive regimes to which they were assigned (Schlagdenhauffen, 2018).

Female homosexuality was not illegal but was strongly condemned socially. It was held that homosexual women could be 're-educated', and thus were not seen as holding the same social threat as male homosexuals. The number of women sent to concentration camps because of their sexuality is impossible to determine as they were generally characterised as 'anti-social', possibly with a secondary notation indicating 'lesbian'. The fate of such prisoners could be brutal as 'anti-social' prisoners were often regarded as 'minderwertigen' – of less value, and routinely killed. Schlagdenhauffen (2018) notes that little research has been focussed on concentration camp prisoners that were classified 'anti-social'.

One of the key intentions during the war was to prevent repeat 'offending', which meant that after 1940 homosexual men that had already served prison sentences were sent to concentration camps. In camps and penal units alike, homosexual men were assigned the worst types of hard labour [6] and kept apart from other detainees to present 'contamination'. They were also required to wear a pink triangle, signalling the nature of their crime to other prisoners. There is more detail that can be presented about this period, but I feel a strong compulsion not to lapse into a voyeuristic engagement with the horrors of the Holocaust. I will end this section with several important observations [7].

Most of the estimated 15,000 gay men sent to the camps did not survive. Of the few that did, they were released into a world where expressing their sexuality remained a crime (Paragraph 175 remained in force until 1994) [8]. After the war, recognition as a 'victim of Nazism' was limited to persecution based on race, religion, or political belief. Holocaust survivors who were later revealed to be homosexual could be

[6] An example is the shoe testing commando, where prisoners were required to run 30km a day to test the durability of shoes. From 1943 onwards they were also required to carry loads of up to 25kg. Prisoners suspected of homosexual activity in the camp were assigned this activity for one year. It is reported that none survived for longer than six months.

[7] I only became aware of much of this because of this project – I find this closing history profoundly distressing, revealing as it does the protracted complicity of the opponents of fascism in what must amount to one of the most significant moments of LGBTQ+ erasure in history.

[8] This could explain why there are only 14 known personal accounts of the holocaust by homosexual victims.

stripped of the 'victim of Nazism' status and were regarded as 'insulting the dignity of victims of fascism (Schlagdenhauffen, 2018)'. It was only in 1985, forty years after the end of the Third Reich, that homosexual survivors were recognised as victims of Nazism and became eligible to receive compensation. Across a long history of appalling compounding injustices, it was later still, only in 2017, that the German government overturned Nazi era convictions under Paragraph 175 – a fucking long wait for justice.

Communities of safety (and of risk)

It is understandable that in response to homophobic contexts, across time queer people met together in secret places, for sexual purposes and for safety, particularly from prosecution given the severity of the penalties.

Legal records from the 18th century reveal the existence of about 30 molly [9] houses in London (Ackroyd, 2017). These were often grouped in molly districts – historic precursors to modern gaybourhoods. In molly houses, gay men were free to express themselves more fully than in traditional society. However, whilst offering some respite to gay men of the time, they failed as safe spaces from oppression or harassment. Most of what is known about molly houses comes from court proceedings associated with raids by law officers, after surveillance (and infiltration) by agents of the Society for the Reformation of Manners [10].

In the UK, Soho gay clubs continued to be frequent targets of police raids into the twentieth century. Perhaps one of the most well-known [11] is the raid on the Caravan Club on Endell Street, London in 1934. The story of the club, the raid and the aftermath are presented in Houlbrook (2008) and Iglikowski-Broad and Hillel (2017). The Caravan Club opened in July 1934 and quickly proved popular with its target

[9] Eighteenth century slang for a gay man, lower-class women, or prostitute

[10] A group of moral reformers which aimed to suppress profanity, immorality, and other lewd acts. It is linked with over 1300 prosecutions in 1726/7 alone. It is recognised as part of a popular reaction to the liberal attitudes that prevailed under Charles II and James I.

[11] This may be in part to its being 'recreated' by the National Trust as part of the 50th anniversary celebration of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK.

demographic of gay men and lesbian women, registering 445 members in the first six weeks. The club promised to be "Bohemian" and "the most unconventional spot in town" (Houlbrook, 2008, p.71), code for being gay-friendly.

Perhaps due to its success, but also after complaints from local residents, it quickly drew the attention of the police. After a period of observation, which included three visits by plain clothed policemen, it was raided on the 25th of August and 103 people were arrested.

The proprietors were charged with "maintaining a place at Endell-street for exhibiting to the view of any person willing to pay for admission lewd and scandalous performances". They denied wrongdoing but admitted under oath that "we have definitely quite queer people down there". Activity at the club was reported in the Times newspaper, "Some men were made up like women and acted like women. One started to dance as a woman would be expected to dance. Men were cuddling and embracing...".

Seventy-six of those arrested were released without charge. The remaining 27 appeared for trial on 5th of September 1934. The judge described the Caravan Club as "A foul den of iniquity which was corrupting the youth of London" and sentenced the proprietors to hard labour. One other defendant was sentenced to 3 months' hard labour. The remaining defendants were either found not guilty or given substantially shorter sentences.

Undoubtedly, the most famous police raid on a queer venue was of the Stonewall Inn on the 28th of June 1969. Patrons of the Stonewall Inn and residents of Greenwich Village responded to the raid with resistance, initially peaceful, but fought back physically against escalating police violence, and the situation intensified to protests lasting several nights. The Stonewall Riots are recognised as the seminal event for the 'gay liberation movement' in the USA, and the prompt for the modern Pride movement.

There are clear echoes of the raids of molly houses in the eighteenth century in these more recent stories – with queer spaces vulnerable to police intervention, often in response to moral crusaders. With the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK in 1967, the threat to gay venues changed. Moral reformers and law enforcement officers were no longer people to fear – something much more worrying has taken their place. The most significant homophobic attack in UK history, the 1999 bombing of the Admiral Duncan pub, also happened in Soho – when a neo-Nazi set off a nail-bomb, killing three people and wounding seventy (Smith, 2021). More recently the Pulse nightclub in Orlando was the scene of the deadliest 'terror' attack [12] in the USA since 9/11. Forty-nine people were killed and 53 injured by a gunman claiming to act in response the killing of an Islamic State leader by the US military (Kelleher, 2023; McCormick, 2016).

Medicalisation

By the end of nineteenth century, psychologists and doctors had engaged with the phenomenon of homosexuality. Notably, Freudian ideas established a tradition of defining homosexuality as a form of fixated maladjustment or arrested development, setting the scene for the medicalisation of homosexuality as a condition that could be cured – a perspective that continues in many instances to this day [13].

Homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1973. It was removed from the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases in 1990. The Chinese Society of Psychiatry removed homosexuality from its disease classifications in 2001. In 2013, the Royal College of Psychiatrists (no pagination) recognised that "This unfortunate history demonstrates how marginalisation of a

[12] The FBI labelling this as a terror attack is controversial, as it erases its history as an LGBTQ+ hate crime.

[13] It was only in the 2021 Queen's speech that the UK government announced its plans to legislate the banning of conversion therapy, three years after an initial pledge to do so, and without announcing a time frame for the proposed legislation. Controversially, this was followed by an immediate announcement of a consultation on how to address the issue while "protecting the medical profession, defending freedom of speech, and upholding religious freedom" (Kemi Badenoch, then Minister for Women and Equalities, Parliamentary Record). The ban is still not enacted...

group of people who have a particular personality feature (in this case homosexuality) can lead to harmful medical practice and a basis for discrimination in society". Alarmingly, five percent of 108,000 respondents to the UK government's 2018 LGBTQ+ Survey, said that they had been offered some form of conversion therapy – mostly from faith groups, but, more worryingly, 20% of these were offered conversion therapy by a healthcare professional (Government Equalities Office, 2018).

Fear and loathing: The AIDS epidemic

The AIDS pandemic of the late 20th century brought together those hostile to homosexuality from both religious and medical contexts. In 1987, evangelical Anglican leader, Revd. Tony Higton, proclaimed, "There is a link between sin and sickness. God has spoken on the thing...God's judgement is written into the way things are" (quoted in Higgins, 1993). In the same year MP Elaine Kellet-Bowman said in parliament, in response to an arson attack on the offices of *Capital Gay* – a gay newspaper, "I am quite prepared to affirm that it is quite right that there should be an intolerance of evil" (Kellet-Bowman, 1987).

Ronald Reagan waited four years from the start of the epidemic before mentioning it publicly – his attitude is exemplified by his observation, "When it comes to AIDS, don't medicine and morality teach the same thing?" (quoted in Bronski, 2011). By the time a coordinated national response was implemented in 1987, 47,000 people had been infected with HIV. It is worth noting that it was also only in 1987 [14] that the UK government, under Margaret Thatcher, launched its first AIDS-related public information campaign, five years after the first UK AIDS-related death – and only after successful attempts to block any information containing description of 'risky' sex – out of fear that it would "promote experimentation". The tardy responses on both sides of the Atlantic can undoubtedly be attributed to a reluctance by their respective leaders to be seen to be endorsing deviant behaviour.

[14] The Terrence Higgins Trust, a grassroots organisation founded in 1982, had been funding research and information campaigns for four years.

The suppressive Section 28

In 1986, Lord Halsbury introduced a private member's bill to the House of Lords, which would become the foundation of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality or "pretended family relationships" by local councils (Wakefield and Kelleher, 2021). In her Conservative Party Conference address in 1987, Margaret Thatcher received rapturous applause for a speech which included content about Section 28, "Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay. All of those children are being cheated of a sound start in life. Yes, cheated" (quoted in (Wakefield and Kelleher, 2021). Under the restriction of the Act, councils were prevented from spending money on anything that could be seen as promoting homosexuality (e.g., library books, newspapers, website access or supporting gay-themed cultural events [15] or LGBTQ+ community groups). Teachers, especially LGBTQ+ teachers, risked being fired if they defied the restrictions. It is worth noting that prevailing public attitudes at the time were similarly homophobic; 75% of respondents to the British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey thought homosexual activity was "always or mostly wrong" (quoted in (Wakefield and Kelleher, 2021). Worryingly, 113 countries out of 202 reported on in the Spartacus Gay Travel Index (2023) have laws which are hostile to people of sexual and gender minorities.

Things are getting better?

It would be pleasing to report that things have progressed – and the recent BSA results suggest they have, 67% of respondents said same-sex relationships are never wrong (Clery, 2023). So too does the landmark legalising of same-sex marriage in 2013 in England and Wales. However, "attitudes towards people who are transgender have become markedly less liberal over the past three years. 64% describe themselves as not prejudiced at all against people who are transgender, a decline of 18 percentage points since 2019 (82%)" (Clery, 2023, p.4). Section 28 echoes loudly in protests against the inclusion of homosexual relationships in the *No Outsiders* relationship and sex education curriculum (Severs, 2019).

[15] Financial support was withdrawn from a Glynebourne Opera production of "Death in Venice".

Perhaps more worrying, reported hate crime against LGBTQ+ people, in England and Wales increased from 4,658 to 18,375 between 2011/12 and 2019/20, and has grown at double the rate of other hate crime categories in the last two years. Police estimate that 47% of hate crime is reported, but research by LGBTQ+ support organisation, GALOP, found that only 1 in 8 respondents reported their "most recent" incident to the police, which suggests the national reporting is an underestimate of the actual number of incidents (GALOP, 2021).

These historical and contemporary vignettes present a predominantly depressing picture of enduring social, religious, and political hostility towards homosexuality, but also some of the (more recent) resistance and community–led affirmation and support activities. It is not unreasonable to acknowledge that despite progress with regards the basic human rights of LGBTQ+ people, the life experience of the majority of LGBTQ+ people is negatively impacted by prejudice and fear. In this context safe spaces – physical, emotional, social – become an important refuge. History has shown that seeking safety in physical spaces provides both social and emotional safety to express themselves more freely, but such gathering has also provided easy targets for homophobic actions and attacks. More recently, the idea of safe spaces, has been presented as an attack on free speech and a constraint on liberal democracy – particularly by right wing activists.

Read in conjunction with the research presented in the introductory chapter this history illuminates the social forces, both ancient and current, that have shaped social attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people over millennia. Both in broad social and specific professional contexts, for many, the hegemonic positioning of LGBTQ+ people, has resulted in feelings of otherness, fear, and shame. The review of people's experience at work reveals a range of strategies and behaviours that people have adopted to manage the impact of experiencing social and / or professional contexts that are characterised by perceived antipathy – an antipathy that has a documented history lasting over 2000 years…

The theoretical foundations of the research will be discussed in the next chapter. It will consider the role of activism in this research, present the theoretical foundations of the research project, and contextualise them as elements of the previously mentioned framework for autoethnographic research that has been developed as part of this project.


I would like, if I may,
to take you on a
strange journey...
Richard O'Brien

As researchers, we are knowledge workers, and in this work there is no neutral space. When I was a student in South Africa, anti-apartheid activists correctly insisted that a posture of neutrality regarding apartheid amounted to a tacit endorsement of the associated beliefs, policies, and power relations. In the light of this personal history, dispassionate engagement with a situation of oppression, inequality or injustice is problematic to me. It implies that all social research can / should be seen as activism, whether it recognises this or not.

When I think about knowledge and power, and the relationship between them, I do not revert to the idea that knowledge is power or, conversely that ignorance is powerlessness. Gayatri Spivak's (1988) concept of epistemic violence focussed on the silencing of the knowledge of marginalised groups and the related denial of their voices, based on Foucault's thinking on knowledge, power and social control. For me, the realisation that controlling the nature of knowledge that is perpetuated about a marginalised group within dominant cultures reflects and reinforces not only the beliefs of the dominant culture, but also shapes the self-perception of members of the marginalised group themselves, is worryingly dystopian. But it does explain the pernicious working of dominant knowledges within contested social contexts, such as race, sexuality, and gender...

Smyth and McInerney (2011, p. 3), "actively den[y] that it is possible to do social research in ways that are allegedly neutral, objectivist, detached...". Social research that claims neutrality, they suggest, arises from an unwillingness of the researchers to acknowledge the values and interests that they hold regarding their research area. They use the term 'advocacy ethnography' to describe research that is reflexively engaged with profoundly political questions, involves working with and for marginalised minorities, and supporting them in challenging their situation of exclusion. Sometimes this is framed as requiring a close relationship with direct action, and / or close relations with activist organisations beyond academia (Choudry 2013) .He draws a distinction between academic activist researchers (which I would consider myself to be), and activist researchers who are more directly embedded with social movements and organisations. Nguyen (2021) concludes her review of

activist research by defining it as research committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society. The commitment is to transformation of oppressive systems.

In the light of this discussion, I regard this project as activist research. Ultimately, it is not the situation or level of activism of a researcher that defines activist research but rather their intention – "the questions we ask and the purpose to which we put the analysis" (Naples 1998, p.7).

This chapter presents the intellectual journey that I followed in developing my understanding of the project. It will present my conceptual model of the project which consists of four main elements. The first is the theoretical space in which the project is situated. The second is the contextual space, which includes consideration of the social, professional, individual, and intersubjective contexts of the research engagements. The third element is the conceptual topology of ideas linked to the project. This is a topological space as the emphasis is on the relationships, synergies and contradictions that are relevant to investigating LGBTQ+ professional identities. The fourth element is the analytical space. It will be discussed in detail in the chapter 'Spilling the T' which presents the analysis of the collected stories as the specific analytical approaches are responsive and emergent elements of the project. This makes it appropriate to present them in parallel with other research findings.

In traditional social science, with its legacy of positivism, a theory is an explanatory framework that is both testable through empirical enquiry and which produces generalisable results (Grzanka, 2019). In the context of critical theoretical research, theory is better considered as a lens through which sense is made of the collected data. This blurs the boundary between traditionally distinct research categories of theory and method; it reflects the not-unusual alignment of critical theory with deconstructive approaches to challenging ideas often conceived to be oppositional binaries. In anarchic research contexts, it is not only dualisms that can be recognised, examined, or challenged, but more complex sets of interrelated ideas – what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call multiplicities. Multiplicities are more than groups of related

words. For example, the theory / method binary could be extended to include ethics, participant recruitment, analytical approach. However, any of the members of a multiplicity can simultaneously participate in other multiplicities, and new multiplicities can also serendipitously emerge.

I believe that the unifying element of all critical theoretical research lies in its insistence on activist stance. Queer theory in its simplest manifestation turns a sexuality-and-gender lens on the world – and this project does just that – focussing as it does on the professional experience of a group of lesbian and gay STEM university tutors. However, queer theory's critical theoretical genealogy means that it has the potential to move beyond and return to sexuality, enabling the examination of relations of power wherever they are manifest. Grzanka (2019, p.1) recognises the utility of queer theory in context of anti-hegemonic social research – "queer theory has been an indispensable tool for researchers asking questions about the roles of power, discourse, and knowledge in the development and maintenance of structural forms of domination, especially those forms of oppression that appear to be normal or natural".

Establishing the theoretical space of the project

This section will examine how I attempted to respond to these normative power relations in a research project that aims to be critical, collaborative, emergent, representative, and ethical. It will explore the lineage, character and complexity of queer theory and its application in research. It will show how and why a queer approach suits an anti-normative project such as this one. It is neither sensible, nor probably possible, to disentangle the epistemological, ethical, political, methodological, and material considerations of a queer research project (Grzanka, 2019; Adams and Holman Jones, 2011), so this chapter weaves a narrative for the project that incorporates all these considerations.

Working with 'Critical Theory'

It is worth considering, at this point, what should be taken as signified by the term critical theory and how it is applied in this work. Firstly, I would suggest that there is, as with queer theory, no unified or authoritative definition – so this is offered as a

tentative, contextual discussion only. However, one frequently recognised characteristic of critical theory is its synthetic character, where a theorist may select those elements from the *corpus* in a deliberate and responsive manner to the task at hand (Sim and van Loon, 2012).

The Frankfurt School was a group of Marxist academics, from a range of disciplines, affiliated to the Institute for Social Research associated with the Goethe University Frankfurt. They had fled Nazi Germany but returned to Frankfurt after the war. The approach of the Frankfurt School, which became known as 'Critical Theory', incorporated multidisciplinary social research with basic Marxian analysis to examine social relations in capitalist societies (Garvey and Strangroom, 2012; Sim and van Loon, 2012). They confronted what they perceived as the failure of the Enlightenment view of inevitable human progress which they regarded as entwined in contemporaneous (oppressive) social systems of capitalism, stalinism, and fascism. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, p.1) note that "the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity". This perception intensified in response to the brutality of Stalinism, the horror of the holocaust and the resurgent, intensified capitalism of the Post-War era. They proposed a method of emancipatory critique that preserved the foundations of Marxian analysis and co-opted ideas from sociology, psychoanalysis, and existentialism – from its inception critical theory has been, and still is, a selective and multidisciplinary endeavour. Max Horkheimer, an influential member of the Frankfurt School, required a critical theory to have three characteristics (Bohman, 2005). It must be simultaneously,

1. explanatory
2. practical
3. normative.

Marx's recognition and revelation of a social superstructure – the hidden, ordering, normative structure of relations in society (which for Marx was economics) – is foundational to almost all latter critical theoretical positions including post-colonialism, feminism, queer, gender, race, crip, and those, I would suggest, that have yet to be formulated.

The idea of the superstructure was expanded upon and crystalised in Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Macey, 2001). He uses the concept to explain why workers are not revolutionary, and, contextually, why they might be fascists. Hegemony, unlike Marx's materialism, is not bound to the material (realm of economics) but situates elements of the normative power of the superstructure in the realm of ideas – which he called ideology, but which masquerades as culture (Sim and van Loon, 2012).

Gramsci did not repudiate materialism entirely but saw proletariat oppression as a product of both economics *and* the control of ideas which, I suggest, includes a control of knowledge. He believed, as Marx did, that revolution was both desirable and inevitable, but situated the struggle in a more complex and contested space, which added ideas and culture to the purist Marxist realms of politics and economics. Gramsci rightly politicised culture, the aftermath of this manifests itself in contemporary politics, commentary and culture wars (Anthony, 2021).

In contrast to the social focus of Marxian thinking, at an individual level psychoanalysis suggests a hidden, driving force in the behaviour and character of individuals – the unconscious – which is akin to Marx's social superstructure, as it shapes and controls the conscious expression of individuals without their knowledge or consent (at least, prior to psychoanalysis!). Frankfurt School critical theorists took the idea of the unconscious and applied it, or at least examined its workings, in the context of cultural production. In the same way that economic and social phenomena can be exposed by considering their superstructure or hegemonic context, cultural artifacts, of which 'society' is the aggregate realisation, can be regarded as a manifestation of unconscious processes at work during their production (Sim and van Loon, 2012; Macey, 2001).

It was the further co-option of sociological theory (particularly that of Max Weber) that transmutes the approach into the reflexive, interpretative, and sceptical endeavour we now recognise as critical theory (Cultural Reader, 2014). Max Weber held a strongly anti-positivist view of social research, believing that social research is

confounded by a circularity in which the concepts and language that researchers are obliged to use determine their own perceptions of the social world they are investigating. His ethnomethodology parallels modern applications of critical theory which take an interpretivist view of the world, where meaning is not derived through invoking some objective metaphysical truth but arises from the subjective experience of individuals within a given context.

Combining the historicity of Marxian analysis, the cultural critique offered by psychoanalysis, and this sociologically informed interpretivist view of the world, enables social researchers to defend an epistemology that runs counter to traditional notions of knowledge as objective truth, to something more nuanced and contextual, socially, and politically engaged, and deliberately self-conscious. This meets the first two requirements of critical theory, which are that is explanatory and practical.

The final of Horkheimer's three criteria (Bohman, 2005) is the most contentious. An appeal to normative values requires an ethically reasoned position. All critical theoretical approaches have an inevitable recourse to the broadly Marxian appeal to freedom from slavery (Neilson and Peters, 2020). But different types of slavery require different responses informed by different value systems, for example, queer, and hence intersectional, liberatory endeavours are likely to be responsive to an extended set of values, in comparison with, for example, more specifically Marxian economic liberatory endeavours.

This suggests an appropriate amorality within critical theory itself. The application of critical theory is not an ethical endeavour per se, but it requires a rigorous ethical framework to satisfy Horkheimer's requirement that it be normative. However, when combined with interpretivist and reflexive practice, ultimately the moral and ethical intentions of the researcher become the normative centre.

The preceding discussion of the origin and characteristics of critical theory, whilst selective and incomplete, is presented as the set of foundational ideas for this research project, which shares key elements – to be explanatory, practical, and normative through an exploration of hidden power structures, and their role in

determining the classroom experience of a group of lesbian and gay STEM university lecturers. It adopts an interpretivist research strategy and inherits the Marxian commitment to emancipatory praxis. I hope that over the course of subsequent discussion a robust defence of the theoretical and ethical position I have adopted, and which originally motivated my interest in the project, will become apparent.

Thinking about 'Queer'

It seems sensible to continue with a selective history of queer thinking, as a consolidation of its critical theory lineage. This version of the story is derived from and heavily indebted to the work of Barker and Scheele (2016).

Philosophically, queer theory has its roots in existentialism, with its rejection of both biological and social essentialism. Simone de Beauvoir (1988) recognised that people are not all equally free to make 'existential' choices – and that freedom differs across time and cultures. de Beauvoir viewed gender as something that emerges through society, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (quoted in Barker and Scheele, 2016). Her formulation of the difference between sex and gender constitutes a foundational idea in feminist thinking but it also extends into queer theory. It can be considered a precursor to the thinking of two key queer theorists: Michel Foucault and his concept of subjectivation, and Judith Butler and her idea of performative identities, both discussed by Youdell (2006).

Black feminist, Audre Lorde, highlighted that thinking categorically, resulted in unexamined privileging – 'women' standing for 'white women', othering 'black women' (Lorde, 1980). In her writing Lorde emphasises the hegemonic character of oppression itself, and the interrelationships between different types of oppression. An excerpt from *There is no hierarchy of oppressions* (1983, online) is presented – no paraphrasing can do justice to the power of Lorde's words.

> *"I was born Black, and a woman. I am trying to become the strongest person I can become to live the life I have been given and to help effect change toward a livable future for this earth and for my children. As a Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, poet, mother of two including one boy and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself part of some group in which the majority defines me as deviant, difficult,*

> *inferior or just plain "wrong." … From my membership in all of these groups I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sexes and colors and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression… Within the lesbian community I am Black, and within the Black community I am a lesbian. Any attack against Black people is a lesbian and gay issue, because I and thousands of other Black women are part of the lesbian community. Any attack against lesbians and gays is a Black issue, because thousands of lesbians and gay men are Black. There is no hierarchy of oppression. I cannot afford the luxury of fighting one form of oppression only. I cannot afford to believe that freedom from intolerance is the right of only one particular group. And I cannot afford to choose between the fronts upon which I must battle these forces of discrimination, wherever they appear to destroy me. And when they appear to destroy me, it will not be long before they appear to destroy you."*

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1990) coined the word "intersectionality" – which can be read as an elaboration of Lorde's, and other feminist and anti-racist thinking on oppression, highlighting as it does the complex interactions of identities and power, that are not simply additive in character but "inflect and infuse" (quoted in Barker and Scheele, 2016) each other in complex ways.

The Gay Shame movement explicitly confronted the normative power of the words 'gay' and 'pride', with their cisgender, white male, and commercial baggage ('Gay Shame: A Celebration of Resistance', n.d.).

> "We seek nothing less than a new queer activism that foregrounds race, class, gender and sexuality, to counter the self-serving "values" of gay consumerism and the increasingly hypocritical left. We are dedicated to fighting the rabid assimilationist monster with a devastating mobilization of queer brilliance."

They called out the depoliticization of the movement that started as a night of active resistance to police persecution of queer patrons of the Stonewall Inn in 1969, emphasising that inadequate progress has been made, and that the move from protest to party is premature. Gay Shame resists assimilative, homonormative societal structures, and argues for broad societal change ('Gay Shame: A Celebration of Resistance', n.d.). The movement currently has a smaller public presence than it had a decade ago, but this type of protest continues with, for example, the London-based Queeruptors, and their alternative to mainstream pride LaDiDah (Brown, 2007).

The term 'homonormative, mentioned above, was popularised by Duggan (2002). It refers to the way in which heteronormative social expectations are replicated and performed by homosexual people. This includes the privileging of behaviours such as monogamy, marriage, procreation, and productivity. It is a key element of LGBT conservatism and envisages the creation of a 'gay mainstream', which is compliant with dominant social norms, including capitalism and consumerism. It represents the domestication of LGBTQ+ people and stands in opposition to queer activism.

There was a shift in the late 20th century from an emphasis on 'gay liberation', which had become aligned with identity politics and could be seen as complicit with homonormativity, to an activism focussed on confronting the working of social structures, and the operation of power within them (Bernini, 2017). This post-structural turn in queer activism is a key moment defining what we now recognise as queer theory. Two important post-structuralist informants of current queer theory are Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Both explore the normative processes within societies which enable and constrain the emergence of socially constructed identities (Barker and Scheele, 2016).

Foucault (1979) used the panopticon [16] as a metaphor for how peoples' self-awareness of the many critical gazes upon them promotes self-regulation – compelling them to maintain their acceptability and avoid censure or disapproval. This gives hegemonic discourses the power to regulate behaviour vicariously, through the subjects of the discourse itself. If one accepts that it is through our behaviour that our subjective identities are performed, then regulating behaviour is an integral and constraining influence on the social processes through which subjectivities are formed. This process of subjectivation, imbues selected behaviours with either normalcy or deviancy (Youdell, 2006). Foucault suggested such reification of normative ideals was instrumental in the development of ideas of

[16] A circular prison with a guard tower in the middle so that guards can at any time be looking into any cell, which has the effect of making prisoners constantly monitor and regulate their behaviour.

'sexuality' itself, as well as enabling the resultant emergence of identity politics and its associated (resistance to) power relations.

Judith Butler (1999), building on the work of black feminists, reiterated the problematic nature of categorical thinking; that universalist assumptions about gender are unhelpful and should be avoided. Such assumptions are informed by what she called the heterosexual matrix – broadly, you have a body of a fixed sex (male or female), upon which a stable gender is culturally constructed (masculine or feminine), which determines your desires ('opposite' or 'same' sex). It is noteworthy that this conceptualisation incorporates binary thinking about sexuality. I think it plays a role in validating assimilative strategies that some LGBTQ+ people have adopted in the workplace and life, more broadly, as it situates selected homosexual performances within the heterosexual matrix.

However, Butler refuted the implicit causal links between sex, gender, and sexuality – insisting that our bodies do not determine our genders and neither do our genders determine our desires. The queered matrix suggests you have a body, you perform an identity, and you may have desires. This means that gender is instantiated through our expressions and behaviours – it is what we do, not who we are. Through taking on societal expectations of what 'men' or 'women' should do, certain discourses are repeated, and take on a mantle of 'reality', becoming normative ideals about gender. This is performativity – normal (and deviant) behaviours are responsive to a context, and their repetition reifies the ideology of that context.

Butler maintains that it is impossible to step outside of the existing power relations that govern gender performance. However, resistance is possible through subversive performances of gender that reveal how it is constructed, and by denying the 'truth' of binary understandings (of gender and sexuality) – for it is through binary oppositions (e.g., male/female, gay/straight), and the asymmetric privileging of one element that discriminatory, coercive discourses come into being. While much of Butler's work focussed on gender specifically, it has been taken up by queer theorists (who would claim gender as a legitimate intersectional concern of

queer theory), and the concept of performativity is a key element of much research published under a queer banner.

Ultimately, it is impossible to authoritatively define queer theory – just as it refuses a fixed identity in its conceptualisations of personal subjectivities, it morphs to the subjectivity of the queer researcher. However, Browne and Nash (2010) identify a range of concerns that are likely to get broad assent from researchers claiming a queer approach.

- Firstly, it is located within a post-structuralist paradigm, examining the power relations related to sex, sexuality, and gender, drawing on elements from feminist, anti-racist and post-colonial approaches, and requires queer scholars to self-consciously articulate their ontologies and epistemologies.
- Secondly, it refuses the fixed subjectivities of either researchers or researched – which raises ontological conundrums: if subjects and subjectivities are not fixed, how can we gather 'data', what meanings can we draw from momentary realities, how does such a destabilised reality position us as researchers? These impact on how research is designed, interpreted, and, importantly, written.
- Thirdly, taken-for-granted seemingly fixed attributes of the self (e.g., sexuality, gender) are reframed as social constructions which arise from performance not essence, and their contingent character is cast as a matter for research.
- Fourthly, it confronts normative social discourses, in particular heteronormativity, and the privileging of heterosexuality as the central organising principle of society, by challenging the binaries that cast hetero as normal, natural, moral and homo as other, or deviant.
- Fifthly, it is deconstructive in its nature, using the exploration of binary oppositions to explore power relations manifest through normative discourses.

- Finally, by recognising the intersectionality of subject experiences of various hegemonic discourses (race, sex, sexuality, gender), the scope of queer approaches transcends its obvious realms of application – allowing the 'queering' of a range of disciplines.

Queer theory's rejection of the stability of the identities of researchers and research collaborators, has raised questions about the very possibility of collecting data, let alone the subsequent attempts at any meaning-making, or what the nature and value of such meaning could be, in such a context (Browne and Nash, 2010).

Although not a specifically queer perspective, I believe that Haraway's (1988) defence of situated knowledges provides a framework for responding to this conundrum for queer research(ers). Written in refutation of the valorisation of objectivity as the measure for valuing research, she argues that knowledge presented as if produced by neutral observers in a context that is valueless (as positivist, traditional scientific paradigms claim) is ultimately disingenuous. She argues for a new scientific process of endeavour that offers a more adequate, richer, better account of the world. She suggests this would improve how we live in the world in critical, reflexive relation to processes of domination, unequal privilege, and oppression that make up our experiences (Haraway, 1988). "The issue", she notes "is ethics and politics perhaps more than epistemology" (p. 579) and suggests that critical reflexive practice requires a commitment to mobile positioning (recognising different perspectives) and passionate detachment (adopting a critical distance). This resonates with the ideas of individual identities as performative and multiple, as well as the conundrum of insider, autoethnographic endeavours, both key considerations in queer(ed) research.

She argues that science is not produced through identity (the mythical 'neutral observer" **IS** an identity) but through objectivity. She equates this to critical positioning, which, in turn, requires accepting responsibility for our research decisions (ontology, epistemology, axiology, theory, methods, analysis – everything!). It is easy to conceive of the identity of 'scientist' as an unexamined performative

instance, embodying the norms and disciplinary expectations of what a 'scientist' is. Resisting such hegemonic determinism, requires recognition of the embeddedness of ethical and political standpoints in what counts as (the pursuit of) rational (scientific) knowledge.

There is an additional element of the argument for situated knowledges that resonates with anarchic / queer research. Haraway (1988, p. 585) recognises that there are points of view "which can never be known in advance" that offer "knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organised by axes of domination". The idea that there is a productive serendipity [17] that is enabled when control is relinquished and a centre refused, creates a frisson in the research process and powerfully reflects my own affective relationship with, and experience of undertaking, this project. It shapes the deliberate emphasis on the emergent nature of many elements of the project.

As a project claiming a queer theoretical position, this endeavour is normative and political – and has to be responsive to existing relations through which power is manifest. In a research context, there are several loci where asymmetric power most obviously exists:

- Designing the project
- Setting the research questions and objectives
- Creating a research tool
- Interpreting the results
- Defining the relationship between the researcher and the researched more broadly
- Presentation of the results of the research

[17] I think this represents a good example of a rhizomatic multiplicity, suggesting an unknown but realisable network of entangled concepts from different perspectives, disciplines, and contexts.

Traditionally, these reside (primarily) within the ambit of the researcher and their supervisory team, and institutional research offices including the ethics committee. The list does not really have any specifically queer focus and represents a generic set of points which could be areas of response in any critical theoretical research project. This suggests that queerness of a research project is significantly related to researcher intention and position within the research. In what follows, I will present my response to these loci of power given the ethos and ambition of this project.

It is easy to conceive of research about queer people, in the same way that it is relatively easy to conceive of queer pedagogy as an attempt to present more inclusive material in the learning and teaching process. But both these conceptions are superficial. The real challenge lies not in the worthy pursuit of information about queer lives and life experiences, but in challenging the power structures that enable / enforce those experiences and subverting the power structures inherent in the processes of learning and teaching (as well as performing research). So, in the same way that queer pedagogy can simultaneously refer to teaching about, for, or by queer people, as well as transformed educational praxis, queer research also extends from the subject(s) of the research to a re-envisioned research praxis. In attempting to expose the queer character of this project, I will respond to each of the loci of power mentioned at the conclusion of the previous section, by exploring the value of entangling three research paradigms – anarchic, rhizomatic, and transformative, all of which can be considered rightful elements of a queer research endeavour. I will draw out a selection of characteristics of these approaches to defend the methods associated with this project, and to demonstrate its queer character and lineage.

The seed of this project was sown in discussion with one of the teachers on the preparatory modules of the Professional Doctorate in Education. I was frustrated by my inability to find a focus for an assessment – but I was enthused by the synergies I was discovering between my academic background (English literature, poetics, and critical theory). The idea of educational praxis, in particular, provided a point of coalescence around which I could begin to articulate and integrate ideas related to my learning history, my resistance to the debasement of higher education in the

context of neoliberalism, and the emotional and political quandaries I experience in the classroom as a queer STEM educator.

The challenge in the light of the preceding exposition of the theoretical context of the research is to transform it into a defensible methodology and a series of related, appropriate, and aligned research steps. Before doing so there are further foundational elements that require exploring. These have already been hinted at but require both explanation and a defence of their centrality to the project.

Addressing 'Anarchy'

The etymology of the word anarchy – from ancient Greek, 'an': without, 'arkhos': a chief / ruler – signifies its meaning in the context of the ethos of this project. I have tried to devise a process where the researcher (project initiator) is not the determining power controlling how the research unfurls but allows it to become manifest through personal engagement with collaborators.

However, even prior to any engagement with people or the research process, the development of this structure has also been the result of a rhizomatic process, through the intertextual synergies that arise from the interplay of my personal story and the research project [18]. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.7) describe the nature of a rhizome as "Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be... A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, social sciences, and social struggles". This reflects both the character and the outcome of my struggle to fashion a research project from familiarity with related literature and ideas, which recognises the unpredictability of engaging with people in a contestable and politicisable context, and which confronts the inadequacy of linear, progressive dialogic models of engagement like structured interviews in socially engaged research.

[18] I am thinking specifically of my introduction to critical theory as student of English literature and my current endeavours in educational research – separated by 30 years of practice and teaching in the context of geography and environmental management.

The strength of the rhizome analogy also lies in its anarchic conceptualisation of the simultaneous potential for a myriad of connections. In rhizomatic research there is no correct order, there is no centre, only points of coalescence between connections that create multiplicities. The vast interdimensional rhizomatic network defies both subject and object. Individuals, ideas, performances, and values exist as multiplicities connected to other multiplicities. Recognition of this fundamental equality and complexity requires an ethics of engagement that is not exploitative, directive, or de-individualising. Recognising and enabling this radical equality requires research engagements to be collaboratively (un)focussed, mutually responsive and empathetic – compassionate not only in how as researchers we relate to our collaborators, but also in how we treat ourselves (Heckert, 2010a).

Heckert (2010b) notes the troublesome delivery of anarchic and queer research. He casts these two traditions of theory and practice as kindred – as both are sites of activism against the legitimacy of borders. The intimate nature of the subject and process of the research requires a mode of relating that is responsive to vulnerability of collaborators as they venture into the research space. This has been both a source of concern for me, but ultimately also one of overwhelming indebtedness to the project collaborators who showed such trust in the project, and a willingness to expose themselves to this perilous, unpredictable process.

This places the ethics of the research relationship as a central concern. Heckert (2010a) reframes anarchism itself as "an ethics of direct relationships". In the context of this project and possibly to all projects making a tentative claim to anarchic approaches, this reframing requires the focus to be not on traditional concerns like methods and anticipated outputs but on process – open relations between equals, "directly, intersubjectively and warmly" (Heckert, 2010a, p.187).

Approaching the 'data'

The final element that needs consideration from a methodological perspective is how the data will be analysed. There is a position in qualitative research where analytical strategies rely on a pseudo-quantification of, for example interview transcripts by

creating word clouds, or thematic coding and analysis, or approaching the data through the lens of a defined social context – discourse analysis. The key distinction of such approaches from a queer analysis is the assumption of a fixed point of departure or centre, the discourse, from which to construct the interpretive response – queer approaches would refute the stability of such centres for analysis (Browne and Nash, 2010). This project requires an approach that recognises the changing subjectivities of all participants, whether the research originator and reporter or collaborators.

Autoethnography allows the inter-relationships between all participants to be considered and has a history of use in queer research (Holman Jones and Adams, 2012; Adams and Holman Jones, 2011). The complexity of a queer autoethnography requires an awareness of the unfixed positionalities of the collaborators. I will approach the collected autoethnographic data, the stories that we produced, from an exegetical perspective – an approach persuasively defended by Carter (2014) who interestingly positions education itself, and consequently educational research, as a 'text' of social practice making it open to such approaches. I will elaborate on the details of the autoethnographic approach of this project in the next chapter which focusses on moving from the theoretical to the methodological aspects of project.

Exegesis is the critical explanation or interpretation of a text which permits the consideration of the externalities of the text to assist in the derivation of meaning. Meaning in an exegetic reading might be established through consideration of the canon to which it belongs, authorship, historic context, and / or the original audience to better understand the intention of the writer / narrator. Exegesis literally means 'to lead out' (Carter, 2014). It is an appropriate method of approaching (queer) autoethnographic texts – given the impetus to develop a deeper understanding of the narrative, to reveal hidden elements, and expose power relations that may have shaped the story.

However, I think an autoethnographic approach requires an additional reading engagement – the converse of exegesis – eisegesis. This means 'reading into' a text.

The requirement for radical reflexivity in autoethnographic projects, reading oneself, particularly as the research narrator, into the text seems an inevitable requirement, revealing the complexities of the intersubjective nature of the process of producing the research text, and acknowledging the influence it has on the research findings. This echoes Horkheimer's requirement for a normative stance in critical theoretical projects and aligns with activist positioning of queer scholarship.

This document is the vehicle through which a series of stories are told. There is the story of the project itself, there are the stories of the collaborators, there is also my story as originating and reporting collaborator. The tellings of each of these stories differ from each other and require a different ethic of telling. The story of the research project requires compliance with institutional, and disciplinary codes for ethical research. The collaborator stories require a different ethic, personal, empathetic, and compassionate. My own story requires the preceding elements along with a deep reflexivity that reveals and acknowledges how the other stories were negotiated and came into being. The lives of all the characters in these stories are unavoidably incomplete. As the researcher / narrator, it is my ultimate responsibility to present a useful story. The ethical centre of the project, this complex, tangled set of relations and representations, is recognised as unstable and performative.

There is a clear alignment between narrative ethics, exegetic analysis, and critical theoretical approaches as all require consideration of the context in which a text arises. Magpieism is how Carter (2014, p.126) describes an approach to textual interpretation that allows "the investigative and reflective individual to put…methods…into a field of play with each other". The purpose is to refute the clarity of systematic reviews and to exploit all potentially promising approaches. It is fundamentally rhizomatic.

Magpieism is also listed as a defining characteristic of critical theoretical positions more generally in Sim and van Loon (2012), who suggest that the multiplicity of theories promotes such experimentation. Carter (2014) cites a range of research

about higher education focussed on gender, race, and culture, each adopting a different, appropriate theoretical position relevant to the focus of the research. She argues for the application of literature study methods such as exegesis, critical analysis, intertextuality, and intersectionality. This means approaching the data as any other text and reading it as a product of a specific circumstance but doing so through a lens which is deliberately selected to foreground project-related ideas and concerns.

In this project, the text is both the transcripts and recordings (which offer a richer version of the text), my own experience of the collaborative engagements that produced the text, and my analytic and affective responses before, during and after the engagements [19]. The lens is queer theory in all its complexity – not just a social liberatory activist approach, but also in its fracturing of identity, and its reflexive view of the formative, normative hegemonies that simultaneously constrain, enable, and refute identities.

The analysis will explore the relationship between the narratives of experience that make up the data and the emergent themes that recur in the extensive, traditional social science explorations of the experience of queer people in the workplace, discussed in the first chapter. There is a further avenue of intertextual exploration, which is across, and between, the narratives produced in this research.

Figure 5 presents how the theoretical elements which I have discussed in this chapter coalesce to form the theoretical space of the project. The theoretical space is the first of the four spaces that make up the SOAR framework, a key outcome of this research. It is presented graphically, as all elements of the framework will be, to illustrate the synthetic [20] character of the space as a purposive selection of theoretical ideas that frame the project.

[19] I kept a research journal for the duration of the project, collecting my thoughts and reflections prompted by the engagements. At selected points in this document I will present extracts in textboxes alongside the moments that prompted them.

[20] I use the term in the original sense of a combining of separate thoughts or conceptions into a whole

Marx's insight about hidden structures determining the seemingly natural order of societies is a foundational idea of critical theory. The idea was extended by Antonio Gramsci from the purely material considerations of classical Marxism to include ideas and culture. In such hegemonies, power is enacted through both material and ideological modes of control. The hegemonies which this project is responsive to are firstly heteronormativity and secondly, its close relative, patriarchy. Key theoretical thinkers, Foucault and Butler, can both be understood as providing practical and explanatory responses to patriarchal and heteronormative power relations. The contribution of Audre Lorde (1983) is important given their recognition of intersectional experiences and unexamined privilege which are central to queer thinking. bell hooks's (1994) emphasis on compassion in teaching relationships is an important element of the praxis arising from this research. Heckert (2010a, 2010b) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) represent both queer thinking and anarchic thinking. The idea of equal relating presented by Heckert forms the foundation of this project and permeates all aspects of the research approach.

Although this discussion, and Figure 5, present the contribution of each contributor as distinct, it is undoubtedly better thought of as a rhizomatic multiplicity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) – a specific coming together of ideas responsive to this project and its ideals. Together they provide the theoretical framework for the methodological approach adopted for this research. I have also included recognition of others who are part of this multiplicity of ideas, but whose contribution is perhaps less direct, less influential, or perhaps even unknown...

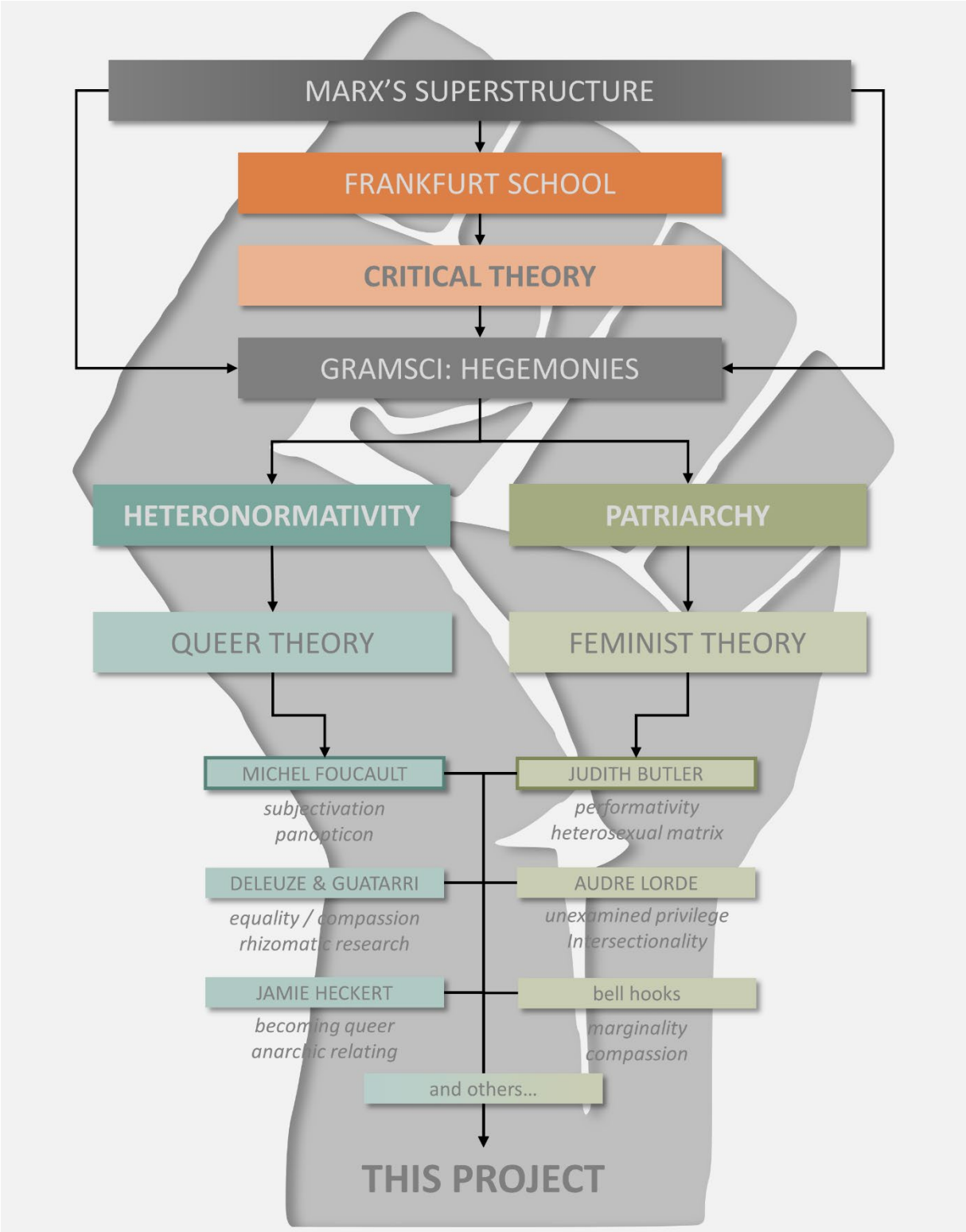


Figure 5: The theoretical space of the project [Clenched fist graphic: CCO I.O Universal (CCO I.O)]

Understanding the contextual space of the project

There are four important spaces in which this project takes place. The first, the theoretical space has been described. The second is the engagement space, shaped by a broad societal context (as is all research) but conceptualised in a way that reflects the ethos and relational commitments of the project. This space is represented in Figure 6 (enlargement in Appendix 4).

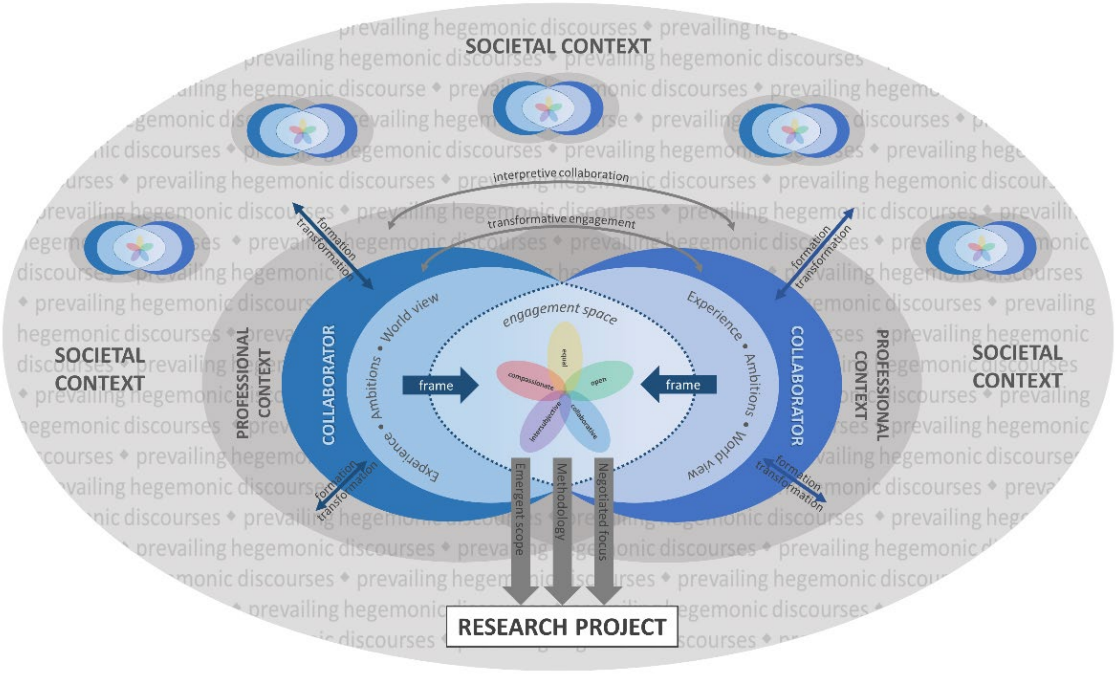


Figure 6: The contextual space and ethical space of the project

The diagram illustrates the recognition of the contextual considerations of the project, and how there are essentially three intersecting contexts which shape the engagement space. Firstly, there is the societal context; the description is deliberately broad as this both precedes the project and prevails beyond it. The representation recognises the hegemonic discourses that play out in this context. The uniform visual treatment is not meant to represent any uniformity in the life experiences of participant – only to represent that each engagement space is formed by the broader contexts of the collaborators and that is potentially transformed by the engagements themselves.

William Blake (1803) wrote that "the eye altering alters all" acknowledging the transformative potential of a change in perspective. Although this project has no

explicit transformative agenda, it rejects the naïve view that people are not in some way transformed by experience – it may be small and insignificant or major and impactful, but change, I believe, is inevitable. The representation acknowledges this two-way entanglement with both parties transformed through their engagement.

The second formational context is the professional context of collaborators. Although the project used a purposive strategy to recruit LGBTQ+ STEM academics, given the broad scope of STEM as a collection of disciplines, it was acknowledged from the outset that each engagement space will differ based on the professional discipline and role of each collaborator. Each of these unique engagement spaces is represented as a separate entity within the broader social context(s) of the project. As with the broader societal context, the professional context is considered a formative element of the engagement space, but also something that could, potentially, be transformed by the engagement.

The central element of the diagram is an enlarged, more detailed representation of an engagement space. It shows the engagement space as being instantiated by an intersubjective engagement between two people, informed by the recognition of this space as a multiplicity (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987), and as one of anarchic relating (Heckert, 2010a). It is important to note the language used. This is not an interview between researcher and participant, rather it is cast as a collaborative engagement that is underpinned by a set of guiding principles that define the relational character of the engagement space. The guiding principles are collaborative, compassionate, intersubjective, open, and equal. It acknowledges the multiplicity of experience, ambition, and the world view of each collaborator in forming each engagement instant.

The project itself is arises from the interpersonal exchanges within this engagement space, each with its own emergent scope and negotiated focus. Two key intersubjective moments are presented in the diagram, the first focussed on collaborative interpretation, and the second on the mutually transformative

exchanges that happen at each moment of engagement. The scope, focus and methodological approach of the project are responsive to the engagements.

Assessing the success of this vision is incorporated into the design of this endeavour, by including a final engagement specifically focussed on the experience of collaboration. The methodological implications are considered in the next chapter.

Developing a conceptual topology for the project

The third space in which the engagements take place is a conceptual space – bounded by the project scope, context, and theoretical foundations. The engagements had to be unbounded – approximating what would traditionally be called an open or unstructured interview. These are described as a method that disrupts the power relations in traditional interviews (Robinson, Barron and Pottinger 2021) – which sits comfortably in the ethos of this project.

Embarking on this profoundly open project left me feeling quite anxious. It dawned on me (someone with no experience in qualitative research) that I had to fulfil a set of complex responsibilities, the trust my collaborators had shown in me, to produce something useful and of value, and to remain true to an open and rhizomatic process. I had to resolve the tension between allowing freedom to collaborators to shape the engagements, and the responsibility of conducting a productive, ethical, and transformative research project.

This prompted me to consider how the main engagements could be managed to allow collaborators the freedom that the ethos of the project requires while still providing focus to these intersubjective engagements. I had the list of conceptual and theoretical touchpoints from the literature, which I expected to play an informing role (presented in Appendix 3). However, I could not see how this could be useful as a means for ensuring that the engagements were worthwhile and productive, without bounding and constraining the opportunity for open discussion – discussion deliberately intended not to be led by my own expectations and beliefs.

I realised that a series of themes that could shape the engagements in a responsive way was necessary. This was originally conceived as a web of related ideas, which can be entered from any point and through which one can move to any other point. This web was considered as a series of openings, which could set collaborators at ease if necessary, and could also foster a comfortable, responsive progression to deeper interaction as each engagement evolved. I anticipated using the nodes on the web as a potentially progressive sequence, with an option to focus initially on less personal elements such as professional history, teaching, and classroom identity and relationships, and then potentially moving to more personal discussion. This conception was not very useful. Whilst it would permit all possible journeys, it did not recognise the relationships and interconnections between ideas, making it a misrepresentation.

While the initial idea of a web remained appealing – because it reveals both complexity and interconnectedness, I realised that the relationships were better conceived as a network of interrelated sets of ideas. Thinking about how this could help guide the engagements without constraining them, made me think of the engagements as journeys – undertaken by me and the collaborators. This metaphor was very useful in reimagining the engagements. The realisation that the engagements are journeys, and that points along the journey are related, and that some points were more strongly related than others, put me in a cartographic [21] state of mind...

One of the most famous representations of a network of related locations, which allows journeys from any given point to any other point, and simultaneously also allows freedom in choosing which points to visit, is the London Underground Map. Based on the principle of topological representation, I developed a tool which would allow me to rapidly detect and respond to connections between related ideas, without dictating the course of the engagements with collaborators. The product of

[21] My professional context is geography and environmental management, specialising in geographic information systems and cartography.

this process, a conceptual topology, is presented in Figure 7 (enlargement in Appendix 5).

The central location is the three interconnected loci of person, teacher and professional – which are simultaneously occupied by all the project collaborators – this is the point from which all the journeys start.

The thematically related concepts are presented as equivalents to the lines on the London Underground. There are potential stops along the routes representing specific thematic instances within each aggregation. Points of intersection between themes are presented as stations. Where relationships exist that are not direct conceptual intersections, the stations are presented as linked but separated by distance – reflecting a measure of conceptual distance between the ideas. All the points and stations on the lines are concepts that arise from the literature reviewed in the introductory chapter. They are an abbreviated, yet representative sample of the full list of touchpoints presented in Appendix 3.

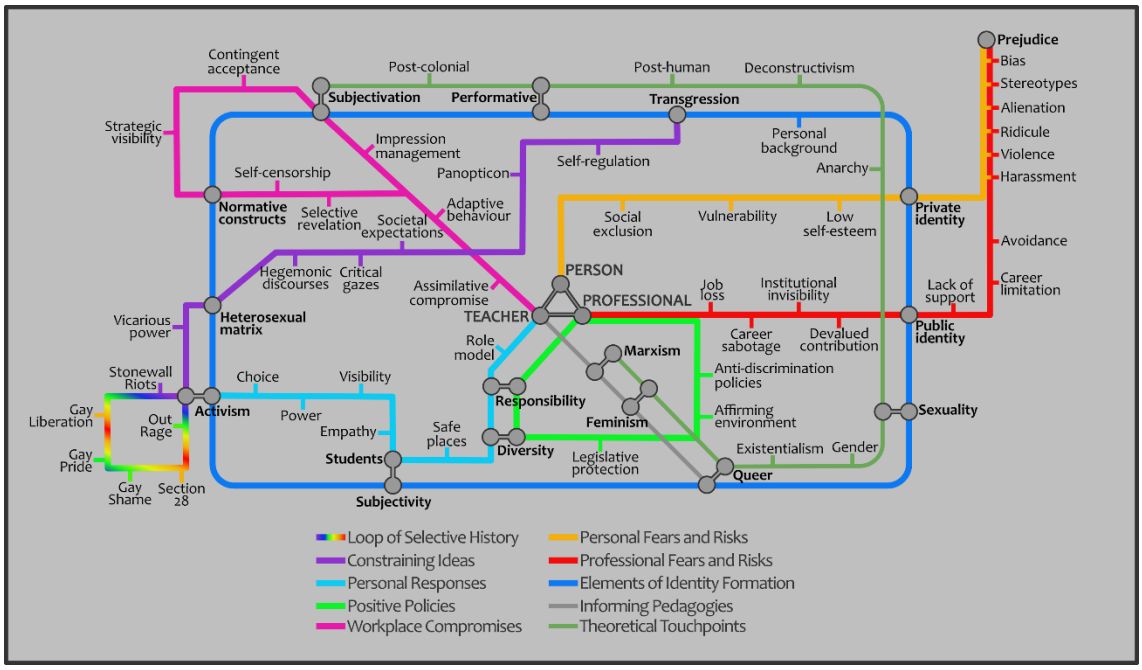


Figure 7: Conceptual topology for navigating the meetings with collaborators.

This diagram is not a complete representation of all possibilities within each engagement. It is an aid to allow me to position the content of the engagements, and to be aware of the potential routes could be revealed for possible exploration during

the engagements. The mapped topology presents topics that might be discussed; reveals how they might relate to both the theoretical / philosophical underpinnings of the project, and links to the pedagogic principles which prompted the conceptualisation of the project.

Having an idea, or even a set of ideas, is not the same as having a project. The following chapter will describe how the four spaces of engagement were translated into a real-world research project.


Stepping out of the page,
into the sensual world
James Joyce

This chapter presents how the theoretical ideas of the preceding chapter were translated into a practical research project. It will describe the processes of recruiting collaborators, responding to both the procedural ethical requirements as well as the specific practical ethics that a project such as this entails, and it anticipates the methodological approaches that are implicit in its theoretical commitments.

It is in the praxis of the methodology, which is presented in this section, that the influence of anarcho-queer thinking is most obviously manifest in the presented research. Firstly, all the practical aspects of the research were underpinned by the anarchic commitment to equality in relating, which also confronts the major locus of power in research – the researcher/participant binary. The preceding theoretical discussion presented the scope, focus and analytical emphases within the project as elements that emerge from and across the engagements themselves. This intersubjective / inter-collaborator multiplicity arises directly from considering the research process to be rhizomatic. The analytical approaches to the data collected during each of the three engagement phases, was only finalised once the data collection was completed. Final choices were shaped by considering how to get the most value from the commitment of the collaborators, and how to (re)present them as transparently as possible. My experience, as a researcher, of refusing the certainty of defined objectives of the project at the outset but allowing their development to be responsive to the process of intersubjective engagement was extremely positive. I believe it is strongly aligned with the commitment to confronting power inherent in all critical theoretical research, but perhaps particularly in research claiming an anarcho-queer approach.

Starting with an ethic of engagement

This project started with an ethical commitment to the people who would end up collaborating, even before they had been approached. It is informed by Heckert's (2010a) anarchic commitments to ethical relating. This element underpinned all practical, methodological aspects of the project – from its design and implementation to its analysis and reportage. These have already been discussed. However, such practical ethics are only one of two ethical components of research.

The second relates to institutional ethical approval and compliance processes. This research followed all required ethical protocols and adhered to the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (British Educational Research Association, 2018) throughout. Ethical approval was gained through institutional research committees. Participant information sheets (Appendix 7) and consent forms (Appendix 8) were approved during this process.

Issues around informed consent, the right to withdraw, alongside the commitment of participating in such a personal project were key foci. So too were considerations of the complexities of insider research, as well as the possibility of me knowing some of the collaborators. Given the nature of the project, these were not considered problematic – perhaps even advantageous. Alongside data management processes, these form the centre of the procedural aspects of the ethics.

There is an element of the formal ethics process that also addresses the personal relationships with, and responsibilities to the collaborators. I was particularly aware from the outset, given the substantial commitment participation required, of the responsibility to produce something useful.

Similarly, the anonymity of participants needed consideration. Practically, this included pseudonymisation, biographic alteration, transcription redaction, and constructed ambiguity where necessary. This created a tension between ensuring anonymity and pursuing integrous representation of the people involved, especially where their stories are personally specific and inform the understanding of the project. I have mediated this tension with care – always making choices by considering the collaborators' welfare, both during and after the project.

Finding collaborators

Recruitment of collaborators was (initially) implemented by reaching out through LGBTQ+ staff networks which circulated an invitation to their membership – with the intention of snowballing the sample from an initial cohort of respondents. I had no responses to the initial attempts, and invitations were circulated a second time. This time I had one response. The reply was from someone in a student facing role which

I had not initially anticipated as forming part of the target population (teaching academics). I discussed the inclusion of people with student-facing educational roles within higher education but who were not academic staff with my supervisory team, and it was decided that the experience of people in such roles was relevant, and a useful expansion of the initial project conception. Such wider sampling also has precedent in research related to LGBTQ+ STEM academics (Partridge, Barthelemy and Rankin, 2014).

Embarrassing silences

Interestingly, in the days following sending the second wider appeal for collaborators, a couple of people in the building I work in, who I knew very peripherally, expressed support, while other closer colleagues said nothing.

This observation may or not be significant, but the profound self-consciousness that had caused me to hesitate in sending the email, and which has dogged much of my life, reasserted itself at those moments - in response to both the expressions of support, and the silences.

I realised, after the limited response through LGBTQ+ staff networks that wider appeals for collaborators was needed. I agonised about how to go about this – I realised that the invitation to participate needed to be circulated beyond this focused, yet narrow audience. I was extremely uncomfortable about this as, although I maintain a tentative (often uncomfortable) visibility within my own institution, I felt that making a broad appeal, within and beyond it, would be a significant increase of this visibility. I fully realise that it is not inevitable that research related to queer people is necessarily conducted by queer researchers, but it still seemed to me like I would be coming out to hundreds of people without any context.

I drafted an email for wider distribution with an invitation for it to be forwarded by the initial recipients. It introduced the project and invited interested people to contact me – and agonised for a week about sending it. Eventually, with the cursor hovering over the send button, and knowing that one click, taking less than a second, was all that I had do... I closed my eyes and – reluctantly / deliberately / excitedly – clicked. It was the only way this project, which I strongly believed in, could go ahead. I got six responses through this approach – and had a viable project with seven collaborators.

I knew four of the seven respondents. The possibility of this happening was identified during the ethical review process and acknowledged to be a potential benefit given the nature of the research. I will identify and elaborate on these existing relationships when I discuss the content of the engagements.

I met with each respondent to explain the purpose of the project, its unorthodox approach, and the commitment to compassionate collaboration and openness on which it is founded. During these discussions, I explained that there were no questions for future engagements, and that my hope was that they would lead me through the territory of the enquiry as they wanted. These initial meetings were not recorded and do not form part of the data.

I offered to send them the page of theoretical and contextual touchpoints [22] (presented in Appendix 3). All declined this offer, which I interpreted as their buy-in to the open, collaborative methodology. This was affirming and reinforced my belief in both the project and the proposed approach. I also think that they, more than likely, appreciated the opportunity to shape a conversation about profound, personal themes in which they would also be heard in a non-judgemental, and compassionate way. The role of listening in such qualitative research projects, and 'good listening' specifically, is discussed in the next section.

Participant information sheets (presented in Appendix 6) were sent to collaborators after these meetings, so that they were fully informed about the project, my expectations, and their position as collaborators, before they committed to participate. Everyone I met in these initial meetings, remained supportive and chose to participate. Given the target number of collaborators was six to eight, I was very pleased to have seven collaborators [23]. They were a diverse group of men and

[22] It was created by a severe edit of the initial proposal text, identifying, and grouping ideas as either contextual or theoretical touchpoints.

[23] One person subsequently left their higher education employer, and although I felt that this was not a barrier to continued collaboration, they felt that they would be unable to participate as fully as they would like to from their new professional context and withdrew from the project after the first (non-research) meeting.

women, with different teaching roles within their universities, in a range of career phases, and of different ages. All bought into the project's ethos and were enthusiastic about their participation.

Informed consent was formalised at the first engagement in writing (the form is presented in Appendix 7) and reconfirmed at the start of all subsequent engagements.

Listening in practice

I do not consider the engagements that I had with my collaborators 'interviews', and I have used the term 'engagement' to indicate a level of interaction that is more than a simple transaction attempting to glean something useful from a group of volunteers. Much has been published on interview-based research and the importance of listening in this context (Forsey, 2010; Finlay, 2012; Talmage, 2012; Purdy *et al.*, 2017; Bihu, 2020, Lavee and Itzchakov, 2023). Although the research covers both structured and unstructured interviews, there are commonalities across the methods, for example, both require a measure of rapport, but the character of 'good listening' will vary depending on the nature of the interviews.

Lavee and Itzchakov (2023) regard the quality of the listening that happens between researchers and participants as a key determinant of the quality of qualitative research, because it determines the richness of the data that is collected. They use the term 'good listening' to describe listening that increases rapport, authenticity, speech fluency, trust, self-disclosure, liking, open mindedness, and self-insight. Morse (2020, p.4) summarised this need for good listening clearly, "excellent research requires excellent interpersonal skills in order to obtain good data". A research interview is a collaborative process of meaning making, although the roles of the collaborators are not the same.

Poor listening has negative impacts which damage the quality of research conversations. In particular, it can increase social anxiety and reduce trust (Castro *et al.*, 2016). Reduced trust constrains the emergence of a safe space, which is essential in research projects that focus on sensitive issues, as this one does. The value of

considering and understanding the engagement space (Figure 6 presented in the previous chapter) is directly linked to the idea of good listening and the manifestation of a safe space for research conversations.

Lavee and Itzchakov (2023) list five characteristics for good listening, which I would suggest also contribute to ethical listening. I will present each characteristic and summarise my experience and thinking in response to it within the context of this project's research conversations. I am not an experienced qualitative researcher, and I was very nervous about the research engagements. I was not sure if I would be able to establish the required rapport with my collaborators, which is why I focussed on an ethic of engagement to shape the listening relationship. I think this was a successful approach – as it determined the nature of the relationship I was attempting to cultivate, rather than focussing on any potential product of the engagements which was essential given the commitment to openness in the research process.

1. Clear your mind and give full attention to the interviewee
   I think initially this was difficult for me. I did not know how to resolve the tension between being productive and being fully invested in the personal conversation.
2. Avoid judgement and evaluation
   The engagements with collaborators were never intended to be neutral or dispassionate regarding the subject matter. The engagements were dialogic and conversational, characterised by a considerate exchange of ideas, and deeper inquiring by me. I think the sharing of my own experiences, particularly in response to collaborator stories, was beneficial in establishing rapport. So while judgement and evaluation of the respondents never occurred, judgement and evaluation of issues around the subject matter was not considered problematic. Although there were moments of disquiet in some engagements, such as when issues around race were discussed – which I find awkward given my life story being enmeshed in the South African history of apartheid.

3. Reflect and validate the interviewee

   Given the dialogic style of engagement with the collaborators, reflection and validation happened in both conversational directions. I often found collaborators turning a question back on me or asking about my experience in response to a line of enquiry. I always answered these honestly and completely. I have no doubt that this was the best approach, as it enabled a true ethos of compassionate collaboration to be established. In the third engagements, collaborators often referred to 'we', 'us' or 'our experience' – language that reflects the joint, intersubjective experience of participation. Collaborators also acknowledged that the depth of conversation we had, would not have been realised with a more structured approach.

4. Ask good meaning-making questions

   Part of ethical listening (and ethical research generally) is the requirement that it is productive, and that the investment made by collaborators in producing something useful. The engagements were not question based interviews but a discussion about classroom experience, professional identity, and pedagogic relationships. The only common question across the engagements was about how collaborators came to be in their current position. Its main purpose was to make them at ease with the situation and to get them to feel comfortable with talking about themselves through an emotionally neutral question. After this opening question, the conversation was a responsive exchange between me and each collaborator. In this project meaningful questioning was supported through the conceptual topology. Its utility is discussed in more detail below.

5. Reflect on your own listening

   This was an essential element of my approach to the project. After every engagement I noted key elements of my experience and reflected on the moments where I felt uncomfortable – which were mainly where I felt I had lost the way a little and was unable to keep a focussed, but open, conversation going. I also listened to the recordings shortly after each engagement with a view to confirming or refuting my reflexive perceptions.

The third engagements, focussed on the experience of being part of the project, were a key moment in assessing whether the research approach had been successful. These engagements are discussed in the third part of 'Spilling the T'.

The conceptual topology presented in Figure 7 was a key tool in facilitating good listening during the engagements. It enabled me to see potential linkages during the open conversations. For example, if a collaborator was talking about role models, I could, immediately, see it was potentially linked to aspects of identity, which in turn could link to constraining ideas or workplace compromises. Similarly, if a collaborator discussed workplace experiences, I could link this to workplace policies, which, in turn, potentially links to their personal responses as a teacher. Such 'journeys' did not require visiting every station on a line. The utility of conceptual topology was to allow me to be responsive to each collaborator, aware of potential linkages to subjects yet undiscussed, and to ensure a continuity in the flow within each engagement. Such conceptual topologies may have value to any qualitative research project using open conversations to engage with participants.

Transformative potential

When I conceived the idea of this project, I did not give much thought to an academically defensible methodology. I knew from the start that the project itself would emerge from the engagements with the collaborators – and I refused specific research questions or objectives.

The project aimed at creating a space and opportunities to engage compassionately with LGBTQ+ higher education teachers in STEM disciplines about their teaching identities. Recognising the personal nature that these conversations were likely to have, the ethics of engagement and the commitment to the collaborators determined the project's structure. It was unthinkable to me that I would talk to people only once – it seemed disrespectful to ask people to talk about personal and emotive subjects and then to abandon them. It also seemed essential that I talk to them about what other collaborators had said – but without compromising anonymity or the integrity

of the project. I pictured myself as a go-between between strangers with a common purpose in the planned second engagements.

I also recognised that, even as I was developing the project, I was changing. I had anticipated this, but it was happening in a more profound way than expected. And while the initial eureka moment that produced a project based on praxis was exactly that – a moment, the subsequent time I spent on the project was like a slow progressive epiphany. This transformative potential of the project at a personal level had to be responded to, as did the personal responsibility I had as the instigating and reporting collaborator to the other collaborators.

The third and final engagements were included to close the circle of collaboration, to allow collaborators to think about what being part of this endeavour had been like, and for me to find out if I had managed to achieve the ambitions of the project and remained true to the ethos that I had envisaged at the outset. I remember a period as I was starting to write, and diving into the transcripts, that I was convinced that, just as I had no research questions, I had no methodology. I now know that I have a clear methodological process that I can attach traditional academic descriptors to, but it too has been an emergent element of the project, coming from the nature of and ambitions for the engagements, and very strongly influenced by my commitment that this endeavour had to be valuable and useful – respectful of the time that all of ushave spent on it. The community that has contributed to this is most obviously the seven collaborators, but it extends beyond that, I know discussions have extended beyond the scheduled meetings to partners and colleagues, and through the later meetings, those unknown people have contributed too. I would include my supervisory team, trusted colleagues, supportive peers at conferences, the critical friends who have had to listen to my ramblings, the proofreaders and guinea pigs on whom I tested my writing, and for me, it includes my partner who supported me as I dealt with the emotional labour of a project like this.

Autoethnography

I am slightly uncomfortable with the word autoethnography. There is no doubt though, that this artefact, this document, is an autoethnography. Exactly what this term means is contested. It is predicated on the idea of ethnography – which means writing about people (Madden, 2022). It is traditionally associated with fieldwork – observations reduced to fieldnotes which become rich, detailed, non-fiction descriptions of the observed people (Shelton, 2021).

The prefix 'auto' refers to the writer – in the same way as it does in autobiography (Grant, 2023; Cooper and Lilyea, 2022; Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnography is described by Ellis (2004) as a research practice that connects ethnography and autobiography. In its simplest conceptualisation autoethnography is the reflexive practice of ethnography, requiring acknowledgement of the intersubjective engagement of the researcher with their project and its participants. It is widely acknowledged that there are various levels of emphasis that can be placed between the 'auto', 'ethno' and 'graphy'. I think this is the source of my disquiet with the term, it seems that in many forms the 'auto' seems to supersede the 'ethno' – with an implicit privileging of the researcher / writer of the study. Forms such as narrative ethnographies, confessional tales, ethnographic memoirs, and personal narratives exemplify such privileging.

Some scholars, including those that align themselves with queer approaches to knowledge, have focussed on the social, experiential aspect – the 'ethno'. It has variously been described as looking to extract meaning from experience (Bochner, 2000), as engaging in dialogue with others to help us understand broader social phenomena (Anderson, 2006), and as locating the experiences of individuals in tension with expressions of discursive power (Neumann, 1996). All these ideas resonate with the vision of this project.

Jackson (1989) used the phrase 'radical empiricism' to describe qualitative research where the researcher's experiences and interactions with other participants are essential elements of the research process. Tedlock (1991) used the terms

'ethnographic narratives' or 'observations of participation' to describe research emphasising ethnographic dialogues between the narrators and members of the groups being studied. These formulations seem closer to the ethos of what this project is striving to achieve. In an article focussed on racism Deleon (2010) integrates elements of anarchic theory with autoethnography to create a process which includes narrative inquiry into a researcher's own communities, and praxis through the exploration of self. He recognises the emotional labour that such an approach entails, describing it as the "difficult process of theorising from our own locations that includes moments of intense pain, shame, and triumph that life sometimes brings us" (Deleon, 2010, p.401). These formulations seem closer to the ethos of what this project was striving to achieve. Additionally, though, the anti-hierarchical and compassionate (anarchic) potential within the project was pursued through a commitment to openness, vigilance, and the continuous, conscious effort to redress the implicit power hierarchies in research relationships. I believe the strongest reflection of this commitment is in permitting both the thematic foci and the methodological approaches to emerge from the engagements themselves.

I acknowledge that my role, as the instigating and reporting collaborator, is different from that of the other collaborators. I am responsible for realising the value and utility of the research process and outputs, as I am responsible for conforming to the requirements of academic discourse and its associated expectations, for fostering credibility, for presenting the collaborators as honestly as possible, and for enabling utility to emerge from the project. This disquieting reality is acknowledged as the crises of legitimation, representation and praxis by Holman Jones and Adams (2012).

These concerns may seem misplaced in a project purporting to have anarchic foundations. However, in the context of praxis – that moment of moving from the world of theory to the world of flesh and blood, of grief and joy, and of politics and power – conformity to expected norms may smooth the engagement of others and the acceptance of research findings beyond sympathetic allies. Realising value from the collaborators' commitment and contributions is a foundational ethical principle of

educational research (British Educational Research Association, 2018), and, I believe, integral to compassionate engagement.

Autoethnography is recognised by Holman Jones and Adams (2012, p.197) as a queer method, sharing the refusal of orthodoxies in favour of "fluidity, intersubjectivity and responsiveness". They list the (many) critiques that queer autoethnographic research has faced: it is

> "too much and too little – too much personal mess, too much theoretical jargon, too elitist, too sentimental, too removed, too difficult, too easy, too white, too western, too colonialist, too indigenous. Yet at the same time, too little artistry, too little theorizing, too little connection between the personal and political, too impractical, too little fieldwork, too few real-world applications." (p. 197)

These critiques foreground the subjective valuation of such research, and indeed the feelings of self-doubt that researchers themselves may experience.

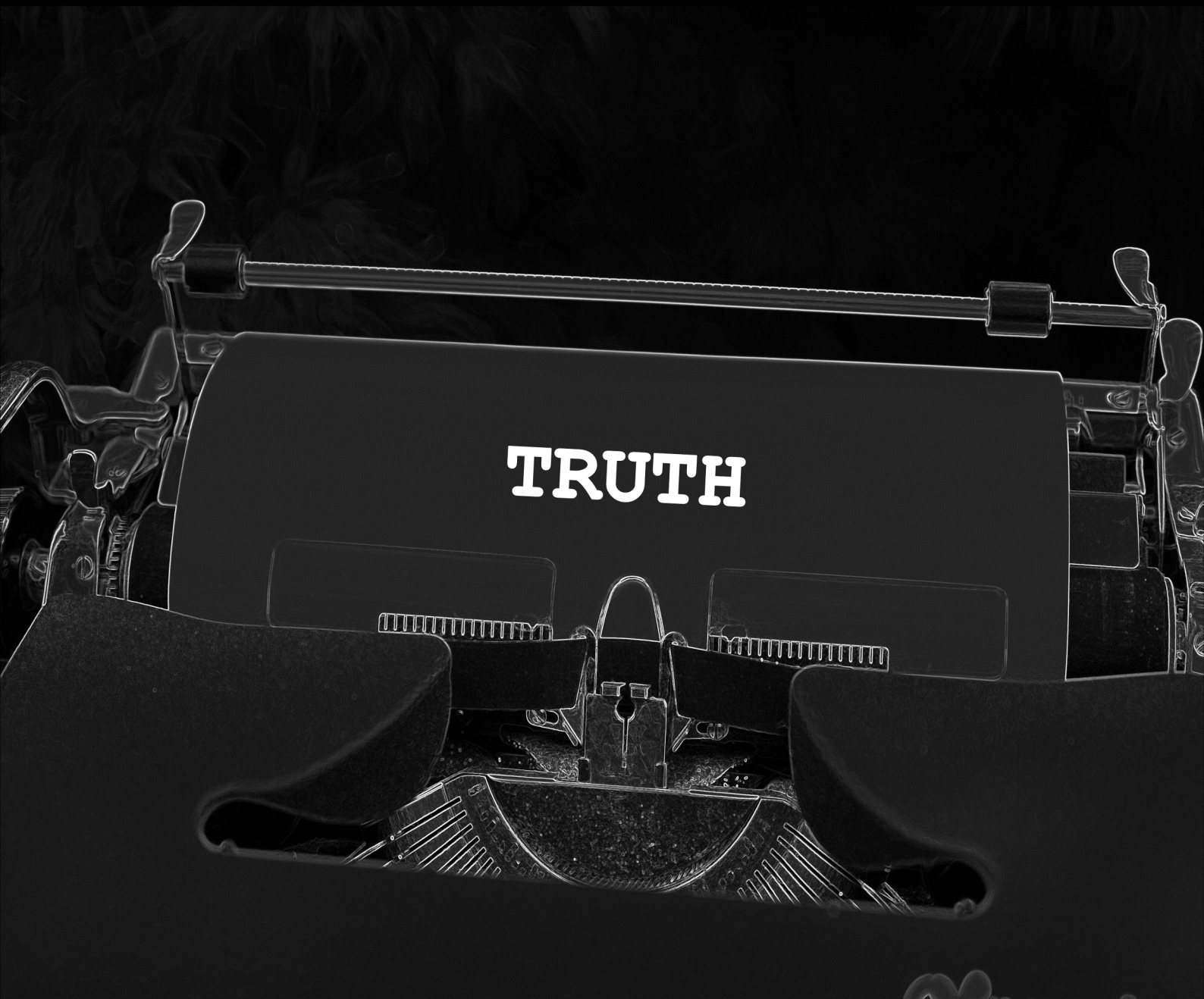
To attempt a synthesis of the preceding discussion, towards a description of an implemented methodology that aligns with the ethical, political, and theoretical foundations of the project is simultaneously desirable and dangerously contestable – yet also essential. This is what I offer, anarcho-queer-autoethnography. Autoethnography enabled the reflexive, politicised, social, intersubjective engagement. Anarcho- offered openness, resistance to hierarchies, and compassion as an ethos for engagement, and an openness to serendipity. Queer provides the specific realm of enquiry as well as suggesting a framework for intellectual interrogation and political challenge. These three elements coalesce synergistically in a unity that is aligned with and responsive to both the theoretical foundations of this project, and its methodological approach to the production of knowledge.

This chapter has presented my reasoning and formulation of how this project fits within traditional academic methodological constructs, and my sometimes-reluctant concretisation of ideas. Reluctant not only because the concretisations are contestable, but also because the impetus of the work itself is to resist such specific closures. The many evocations of autoethnographic research, to which I have just added, may, according to Denzin (2006) be as different as apples and oranges.

Accommodation is achieved by acknowledging the differences and claiming our version of autoethnography as *our own*.

The analytical implementation of this approach required different practical emphases at different phases of the project. I will present the way in which I approached the presentation and interpretation of each set of engagements when I discuss them.

Spilling the T…



According to Davis's (2021) dictionary of LGBT+ language and phrases, *The Queens' English*, the phrase "spilling the T" means to deliver news or gossip. Other sources suggest that T refers specifically to truth [24] – an inevitably contestable idea.

In this chapter, I present and respond to the series of engagements that make up this endeavour.

I have no professional experience in qualitative research. I felt intimidated by the prospect of meeting new people and trying to establish sufficient rapport with them to enable the type of intersubjective encounter to happen that I hoped would characterise the time I spent with my collaborators. The process of finding collaborators has already been described, but I would like to recap the pattern of engagements that took place with each collaborator and explain how global (and personal events) forced a change in how the project unfolded.

I met with each collaborator four times in all. The first time was to chat to the people who had responded to the invitation emails about the project and how I envisaged it unfolding (including the time and commitment that was likely). After this initial (non-data) meeting, and on reading the detailed participant information sheet, they decided whether they wanted to collaborate. They were sent informed consent forms to complete, which were collected at the main engagements.

I will present my reflections within and between the engagements as they happened. There are periodic asides from my research journal, presented in separate textboxes, linked to the material to which they relate.

[24] The online Urban Dictionary notes that one of earliest literary mentions of such usage comes from transgender drag queen Lady Chablis in Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil by John Berendt (1994), "The fact that I'm a beautiful woman is clear . . . but the fact that I have a penis, well, that's my T, that's my Truth."

The planned pattern of engagements that followed was:

- Main engagement (anticipated to be about 90 minutes [25])
- Second engagement (after all main engagements were done to talk about what was emerging from the project, and anticipated to be about 45 minutes long)
- Final engagement – after the second engagements were done to reflect on what participation in the project had meant to each collaborator, expected to take about 30 minutes.

I was committed to physical, in-person meetings for this project. The first few engagements were profound. I was surprised by the rapid rapport that developed in these engagements, and the willingness of my collaborators to talk about personal and sometimes difficult moments with an honesty and openness that, even thinking about it now, makes me feel very emotional.

Then the Covid-pandemic struck. As a close family member was particularly vulnerable, I immediately moved all my teaching online, and went into self-imposed lockdown a few weeks before national lockdowns were declared in the United Kingdom. Over the next few weeks, I became extremely despondent about the viability of continuing with the project, convinced that using technology would create an inhibiting intermediary in the engagements.

I had to suspend my studies [26] when a close member of my family died of Covid, and my partner and I had to deal with being executors of their estate. The project stalled. With no end in sight to the lockdowns I felt there was no way the project – so dependent on personal intersubjective encounters – could continue.

By the time teaching resumed, a range of new technologies had proved to be viable alternative ways of meeting. Although I had used these in my lockdown teaching, I

[25] The engagements often ran beyond the anticipated length, as collaborators were happy to let the conversations run their course.

[26] Other suspensions would follow as I tried to deal with the protracted and ongoing illness of my father.

still had concerns that using them would compromise the ethos of the project. At this point only three engagements had been completed, and they had consistently left me profoundly moved – grateful, humbled, and surprised.

I reached a point where I felt that I either had to give up my doctoral ambitions – at least as far as this project was concerned – or compromise on the use of technology. I discussed the issue with my supervisory team and agreed that it was worth persisting and trying an online engagement, despite my reservations about it compromising the ethos which I considered vital to the project.

I was surprised by the invisibility of the mediating technology during the trial (and later) engagements. With hindsight, this should not have surprised me as such technology was rapidly normalised during the pandemic and lockdowns. It may even be that being in a safe personal space (home or sometimes office), promoted a sense of security when compared with an unfamiliar and impersonal physical meeting space. As the rest of project unfurled, once lockdowns had ended, giving collaborators a choice of in-person or online engagements facilitated completing the full series of engagements, and was more responsive to the personal

Humbled by trust

My first engagement is over. I was very nervous, and I think it probably showed. I found it challenging to keep the project themes and their interrelations in my head, while listening to James, and thinking about how what he was saying opens, or suggests, the next point of discussion… I think at times the links were quite tenuous and it was probably a bit more directed than I anticipated. Perhaps my expectation for collaborators to 'lead' the engagements was unrealistic – or at least the level of it. Then again, it may be a result of my own misinterpretation of what 'lead' might mean in the context of this research.

The engagement completely exceeded my expectations, and I feel very deeply affected by the exchange – there was no traumatic or strongly emotive in the content. I am overwhelmed by the honesty and trust and depth of thought that someone I don't know was willing to share. I feel acutely aware of my responsibility to my collaborators. My subjective response is so different to what I was expecting, more intense. Although I should not be surprised, as the project was conceived on the premise of compassionate, interpersonal exchanges. What does this signal about the project? What does it mean for the interplay of my traditional academic mindset and role, and what I am trying to cultivate and enable through this project?

I feel humbled.

circumstances of collaborators – ironically enhancing the ethos of the project rather than compromising it as I had feared.

Personal conversations about work are informed by many things – not just what happens at work. The specifics of role, seniority, discipline, as well as personal attitudes and life experience can all play a role in shaping the conversation that takes place. For this reason, I would like, at this point, to introduce you to the collaborators in this project. They are presented using pseudonyms, and a generalised professional description to reduce the possibility of deductive disclosure, whilst providing some insight into their professional contexts. Resolving deductive disclosure issues is complex (Kaiser, 2012). It requires compliance with the ethical commitments to protect respondent confidentiality, alongside the requirement to share their stories with a larger audience and presenting useful results worthy of publication in scholarly journals (Weiss, 1995).

McMullin (2023) recognises transcription as epistemological and ethical considerations in qualitative research. I have kept the transcriptions as complete as possible, incorporating meaningful repetition, and using punctuation to suggest the dynamics of the discussion. This approach is aligned with (Bucholtz, 2000) denaturalised transcription approach. However, there were also instances where a full verbatim approach was not applied if it made the meaning clearer. I have, as far as possible tried to preserve the character of the collaborators in the transcripts as part of the ethical commitment to integrous representation. I have redacted elements to preserve the anonymity of collaborators or associated people – usually discipline or location specific information. Where the redactions are driven by more specific concerns, I have explained them in a footnote. Occasionally, I have inserted basic phrases to support the understanding of the extract – these are presented in square brackets.

Dramatis Personae (in order of appearance):

- Michael, a senior lecturer, and the instigating and reporting collaborator
- James, a lecturer in a studio-based teaching discipline
- Peter, a senior lecturer in a technology-focussed field
- Carl, a student-facing research/laboratory technician
- Max, a senior lecturer in a medically aligned discipline
- Sarah, a senior lecture in an environmental discipline
- Cathy, a researcher with increasing teaching responsibilities

The main series of engagements

The methodological approach to these, indeed all, engagements was an emergent component of the project. While the broad methodological approach was defined, an agnostic view of interpreting and presenting the conversations formed part of the open research commitment. In the discussion of each set of engagements, I will start by presenting the details of the analytical approach.

Main Engagements: Method – Analytic autoethnography

The analytical approach to this series of engagements is aligned with Anderson's (2006) analytic autoethnography. The characteristics of this approach are:

1. Complete member researcher (CMR)

   This requires that the researcher be a complete member of the social world under study. This role is described by Merton (1988) as the ultimate participant in dual participant-observer role. In the context of this research I am an opportunistic CMR (Adler and Adler, 1987) – as I share sexual minority membership with my collaborators, as well as the specific disciplinary and employment contexts upon which the research focusses.
2. Analytic reflexivity

   This is described as the researcher's awareness of their connection to the research situation and its effects upon it (Davies, 1999). It focusses on the reciprocity between me as instigator and the other collaborators. Atkinson,

Coffey and Delamont (1999) describe this as researchers forming part of the research's representational processes and part of the story being told. Researchers are (re)formed through this engagement.

3. Narrative visibility of the researcher

   This requires the visibility of the researcher as an actor in the text – with their feelings and experiences being incorporated as data about the world being observed. I have attempted to realise this in two ways, one is through the presented narrative of the engagements, and the other is through the specifically personal reflections from my research journal.

4. Dialogue with informants beyond the self

   A flaw in reflexive ethnography has been described as a "tendency for the self-absorbed Self to lose sight of the culturally different Other" (Rosaldo, 1993, p.7). This is something I was very aware of, and I have tried to present the dialogic character of the engagement, whilst deliberately privileging my collaborators over me.

5. Commitment to an analytical agenda

   Anderson (2006, p.388) describes this as 'the value-added quality of not only truthfully rendering the social world under investigation but also transcending that world through broader generalisation". I would be reluctant to describe my sensemaking as generalisation, as the experiences and narratives of my collaborators are idiosyncratic. However, there are resonances, echoes and harmonies that can be highlighted to suggest commonalities of experiences, or indeed, related oppositions. My commitment to finding utility from the engagements is incontrovertible, and forms part of the ethical commitments of the research.

The methodological approach of analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006) is complimented by the adoption of Carter's (2014) defence of treating autoethnographic data in a similar way to a literary text. Her suggestion that exegesis and hermeneutics parallel critical theoretical approaches in their engagement with broader societal contexts, is usefully extended by the inclusion of eisegesis – which

recognises the participation of the researcher in the derivation of meaning from a text. The culmination of this eclectic approach is, to use Carter's (2014 p. 132) words, "a sophisticated deep-level probing enabled in part by pillaged bits of theory and methodology, in part by the poetic and the ironic potential of language".

A schematic representation of the analytical intersubjectivities is presented in Figure 8. The individual collaborators are represented by different coloured circles. I am represented by the series of circles labelled 'Instigating Collaborator', smaller than those of the collaborators to reflect my attempts to avoid privileging my position in the research. The intersubjectivity of the engagements is represented by the glow that links me to the collaborators. The engagements proceeded in a chronological sequence with each influencing the next engagement (represented by the linking dotted line) as I was not unaffected by the engagements as they progressed. The changing colour of the circles representing the instigating collaborator reflects the continuity and transformative processes prompted by the engagements. The emergent analytical approach is represented by the horizontal line signifying time. The grey words that form the background reflect the ethos of the process.

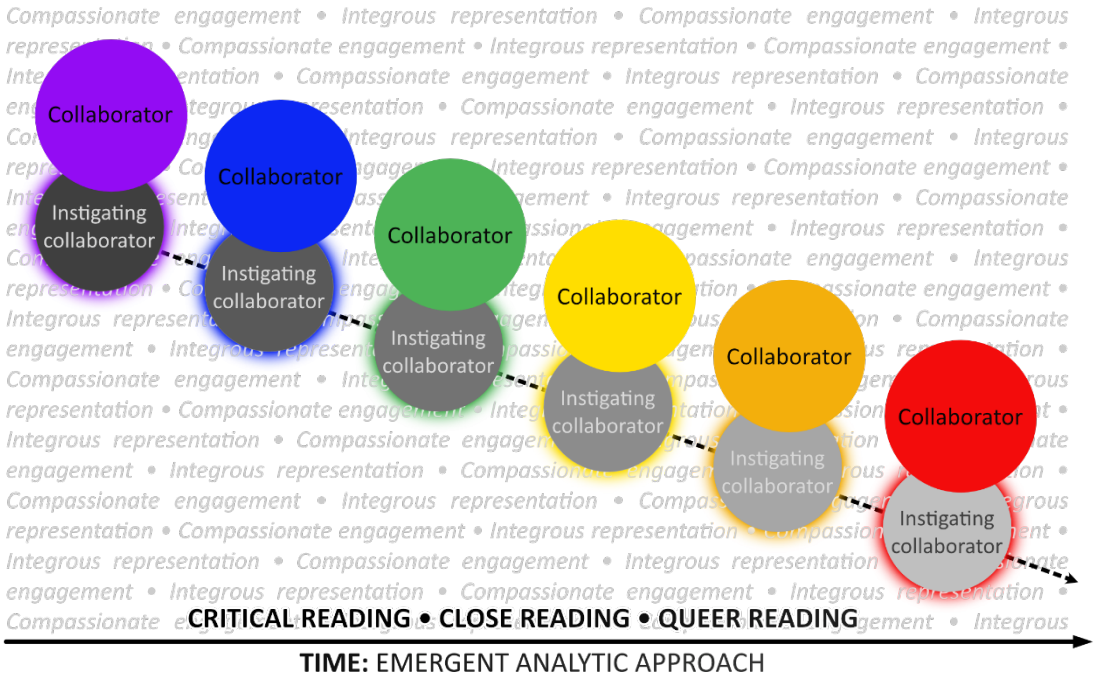


Figure 8: Schematic of the analytic intersubjectivities of the main engagements.

I am going to present the engagements in chronological order – because my thinking, understanding, and relating during the engagements evolved as they took place. I am presenting them individually rather than attempting to integrate them to honour the person-focussed ethos of research. For the same reason, I will present enough of the conversations to reveal something of the character of my collaborators, attempting to present them as people, not contextless quote-generators.

I cannot treat each engagement as an entirely isolated event – the discussion in preceding engagements influenced what happened in later ones – but I did hold true to the approach of trying to make each engagement responsive to, and shaped by, the elements that were raised by each collaborator. But failing to note that they do not stand completely independent of each other would be disingenuous. I will map my broad interpretation of each engagement on to the conceptual topology that was presented in Figure 4.

James (in person)

I was extremely nervous about this very first meeting of the whole endeavour. My vision for how these sessions should be was quite clear in my mind but I had no idea how to realise it. My personal insecurities intensified the discomfort I was feeling as most collaborators (including James) already have doctorates. I was afraid they would see through me…

At the start of the engagement, I asked James why he had chosen to collaborate. He replied that he had seen LGBTQ+ in the subject header,

"I met the criteria. I try to be helpful, and thought OK, I can fit that".

I asked him if there was a particular letter in the abbreviation that he identified with [27]. James said that he would probably say he was gay.

This first engagement with James was markedly different from the engagements with other collaborators in that it focussed strongly on his teaching practice – which is the direction he steered things in from the very early openings. It is noteworthy,

[27] This may seem counter to the queer principles of the project, but I think it is useful as a way of thinking about the intersectional experience of both oppression and privilege that are associated with normative sexual minority identities.

because of the queer pedagogy of his teaching as well as his struggles reconciling traditional teaching with his internalised views of what higher education should be. He also contrasts his own practice with what he suspects is the norm in STEM education. The discussion was wide ranging and includes general normative pressures on gay people, as well as on academics. Emotionally, James spoke of vulnerability, precariousness, tenderness, and desire – revealing the student-focussed and transformative nature of his pedagogic approach. As a researcher, he alluded to the utility of coded self-revelation, letting those in-the-know know, whilst maintaining a position of safety in relation to potentially hostile contexts.

James had been working in higher education since completing his [28] PhD and had eight years of teaching experience, which started during his PhD. He had not anticipated being an academic with significant teaching responsibility and thought his career path would be that of a researcher. He was teaching large classes of over 100 students as well as small groups of two to eight students, and individual one-to-one meetings. He described his role as 100% teaching (at the time of the 1st engagement), so I started our discussion by focussing on that. I asked him to describe his identity as a teacher:

> "I suppose it would be a humanities-based approach where I'm encouraging critical thinking and a student-based approach to learning [...] By necessity of the profession you need to ask the students what kind of [practitioner] they want to become. It's almost a starting point of the education process. That's my understanding of it. And then... the students lead. The students tell you what they should be doing."

It is interesting that James responded by thinking of the learning he is trying to facilitate as a process rather than describing a personal identity or series of personal attributes. He described his role as

> "only assess[ing] the quality of...are they meeting the standard which they should be?".

I was struck by how the way he described his teaching praxis chimed with many of the elements of critical, and queer pedagogy. His elaboration on this process reinforces this perception:

[28] I asked each collaborator about their pronoun preferences and the analysis and discussion of the series of engagement is presented based on their choices.

> "It's a very difficult situation where you almost have to relinquish your own preconceptions about [the discipline] in order to facilitate teaching it. But students need to relinquish their own as well, to a certain extent, to challenge themselves and be in that uncomfortable position of kind of becoming something that they don't know what they should become yet, but it's directed by them. So, it's a very complicated process. In a way, it's a kind of... a becoming of this weird amalgamation of the student's position within the cohort, the tutor, the tutor's position within the cohort, and the student's past experience."

There is a distinctly queer view of his professional teaching identity although it is not expressed as such. His idea of identity as an emergent process that is contextual and responsive aligns well with Butler's (1999) recognition of identity as performative. I also think that the passion with which James spoke of this process (which is not reflected in the extracts) further reinforces this observation – he is, through his performance and investment in its character, embodying an ideal for teaching in his field. He recognises stakeholders external to the actual pedagogic relationship,

> "and the university's directives, as well as the [professional accrediting body's] requirements".

Interestingly, James did not feel that his sexuality played 'much of a role' in his teaching. However, he did describe his research situation as different:

> "[In] my research interests [29], you know, you might find...relationships between my sexuality and...the reaction that I had in my response to the letters [LGBTQ]. I think it kind of informed my approach to research, my interest in research, which, if you read [my] book, you'll find a direct expression of that."

He went on to elaborate:

> "I self-define as a researcher as well. That has an impact on what I tell the students and how I interact with them. So, it does have an impact, but it's quite implicit. It's not a kind of...explicit, here I am. Hi, my name is XYZ. I am LGBTQ+, whatever. I'd rather introduce myself and say, hello, I'm a Doctor [in the discipline you are studying]. This is what I do research-wise. Do you agree? Do you not agree? And have a more...academic discussion about these things, about the expression of my sexuality in my research. I suppose it's very much entwined with all those kinds of Deleuzian and Foucauldian and Wittgensteinian kind of nice academic languages, which are lovely words that have too many syllables and... these things are too difficult to understand. So, yeah, I'd say it's through my research that that happens."

I thought this exchange was particularly illuminating, and it echoes one of the common methods of impression management that characterise the professional behaviour of LGBTQ+ people in the workplace. The revelation of the theoretical

[29] James has published research with a queer focus.

framework of his research can be seen as a proxy revelation of membership of a sexual minority community. There is a coded revelation that is understandable to those in the know, but adequately obscure to not force a coming out as an LGBTQ+ researcher. His identity as a researcher and his specific research interests would reappear during the engagement, but in a more negative way.

One of the common prejudices experienced by LGBTQ+ people in the workplace focusses on the assumption that there is a greater measure of promiscuity associated with minority sexual identities than with heterosexual identities (Ozturk and Rumens, 2014). In a part of the engagement about awkward moments linked to sexuality in his professional context, James made the following observation about finding out that colleagues or students are LGBTQ+:

> "When I find out that other students or other staff members are gay... So, it depends on how you define the letters in the LGBTQ...whether it is something that determines how you engage in relationships with people, or how you engage in romantic relationships, or how you engage in sexual relationships. It does have a... different flavour. So normally it's associated for some reason, or maybe it's just in my head, it's associated with this very corporeal, sexual, bodily kind of affect- which is very bizarre, 'cos we don't tend to think about that... or I don't tend to think about...I don't think about heterosexual relationships in the same way. So, marriage, for example, would be kind of...an institution rather than a determination of, this man has sex with this woman. So, I tend to associate it [LGBTQ+] with that bodily thing, so it's, to me, still a bit odd to find it at a university where the curation of the university environment is anything but bodily. Maybe I shouldn't say odd, I should say unusual".

Quite often the characterisation of LGBTQ+ people is linked to preconceptions and stereotypes of promiscuity. This was an element of profound negative experiences for Max, another collaborator, which I will discuss when I explore his first engagement.

If we take a deconstructive view of the binary pair physical / cerebral, there is a history of privileging the cerebral over the physical, which has also transmuted into a gendered privileging of male (rational) over female (emotional). The writings of Immanuel Kant have been identified as an exemplar of such thinking (Hay, 2013).

The conversation moved from the discussion of the physicality which James associated with LGBTQ+ identities to an extended focus that included

"tenderness and the more emotional side of people's lives".

I asked him if he thought expressions of tenderness had a role in the classroom? If one considers the element of queer pedagogy linked with the pedagogy of desire – essentially a non-instrumentalist view of education (Letts and Fifield, 2017), and a recognition of the roll of affect (emotion) and in particular a relationship of 'desire' between teachers and students (Jannat, 2021), this question potentially reveals elements of interest in James's view of education. His reply was illuminating.

> "Oh, very much so. That's something that I'm kind of struggling with myself. The...the kind of anticipation that, you know, I'm not dealing with a robot, I'm dealing with a human being that has emotions, who will respond to what I'm saying about their design or their work or their presence in a cohort in a...in a human way. Mm-hm. And, you know, for the last eight years, I've been subject to, you know, students being very friendly to me and....and starting to be extremely friendly to me. I hope, I try to respond with similar tenderness, but there is still that part of me that kind of sees it as...not part of the academic life. It's almost as though...mmm...maybe this is something that describes my approach to... it's almost as though I'm being taken from the space of the classroom, from the space of the university, to almost teleport from here instantly into this weird place where it's OK to be like that. It's OK to be friendly, to be tender, to be... you know, it's OK to be gay, it's OK to have a sexuality at all, it's OK to...you know...to, quote, 'eat, breathe, shit and fuck'. And... and have that in multiple relationships, you know. Who hasn't had situations where you told a student that they will fail, and they started crying and you needed to comfort them? So that would be an expression of that. To comfort someone is to engage with them emotionally. And I suppose that teaching requires quite a lot of that. I suppose that's a struggle for me."

He went on to describe traditional teaching contexts as dry and suggested that it was the studio-based nature of his discipline that probably made the type of teaching practice he was describing possible.

The discussion moved on to his research activities, and he told a story about implicit coming out and the vulnerability it evoked even within the controlled environment of an academic conference...

> "I started off with a conference where I was talking about the elevations of gay clubs in [the city I live in] and...how the space inside would be...a space that is for the other, and how that space for the other is expressed in different ways. And again, I was kind of shielding myself with this kind of, let's talk about Foucault, let's talk about... You know, I talked about Manet's painting... Then I kind of detoured into talking about this...this space for...for sexuality to unveil and how it happens. And then it...kind of... it was accepted well. People asked questions, so that was... You know, I took it as people being interested...But I took it as, it's fine to talk about these things, at least on that level of Foucault, Manet, etc. So that was a kind of explicit way of me...expressing that and becoming a little bit vulnerable and...kind of sharing that generosity of information about me and sharing the...sensitivity of that emotional relationship between myself and what I think

> other people see as LGBTQ+. And being in that kind of precarious state of, oh, how will they take it?"

Vulnerability and precariousness would reoccur in James's discussion of reciprocity in relationships with students (and colleagues) – did a personal disclosure from a student require an equivalent disclosure from him, and would it be linked to his own sexuality? I asked if that would be risky in a work context, without a moment's hesitation, he said, "Obviously it would".

Whilst acknowledging that it is possible to still meet with blatant disapproval, he was more concerned that declaring that one thing, his sexuality, about himself, would come to dominate others' perception of him in totality – and that this might be intensified through his research and philosophical positioning as an academic.
Later in the engagement he related a discussion he had with a research leader in his department who said,

> "you shouldn't be sitting in your dark office, writing about something only you are interested in but should find a field of research that would attract funding…"

This did trigger what James described as "paranoia" – about his research, its legitimacy, its relationship with his sexuality. On reflection, he decided it was maybe just an uninformed statement… I have had similar experiences, and it still nags at me, although whenever I have presented elements of this research at conferences, it has been an affirming experience.

Valuing Queer Research

I was discussing my project, and the potential journals that may be suitable outlets, with a close colleague who identifies as gay. I mentioned the Journal of Queer Studies. "What's the impact factor of that?" he sneered scornfully, reflecting an instinctive devaluation of queer research.

I was taken aback, and it brought home to me how negative views of queer research, are so entrenched that the spontaneous reaction of a gay academic is antagonistic and derisive.

It also illustrates the pervasiveness of the metrification of research value within academia, and the implicit hierarchy of knowledges within systems such as the Research Excellence Framework.

The topic shifted to the role of subversion in academic contexts, I think because there is a suggestion that his research appeared to be subversive in the context of

institutional research priorities (such as attracting funding). Inevitably we also talked about being subversive in pedagogic relationships.

> "You have to be a little bit subversive and a little bit outside of the norm, I think. That's my approach of how I do things. Obviously, that needs to be a knowing subversion… But, at the same time, you almost need to be gutsy and say, no, actually, Professor So-and-so, I disagree. So, …I refuse to become a professor, or a teacher, whose definition is, here's James, he brings money to the department. I'd much rather be someone who explores things that he's interested in and accepts and allows people to dissent in order to inform different ways of thinking."

I asked James whether he thought it was more difficult to be subversive if you are gay, because you first must establish your credibility as an academic? I think his reply was very interesting,

> "There's two ways of looking at it, I suppose. It's either easier because you're gay, and because you're different anyway, or it's [more difficult] because, as we said, you need to defend your credibility, and therefore you need to be a little bit normal."

Thinking about occupying a marginal position as an academic and a teacher as giving licence to be provocative is interesting – and it chimed with my own perspective, my ambitions for how I teach, and the values I want to impart to the people I teach.

Linking teaching with activism, which the discussion moved onto, is very closely aligned with anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002), and other forms of critical pedagogy. James was reluctant to consider himself an activist in the traditional sense of the word. He was happy with being described as a 'didactic activist', which, again, through its affective element links to queer pedagogic approaches. Towards the end of the engagement James observed,

> "I think there is a level of discomfort to all teaching, for me, because…I want the student to become who they want to become… So, I don't want to stamp on their ambitions, but at the same time, I need to tell them that the way you're thinking about that is wrong sometimes… it's very difficult to balance these two… agendas, the students' and mine, as an academic, as a teacher."

We also discussed the value of visibility to students, and signals such as rainbow lanyards. James did not see wearing one as a declaration of one's own sexuality but as a signal of allyship (although he disliked the "corporate" character of the language). He felt that this would be useful to students, but it should not be an expectation for any staff to wear one.

This led to considering institutional culture more broadly, and the way in which well-intentioned institutional policy and directives may not be useful at a personal level – such as EDI training which says not to speculate or assume colleagues' sexuality.

> 'There's a worry that people might not tell me that they think I'm gay, but they might think that. And so that brings in a whole kind of...very dangerous level of invisibility',

This could create a subconscious adjustment of behaviour to conform with the double-bind identity this implies. Reflecting on where his reticence to be/come out stems from, familiarly awkward moments in high school were raised, where seemingly hostile opinions were expressed, and the feelings (difference, isolation, fear) they evoked in a young gay person still trying to form a coherent sense of self. Experiencing negative emotions in response to one's own sexuality would recur with other collaborators. It certainly resounds loudly with my experience as a beleaguered gay adolescent in a single sex boarding school, where there was no possible greater shame or personal flaw than being a faggot.

Neither closeted nor out, James was very aware of the complex system of normative expectations that play out in the context of being gay both as an academic and a teacher, as well as in everyday life. Of all the collaborators he had the most queer view of his role as a teacher – but perceived it more as arising from the expectations of his discipline than from his own sexuality. He used words like 'precarious' and 'vulnerable' quite frequently in descriptions of his professional relationships. While seeing value in being out – he did not feel as Toynton (2016) suggests that this is an obligation for queer educators. When I offered the chance to raise anything we had not discussed, but that he felt was important, right at the end of engagement, he made these observations about the obligations that play out for gay people:

> "There's a lot of problematisation of being gay in any situation. I suppose it's kind of... that it is a thing, you know, that you have an obligation, that you are... that you should be X, Y, Z. Now, gay people are given the privilege of being able to set up formal partnerships. Why don't you? Isn't that your obligation? But then straight people don't have the obligation to get married. I suppose some people say they do. It's an interesting thing to think about that. To say that a woman should get married, that's bad. Of course, it is. Everyone...the more enlightened people would agree. But to say that a gay person should get married, in some ways it's kind of... it does resonate. But at the same time, it's also looking at... It's that fetishization of that kind of family unit as the determinant of ethics. We're

> completely losing track of the morality of other forms of acting, not only sexuality, but thinking about otherness in society. Which we all are, but we don't recognise it."

And finally, I asked him to reflect on his teacher identity, with the question rephrased in the light of the preceding discussion, "Do you think the process of, or the processes of your identity evolving differs in a classroom situation and in a personal context?".

> "They would do, yes. But in a way, it's not confined to the time or space I'm given to talk to students. It's more, I'm going to say that it's related to the mind frame of how I read that relationality. So, if it changes like that, and the student starts talking about their more personal things, I will start engaging in that way too. And in that way, I will stop thinking about that relationship as one between the teacher and the student. I don't think about it that way. And I start thinking about it in terms of, this is another human being that's crying, or telling me they take drugs, or telling me something happened in their past that's really traumatic. So, yeah, I think it's... it would be different. So, they kind of diverge and converge. I think it's associative, maybe it's a kind of hang-up from me defining myself as gay. Maybe there is that boundary, and perhaps if that boundary is kind of... if I one day dilute that boundary altogether, my approach to teaching will be a lot more...a lot more knowing, and a lot more informed, a lot more comfortable for me. I'm not sure."

Reflecting on this engagement, in the context of all the others, it was also the least revelatory of James in any sense other than as a teacher. I do not know whether this can be read as it being the most guarded, or just the most focussed. It is noteworthy though that, unlike James, all other collaborators spontaneously included elements of their personal experience and life stories from outside of their academic context.

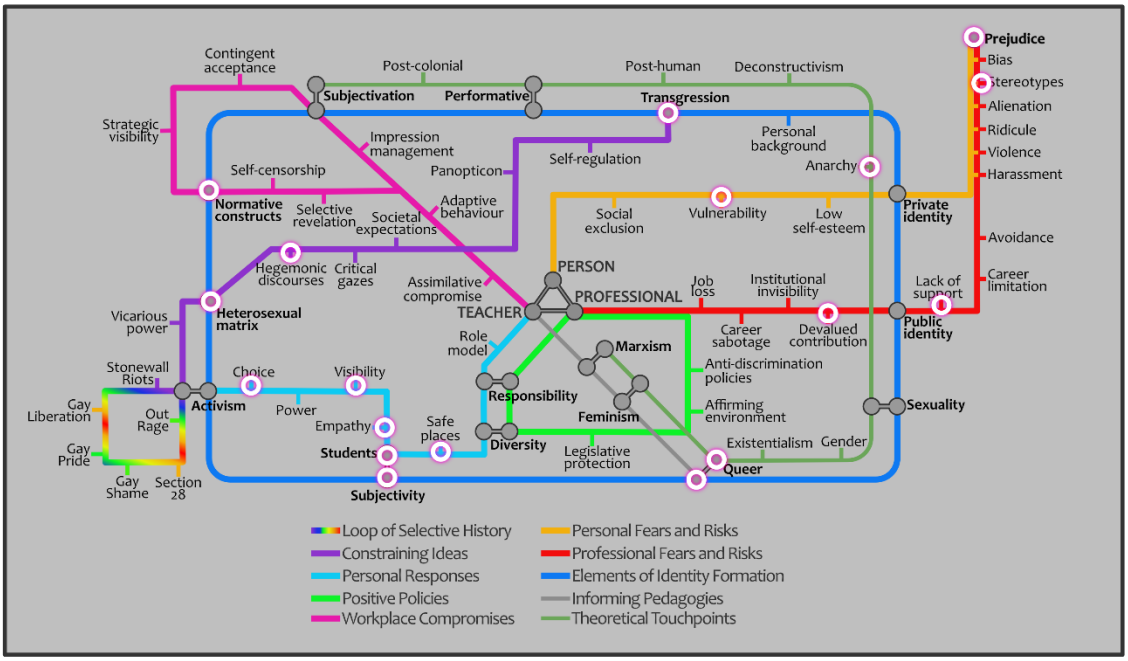


Figure 9: Conceptual touchpoints from James's main engagement.

Peter (in person)

This was my second engagement, and I felt less anxious. Peter had seemed a confident, gregarious person when we met before he agreed to participate. I was surprised by the disheartened and isolated stories he told.

Peter came into higher education from further education. This engagement with Peter stands in stark contrast to that of James. He immediately contextualised his experience as a teacher through a series of profoundly negative, and clearly traumatising, homophobic experiences. He reflected on how that leads to an authority-based dynamic in classroom situations. He reflects on institutional invisibility of LGBTQ+ people as a minority and feeling failed by his institution. Peter emphasised throughout the engagement that the priority should be challenging all discriminatory or hostile behaviour rather than promoting visibility of individuals or specific minority groups, and that this should be an institutional responsibility rather than an individual one.

He also thought there was a disparity in the visibility and strength in institutional response for different designated groups. This seemingly racialised discussion made me feel uncomfortable. There was no racist content, but some of the comparisons

that were made between visibility of institutional activities focussed on racial minorities as opposed to sexual and gender minorities unsettled me. I think this may have to do with my background of growing up in apartheid South Africa, and that I am very cautious about the even the smallest possibility of a comment appearing to be racist. I did not interrupt the flow of the engagement to voice my concern, as I thought it could be revisited in later engagements. As similar observations were made by other collaborators, this apparent disparity became part of the discussions initiated during the second engagements.

I started the engagement by asking how Peter came into his current teaching role:

> "I'll start with where I started teaching about 10 years ago, and I worked in a technical college, which was mostly STEM based and I worked in the electrical and engineering department, which was 1960s in culture, not very accepting of women or gender or sexual orientation and all of that. So, I was quite repressed for a long time there. It was the approach of don't ask, don't tell. Which is the same approach I take here, which is quite interesting. So, if people ask, I won't deny it, but I'm not free to disclose. So a lot of colleagues I've worked with in the past don't know, because like I said, don't ask, don't tell. Because I feel that personal and work life should be separate entities and I like to keep them separate. When people talk about their partners and what they're doing, that's fine, I'm happy to listen, but I won't talk about my [personal] relationships with my colleagues, it's just down to stigma that I've received in the past."

Peter obviously knew that the project was about the teaching identities of LGBTQ+ people in STEM disciplines, but I think it is telling that he chose this story as a point of departure. The language chosen is very revealing, he says he "is not free to disclose", not that he chooses not to disclose. The intensity of these negative experiences results in such extreme self-regulation that it appears, to him, to be externally imposed. If we think back to the workings of Foucault's panopticon, we see the very strong social forces that he feels himself surrounded by, completely curtailing the possibility more open self-expression.

He elaborated on the behaviour of colleagues at the time in other parts of the engagement, such as the permitted resignation of a senior colleague after he had been found to have assaulted a female student. Peter was very clearly disappointed by the response of his previous employer to behaviours he strongly felt were inappropriate and inappropriately dealt with. This disappointment intensified when

he was targeted, with verbal abuse and serious disruptive behaviour by students, for his sexuality.

> "Some of my students found out I was gay and then that became a real problem because they were a Muslim group. And it became a big problem. It wasn't managed well by my manager and in the end, I managed it myself. Which meant refusing to have students in the room. That was how I addressed that, and I got all sorts of issues with that. It all escalated and then I felt it's probably easier not to have that existence at work, so work and personal need to be separate entities. I don't talk about myself. Although people are quite forthcoming, I don't talk about myself or refer to my partner or whatever. And I've been probed a few times and I've gone... well, it doesn't really matter. But it's about feeling safe and comfortable enough, that there's going to be no persecution and there's no stigma attached."

A little later he elaborated on this story, providing more detail. I am going to present it here as it informs much of what Peter said about his current ways of relating to students.

> "...in the past...I've been verbally abused by some of the Muslim students because...they don't accept this into their culture. And it was, 'I want you to shut up, you fag'."

Peter asked the student to leave the room.

> "And then my manager comes down and she asked, why have you excluded this student? I said, well, they made a slurrish comment. I said, I don't want them in my room. Until they've apologised, they can't come in. Then it all got political. I was called to her office and told I couldn't send students out. And I said, well, I'm being profiled and verbally abused. And I was told the student had to come back and that was the end of that. I lost all authority then with that student and their group as a result. That was how it was managed, or not managed... not managed."

Peter's disappointment is clear from the resignation implied by the repetition of "not managed", uttered with decreasing speed and decreasing volume at the time. This extract also provides a clear point of origin for the way in which he spoke about his current teaching relationship style, which he had described earlier in the engagement.

> "So previous experiences impacted my authority. It's something I've lost. So to maintain authority, what I do is I don't talk about it. I feel that if I was to disclose that it's almost like giving the students some ammo and some insight into your personal life. ... When I talk about authority, I'm leading from the front. You know, I put forward a line, and if I give you feedback, or expect you to act or behave in a certain manner, I expect that to happen. I'm not authoritarian but I do expect if I tell you to do something that you think about what I've told you to do and do it. Or at least, you know, ask a question of what I've asked you to do."

The idea of behaviour, what is acceptable and what is not, plays a stronger role in Peter's teaching relationships than any aspect of personal identity – to the point of refusing that it has a place at all.

> "I don't think gender or orientation have a place in academia or the classroom. I think, you know if you're gay, you're gay. I don't think you should be so forward as to push that onto students. I like don't ask, don't tell. And I think we can all support each other in our societies and communities. We've got safe spaces. And I wouldn't tolerate any form of abuse of anything in my sessions. Right. I would challenge [unacceptable] behaviour if I saw it. It's not about orientation, or about gender, or about ethnicity, or about age, because it's about behaviours. I think we should be challenging behaviours rather than talking about disclosure."

At this point I raised the idea of role models, and the potential value that visibility might have for some students. Initially, Peter admitted that he could see value in that but felt it was only useful in a supportive environment, and only

> "if you can remove the stigma [30] that's attached to it".

He said that he didn't think 'role model' was an appropriate term, ending the exchange with "...again, it's about challenging behaviours".

Quite a lot of the discussion was around the invisibility of LGBTQ+ people. This covered quite a few areas, the first was a direct personal experience, whilst others were more focussed on institutional aspects, including the staff network, and information / campaigns around Pride and LGBTQ+ History Month.

When a new vice-chancellor was appointed to focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at his institution, a call for expressions of interest to be one of several Equality Champions for the faculties went out. The champions would collectively form a university taskforce alongside stakeholders from other services within the university. Peter applied, and relates his perceptions of the experience in this extract which also touches on expectations to be out:

> "So I did apply to be the Equality and Diversity Champion for the LGBTQ+ in my faculty. And I was rejected on the grounds that I didn't fulfil their criteria because [the coordinator] didn't know that I was gay. Yeah, she said she was looking for people from a minority group, which is quite interesting- I was discriminated against because I'm not actively flying a flag of celebration, it always seemed to me by her response. So that's the one time I have talked about it with my colleagues. When I was rejected, I went to see her and she said, 'well you're not in a minority group'. I said, 'how did you come to that conclusion?' And she said we're looking for people from certain ethnicities. And I corrected her, and she said, oh well, I can

[30] Peter used the word 'stigma' relating to homosexuality many times during this engagement.

> put you forward for the university-wide thing. I said, well if I can't make it for the faculty, I'm not going to make it for the university. I said, I want to influence my faculty where I work, not the university. And I told her how disappointed I was and left it there. But it was interesting to think that because I'm not flamboyant, I don't jump around and I don't make a lot of noise, I'm overlooked."

I asked if that perceived stereotyping made him uncomfortable:

> "I feel that to be acknowledged as LGBTQ+ you have to come out. And I feel that you couldn't be just an ally of LGBTQ+. I feel that [my institution] needs to go a long way with how gender and sexual orientation...is actually acknowledged and reported in the university. Because as far as HR is concerned, they know. It's all in the university, it's in the interview, it's on my profile and everything. But with my managers and colleagues... it's looking at how that's understood and how and what that looks like."

In the context of elements of this engagement that have already been discussed, this extract shows the tension that exists between visibility and invisibility, feeling safe and protecting oneself from prejudice (Benozzo *et al*., 2015). I think Peter feels this more intensely than other collaborators because of his experiences with his previous employer. He went on to describe how engaging with the staff network had done little to allay his sense of vulnerability.

> "I've been to the LGBTQ+ society. I've been to two events. And although I was welcomed, it's very small. So I think there was only about four or five people in attendance. You think, well, this isn't really working. I mean, it's great because I've met three or four people. But as far as the society goes, I feel that it needs... there's a reason the society is as small as it is. And I think that that's something that needs to be looked at. I think it's about, again, giving the space, about giving an impression, isn't it? I think people don't feel that they can attend these societies for whatever reason. Attending made me feel more vulnerable because I felt when I went, now I'm in a smaller minority than I thought. I know I'm not. I mean, I walk around, and I see people, you know, sort of pick up on things. But when you go to these things, you expect them to be a safe space, you expect them to be, and they're not. And you think, well, that was really quite disappointing. You think, well, this is it. This is the ally. This is my safe space. And it's six people."

The LGBTQ+ staff network came up in most engagements, and rarely with positive regard. The engagement with Carl, who is an active member and office-bearer, presents an alternative view and will be discussed later.

It was clear to me that Peter, while speaking relatively dispassionately, was narrating the development of a range of protective behaviours in response to negative experiences directly linked to be being gay. He had thus far focussed on experiences in a professional context, but he also told me of how some personal relationships also created negative experiences:

> "When my auntie and cousin found out, they became really homophobic- to the point where I don't talk to them. I cut them off altogether. They're on my mum's side, so it's made tension difficult between my mum and I because I don't go to any of the events and that sort of thing with the family because I'm not dealing with them. As far as I'm concerned, they don't exist. But that's families... You think, well, if family won't stand by you... It makes you feel more vulnerable. And as I'm getting older and I'm reaching out further, I think I've become less dependent on family, which is quite sad. I think I'm more dependent on friends for support and comfort than my parents. My dad refers to my partner as my friend. It's about the way they interact with me, the way they interact with my partner and the language they use and responses. It's about comfort, I don't talk about it with them because I know it makes them feel uncomfortable. It's just easier to repress that bit of your life than it is to have to deal with all the backlash and all the conversations and the stigma that's attached to it."

Peter's position of 'Don't ask, don't tell' is one that resonates emotionally with anyone who has experienced rejection or hostility or prejudice. I find it distressing that it also shapes some of his personal relationship as well. The value of such rigid, protective barriers comes at a personal cost in other realms though, and Peter recognises this:

> "But it's quite sad that I'm 30-odd and still seek validation from my peers around my orientation. I think that's really quite sad to think that. I feel like I should tell them, but I don't want to because of the fear of persecution, the fear of abandonment, and them not wanting to associate with me. And it's that sort of fear that keeps you trapped. It's almost closeted really...I think I'd like to be more free in who I am. I'd like people to ask me about how my partner is and how we're doing, what we're doing on the weekend. I'd like to feel normal in that sense, where people actually take an interest in me and my personal life. But at the same time that comes at a cost..."

I wanted to move the discussion on to a more affirming tone, as I was increasingly aware that despite the dispassionate presentation, the engagement was coalescing around an apparent personal detachment arising from negative experiences and the expectation that they might happen again. At the end of the engagement Peter summed up his current professional identity as follows:

> "I think a lot of the focus for me, a lot of where my repression comes from is institutional behaviours more so than... and personal experience. I think it's personal experience and institutional behaviours, and I think I haven't seen sufficient change in institutional behaviours to support me from my experiences. I think that's where I'm caught, because I've got these experiences and I don't see enough change, institutional change, that I [can] feel comfortable that those issues that I have had have been resolved or are in a process where I can feel empowered to deal with it."

Throughout the conversation, Peter had a view of mediating personal emotions around his sexuality through expressions of authority, which defined relationships or expectations with both students and colleagues. It is not surprising that in this regard,

when asked what might alleviate feelings of personal vulnerability, he appealed to institutional policy (and a pervasive awareness of it):

> "I think an awareness of policies, procedures, contracts... and knowing the processes, this is the process, this is how the process is initiated, these are the steps of the process, this is the evidence you need to collect. You know, if a student was to verbally abuse me, I wouldn't know what evidence to collect or how I'm supposed to document it or what the process is. In my institution I've seen the management rush to hush things down. When things get a bit hairy, they sort of try and play it down. I don't know how safe I feel... to me there's not a process so I can go, no, no, I want to go through this process. If there was a process, a flow chart that says, right, if this incident happens, let's say you report the incident and this is what the next steps are, it's more empowering than to challenge [the behaviour yourself]. You can go, right, I'm going to report that, this is the channel to do it, and this is how I do it, and I think that's the first step in making a safe place, having these clear processes. I'm really process driven because I think process protects everyone...and that would give confidence to people like me to look up and go, actually, you know...we can celebrate, and we can become role models because there would be that safe space and you could do that."

Visibility of LGBTQ+ issues was mentioned as a way of creating awareness and through that starting a dialogue towards, for want of a better word, 'normalisation' of LGBTQ+ identities within his institution. He did not feel that LGBTQ+ issues got the same attention as race did. The strength of his feeling is clear in this extract.

> "... you know, we have Black History Month. We're about to go into Pride Month, but we're not going to have LGBTQ+ posters up everywhere with gay people in positions and all that. It would be interesting to see if they do, and I think that comes down to perception. I mean, if I walk down the corridor now, you've got all the black histories, you've got all the black astronauts, the black rugby players... And you've got all the famous black people all the way through the institution, from [my building to the far side of campus]. And next week's Pride Month, it would be interesting to see if they do the same thing for all the LGBTQ+ men and women. And what events do we have for Gay History Month? Where are they advertised? How are they advertised? I think what we do is we have all these history months, and it's great because it gets people talking about it. But there's no talks I know of that are happening about LGBTQ+ or trans or about any of the LGBTQ+ minority groups. Alan Turing, he's on the wall for a different reason, not on the wall as an LGBTQ+ contributor to society and community. [It should be the] same as they've done for Black History Month. And I think that tells you the tone of [where I work]. The tone of my institution is we're going to celebrate black people, we're going to put pictures up. We're going to celebrate black history. [For LGBTQ+] we're going to put a flag on your [computer] desktop for one day. That's our commitment. I feel that the institution's not as committed to celebrating LGBTQ+ people in greater society, as they are with blacks. It's okay to be black and it's okay to have black people on posters. We celebrate Black History Month with all the famous contributors. And then for LGBTQ+ History Month, there's no evidence of LGBTQ+ here except for [an occasional sticker on a door]. I mean, we laugh about it, but it is quite a serious matter. I think if you're LGBTQ+, why are we not celebrating these things? I'm thinking institutionally, like who are the people who would drive that, whatever it may be. Surely that's the idea of the equality

> and diversity section. We need to discuss these things and how we celebrate these months and what that looks like. And it's not necessarily for only gays to be pushing this. Where are the other people? It's bigger than just us."

I do not think that the series of observations made by Peter in this extract necessarily reflect his institution's actual commitment to LGBTQ+ issues, for example, it has been a sponsor of Pride for thirteen years and has been a Stonewall Top 100 employer in the past. However, Pride is an external event, and Stonewall's ranking is driven more by policy and structures than personal experience. This means that it entirely possible that very positive LGBTQ+ policies and commitments exist in parallel to a perception of a lack of commitment internally. It suggests institutional LGBTQ+ visibility within the everyday experience of his institution could be improved to address the perception of inequitable treatment that Peter feels so strongly about.

Peter has a very positive view of Pride:

> "It's a really, really good thing. I think it's great. You have the floats, you have all of that...think the pride is really, really good. I think it's great to celebrate Pride and to get the communities involved in it and to raise awareness of what it is, why we celebrate it. We should be celebrating LGBTQ+ and Pride. I feel that the daytime thing is really, really good and then I think it gets carried away. In my experience it gets a bit seedy. I think it should be a family thing. It should be a family day of celebration about liberation, about all of that."

However, it is strongly tempered by a deep antipathy to the presence of some of the subcultures within the LGBTQ+ community.

> "I think it's taken over then by select groups of the community that then spoil it for everybody else. There are arses out, leather chaps, dressing all their BDSM and all of that walking in some of the marches. I feel it lowers the tone and I think that sets a stigma for what people think we are. I think what it does then is degrade, almost, what our cause is. Our cause isn't about that, it's about liberation. It's about, look, we are a community, we are a society. We have friends, we have family, we are a reachable community. Then you get these minorities showing up and all this stuff. I feel that it just sort of reinforces this attitude of you're dirty, that's gross, that's disgusting."

I have an ongoing battle with internalised homophobia, having been raised to believe that being gay made one essentially worthless and a failure. To rise above this requires a constant personal vigilance, to resist those ingrained norms and received values. I think Peter, through negative experiences and the irresistible force of heteronormativity, not only in the sense of sexuality, but in all its norms and expectations around sex and relationships, akin to Gayle Rubin's charmed circle of

acceptable sexual expression (Rubin, 2012), may have a similar battle. It was in his view of some 'queerer' subcultures that this seemed most apparent. But I think it is also revealed in the almost impersonal and detached view he presents of his professional life.

Similarly, the appeal to formal institutional responses to issues around professional identity, show a depersonalisation of the issue. Responding to and responsibility for the impacts of negative experiences is shifted away from himself, and to an expectation of authoritative intervention. This is echoed at a finer scale in his classroom identity. Both these suggest a refutation of the affective element of the relationships that, I believe, exist in our professional contexts and which are strongly aligned with anti-oppressive pedagogy (Kumashiro, 2002). But I think there is a very important element that must be taken from this, sometimes anxious, engagement. The emphasis that Peter places on the role of institutional processes and support in creating a sense of safety should not be underestimated.

> "I guess it's down to how safe you feel, how much community there is, how well thought through the processes were and how, yeah, just, you know, there was a guidance on how to react."

The idea of community became a central element in the engagements with Peter across the project. The perception that the LGBTQ+ is a secondary concern or a less worthy minority than others, seems to profoundly undermine his perception of his university as a safe space. The role of the university as a safe space recurs across most engagements – but who creates that safe space is shown to be a complex problem – operating across different scales, involving the interactions of a wide range of stakeholders, as well as institutional policy and culture.

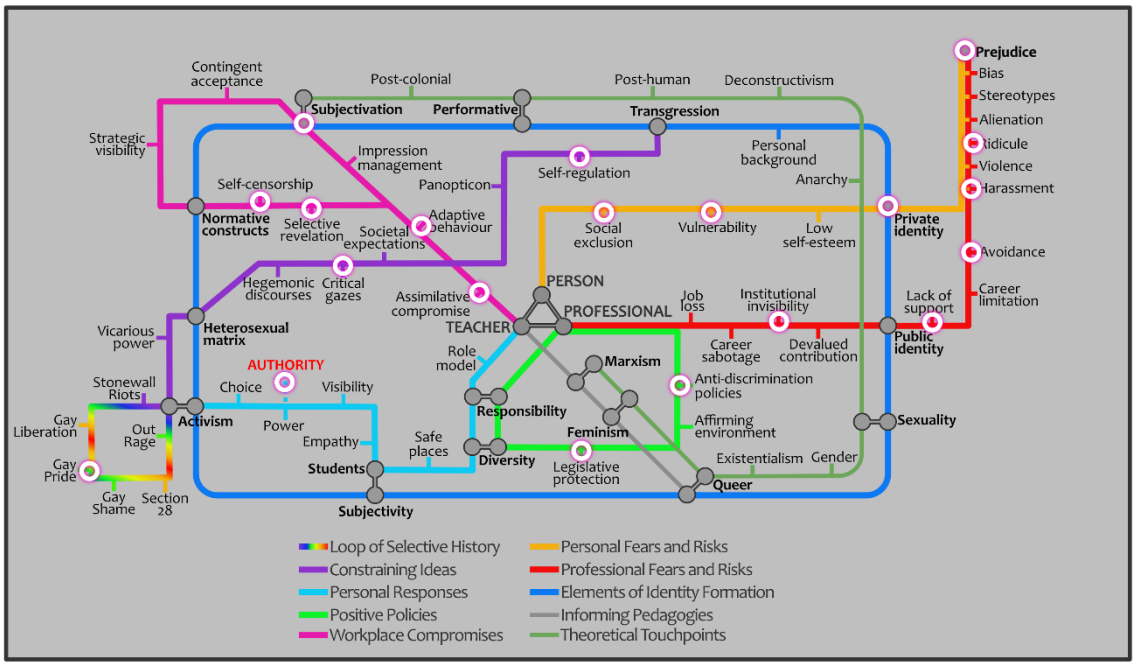


Figure IO: Conceptual touchpoints [3l] from Peter's main engagement.

Carl (in person)

Carl is different from the other collaborators. Carl is a technician with a significant student-facing role in supporting taught practicals and undergraduate and postgraduate research. He was the first person to indicate an interest in this research.

After the initial formalities, I asked Carl if he noticed a difference, as a gay member of staff between his current and his previous employer.

> "I think there was a lot more, especially in the year that I worked in there was a lot more gay members of staff, so we had quite a good little sort of friend group we used to have. I know [my previous employer] had a gay network and I know they were more active than the staff network we have [where I work now], but I wasn't really involved with it very much whereas I am over at this one. We obviously don't do as much as [the network at my previous employer] does. I know of some other gay staff, my manager's gay and I don't think there's that many other gay staff members, I guess just being where I am. So, there's that kind of difference really but only in terms of numbers."

Of all the collaborators, Carl was more active and invested in formal LGBTQ+ networks – in contrast to at his previous employer. Given the community of LGBTQ+ people within his immediate professional environment at his previous institution, which he notes is different from his current environment, it is perhaps not surprising

[3l] I had to add a point for authoritative relating as a teacher, as it had not come up in the literature review on which the conceptual topology is based.

that he chose to be more active within a staff network. I think this is important because it reveals something of Carl's attitude towards community and it being something requiring active participation – not a simple perception of association through a shared characteristic.

Unlike James and Peter, Carl is unguarded in presenting his sexuality when interacting with students:

> "I would generally say that I'm quite out- they're like, oh what you up to this weekend, and I'm like, oh me and my partner are going to go out. I'll generally say his name so they can put two and two together. Yeah, I don't hide it, I don't feel like there's any need to because I feel like it's, not like it's a safe space but I wouldn't expect a student to go, oh I don't like gays or anything like that. And since I've been here, I've been out, that's when I started saying that I was gay and not trying to hide it. I've not had any problems, well not to my face anyway."

Carl's confidence about presenting himself without denial, coded revelation or deception is clear. The closing phrase "...well not to my face anyway", is telling though, suggesting that he recognises that hostile attitudes and responses may exist, although he has not experienced them in his interactions with students. Carl was less concerned with impression management than all other collaborators. I do wonder if this is a manifestation of the different interplay of responsibility and perceptions of power in student/tutor relationships as opposed to student/technician relationships. It could also be a result of Carl spending more time with the students in small groups or individually than lecturers do. There is also perhaps less formality in his relationship with students, as he notes:

> "With some practicals...I'll have a small group, it'll be five to six students, and I'll guide them through an activity and then you have a lot more interaction with them, about what I'll probably be doing later, or just general day to day chit chat. I also have a lot of project students, so I'll be working one to one with them about their projects, and then we get a lot more in depth, constantly chatting, as they're in and out [the laboratory]. A lot of the students will do their research project at the lab, so we'll just be chatting and messing around."

He also does technical support for larger groups, often supporting an academic. I wondered if his behaviour differed in these different contexts.

> "I wouldn't have said so, I still try and do me, so I get quite excited quite easily, and I'm quite aware that sometimes I'm standing in a very camp manner, and when I was younger, I would try and stop doing it, but now that I'm older I don't care."

I asked him if he thought being out in teaching situations was useful to students who might be gay themselves:

> "I think so. I've noticed since I've got a rainbow [ribbon on my lanyard], a lot of students clock it. No one's ever said anything about it, but I've noticed quite often that they've looked at it, and they've clocked it. I think, I don't know if it makes the students, well I've heard from surveys that the students feel better when they can kind of identify with something, like a badge or whatever. I've never had any students say to me directly, I'm glad that you've opened up that you're gay. But I'm sure a lot of students who are gay and they talk about their boyfriends, and I don't know if it makes them feel, less bothered when they talk to technicians or staff about it. So, I've not noticed any difference myself, but I know as a group that they feel better seeing that kind of representation."

This led to a discussion of role models and whether gay teaching staff had a responsibility to be visible.

> "I can kind of see why people have said it, like oh you should be a role model, this, that and the other, but I don't really feel like it's something that we need to wear everywhere. So I feel like it's good that we've kind of got representation and maybe, so like I've got a rainbow badge on my lanyard, or on my email signature I've got a little rainbow badge again, but I kind of feel like I don't need to be active, like in lectures, I'm not trying to make it obvious that I'm gay to kind of prove that, because I just feel like it's a bit unnecessary and obviously in the world we're working towards, eventually no one will bat an eyelid. I think subtle hints are okay, but I don't feel like it needs to be kind of broadcast to make everyone sort of aware of it, if that makes sense."

I think for many collaborators the idea of being too assertively visible is a concern. It results in different levels of behaviour modification or self-censorship in how they present themselves during student interactions. This links to issues around stereotypical framing of LGBTQ+ people and gay men, in particular. It is raised by Carl, but also plays a part in the engagement with Max. Carl said:

> "I think you can't really avoid the stereotypes because humans tend to like putting things in a box. Like everyone's got to be labelled, and even if we don't do it on purpose, we might do it subconsciously. I kind of think it depends on who you speak to. So like a lot of my friends just don't think of a gay person and assume of the, um, like, oh, 'hi guys, how's it going?' [said in a camp manner] And because they're educated and they know that is the stereotype, but by meeting a person, they know that we're not, everyone is different, and we are not like that. Um, I think it depends, I don't really like a lot of the stereotypes that people assume, but I'm not really bothered by it because people will interact with that person, even though they might have a stereotype in their head to start with, when they start to interact with them, they'll kind of realise that their stereotyping was wrong."

Carl did observe that he thought that being quite camp relieved the pressure or even requirement of coming out to colleagues and students. His experience, as he related it, did not really align with this observation.

"I kind of just assumed that when people interact with me that they'll know that I'm gay, but then I have met people who'd known me for like a year [at my previous employer] and I said something and they were like, are you gay then? And I was like, how could you miss it? Not running around with a rainbow flag, but kind of in my head I just assumed that people, there was enough that people would guess, but then that's maybe just me assuming that people kind of pick up on these signs. Um, I think that's probably the way that I've always done it in my head. So I just assumed in my head that people would see that I have some mannerisms or whatever and just assume that I'm gay, but some people did not perceive me that way."

The extent of self-censorship seems to be influenced by people's personal experience, e.g., Peter's "don't ask, don't tell" position is informed by profound negative experiences. Given Carl's open attitude and behaviour, I asked if he had ever had moments where he felt vulnerable because of his sexuality.

Is role important?

Of all collaborators, Carl has the least complicated relationship with students and colleagues alike. I wonder if this arises from a less constrained suite of expectations for professional relationships between technicians and demonstrators and students.

In relationships between lecturers and students, are we essentially marionettes, whose strings are pulled by the heavy, historical, and social norms for higher education? There are definitely clear and specific expectations that we have of each other.

Where does that leave lecturers trying to follow the principles of anti-oppression pedagogies? In less traditional universities? In very traditional universities? In the context, of contentious 'freedom of speech on campus' rhetoric?

"The only time I actually was sure someone was going to hit me was, oh, years ago, I was out for my 18th birthday, and there was a group of us, and I think I had some fairy wings on and a tiara, that my friends had got me, and I remember there was some lad that was like, I'm going to deck you in because you're gay, and it was like, kind of all out of the blue, really, like I wasn't even talking to him, and he started walking towards me, and I thought, oh, this is going to end in tears, and then literally from nowhere, like four guys just kind of jumped between us, I didn't even know them, but they must have either heard something, so it never escalated into anything, I guess that's the only time I've ever felt physically threatened. I've had people say gay and other homophobic slurs loads of times, but that's the only time I've ever felt physically threatened, that I thought he was going to hit me. And then that turns out to be quite affirming, because straight away, like, strangers jumped to my defence...it's quite a nice story."

Queerbashed

When Carl related this story, I was reminded of an incident from my youth. Before I had come to terms with my own sexuality I was assaulted in a nightclub – it was quite a dingy, alternative type of club – there for a small number of misfits in a small town. It was run by a (straight) acquaintance from university. Anyway, I was pounced on by three men, who punched me and generally beat me… I ran away as soon as I freed myself and found my friends. "I've just been attacked", I said, when they saw me, and the blood running down my face. The culprits were regulars…quickly identified…and banned from the venue in future. I found this reassuring – people had my back before I realised it might be necessary.

I told my parents I had been mugged…

There are two things that I think are worth noting in Carl's response. The first is that a potentially traumatic event was thwarted by the intervention of strangers, which allowed him to reframe what must have been frightening at the time as a positive experience. The second noteworthy element is the casual dismissal of verbal abuse – probably one of the most common hostile experiences for LGBTQ+ people. Carl described it as a

"frequent experience…I've had 'gays', 'faggots'… 'batty boys'".

He described this as often happening as him and his partner were leaving a (gay) nightclub. I asked if these experiences of abuse caused them to change their behaviour in any way.

Carl replied,

"we do not do public displays of affection…because we just find it a bit awkward".

Whilst not attributing this to any threat of abuse himself, it is often associated with homophobic abuse and attacks (Rohleder, Ryan-Flood and Walsh, 2023; Buck, Lange and Edlund, 2019). Carl identified the gym as a place where certain behaviours, in particular same-sex displays of affection, were proscribed – "that's just asking for it". I asked if there had ever been instances in his professional context which, he felt, required similar restraint.

"No, yeah, I'm always just out. Like I did it when I was younger, kind of hide things. I worked in a pub for six months when I was younger and I didn't think they would get the gay thing, so I just didn't tell anyone. And they were always going to the bars, and they were like, oh, this girl has really big knockers... And I was like, oh... yeah. I really enjoyed working there, but I kind of felt repressed. I'd always have to think about what I was saying to make sure I didn't get too gay or camp. And once

> I finished there, I was like, oh, I'm not doing that again. Yeah. It's just, it's just draining."

I asked if he thought his current employer was an open and supportive (in the conversation flow, I described this as gay-friendly) place.

> "I kind of feel that they are, at least they're trying to be, because we've got the network. Um, we've also got the, all the trans policies coming in as well, trans-awareness training, and even with the new buildings, they're trying to make it sort of gender neutral. So, I feel like even if maybe some people feel like we're not quite there yet, myself, I kind of feel like they are quite gay friendly and they're trying to encourage everyone to be, to be equal. Yeah. I don't feel that there's any kind of... anyone's putting up any barriers to try and keep, keep us segregated or anything like that."

It is impossible for me not to notice that whilst recognising institutional resources and policies – it is the lack of actual barriers (I don't think Carl meant physical, rather an explicitly hostile environment) that were evidence of being gay friendly.

I feel this is a low bar, and it suggests to me as a community our threshold for what counts as supportive and open is quite low. This is evidenced in other engagements too, e.g., Peter's satisfaction with clear policy, or Cathy's valuing of clear guidelines. No-one spoke directly about the culture of their institution – the intangible elements that determine the quality of the personal experience of working for an organisation.

Carl's mention of staff networks, both in comparison to his previous employer and in response to the previous question, opened this as an avenue to explore.

> "I joined the network when I started two years ago and it's been the last kind of six months that I've started to organise events for it and I've noticed that we don't really have like a big network, so I know [my previous employer], even though I didn't go, had like a big social network, um, everyone kind of knew each other and they did different events and stuff. So I kind of feel we don't really have that, well we don't, we don't have that here. So I think we need to try and find a way of getting everyone together. So people will want to come and see each other and then we can also do the networking and the events. I think it's just trying to find more time really."

Carl went on to explain how for different members of staff (academic, technical, administrative) the ability to be active in the staff network may vary, and that the multiple campuses complicated the organisation of meetings [32].

Given Peter's strong view of LGBTQ+ issues being the Cinderella of diversity initiatives, I was keen to see what Carl thought of that – especially given his active involvement in staff networks. He did not feel able to comment – but spoke about a mentoring programme for LGBTQ+ students living on campus initiated by the student LGBTQ+ Society, which placed LGBTQ+ students with others in student accommodation. He concluded:

> "...even if [my university] is maybe not itself, as a body, pushing forward gay diversity- because it has the staff network and the student network. I find if they put forward ideas, [my university] isn't trying to stop them. It's like, oh, I've got a good idea. Let's, let's try and implement it. So I'm not really sure how much comes from [my university] itself, if that makes sense."

Again, in response to Peter's valuing of policy and guidelines as the key element in framing a safe space, I asked Carl about his awareness of them, and their content.

> "I know they exist, but I've not read them. I might have read them when I first started, but I'm not aware of where they are or what they entail. But it's not something I deal with every day. So, I don't really keep that kind of corporate, not corporate stuff, but yeah, I don't really keep up to date with it, I try and read the strategy every time it comes out, but it's not something I read very often. It's just on the internet, isn't it? If we search for like behavioural guidelines or, um, what is it? Some sort of policy, but I'm sure I could find it on the internet somewhere."

I also discussed Pride with Carl. He had a similar view, in some ways, to Peter – but was perhaps less vehement in his concern about some of the sub-cultures.

> "I think it's a bit of a mix of everything. So when we have Pride and my friends come down, we go out, we get covered in rainbows and glitter and we get drunk, and we love it. But it's also, I think it's still important because obviously like I've seen at Pride that they've got like the family area. So, you've got straight families, gay families with kids...So I see a lot of straight families thinking that gay culture is kind of, it's the same as theirs. It's just if you like guys or girls or whatever. And especially years ago, it was kind of important for showing that, well, we are here, and we do deserve the same rights that you have. Whereas now I kind of feel like because things are starting to get better... I think the best thing I saw last year was they were two lads, must have been about 13, 14, holding hands. And I was like, I never would have seen that when I was younger. Then you would just walk around together. I thought it was really nice. Pride is really important, but we should

[32] It is worth noting that this engagement was pre-pandemic, and the use of hybrid online events has to some extent ameliorated this. Whether an online meeting fosters the network in the same way that an in-person meeting would, is a separate issue.

> maybe start to modernise a little bit now that it's not so exclusively gay. We've got families there. Like I know we've got the subcultures for like S&M, and dogs, I'm not sure what dogs...do you know what I mean? ... Puppies! And like I know a lot of families come here with young kids or whatever, and you can kind of take it but sometimes I feel like it's a bit over-sexualised. I've seen a picture of like a guy that, I don't know how he did it, but had like a rainbow kind of top thing, that had loads of dildos stuck to it. And I know that was obviously like a one-off, but I feel like is that necessary, like if you want to play with the dildos at the club or when you go home or whatever, that's fine. But I feel like it could be nicer because, because we've now kind of integrated a bit better with sort of like the normativity of like hetero relationships."

It is interesting, from a queer perspective, that Carl sees the adoption of heteronormative models of relationships as an essentially good thing, and as a counter to stereotypes associated with promiscuity. Carl had a 'what happens in private is fine' attitude towards these subcultures but was not comfortable with them being part of what he acknowledged as an increasingly less LGBTQ+–centric event.

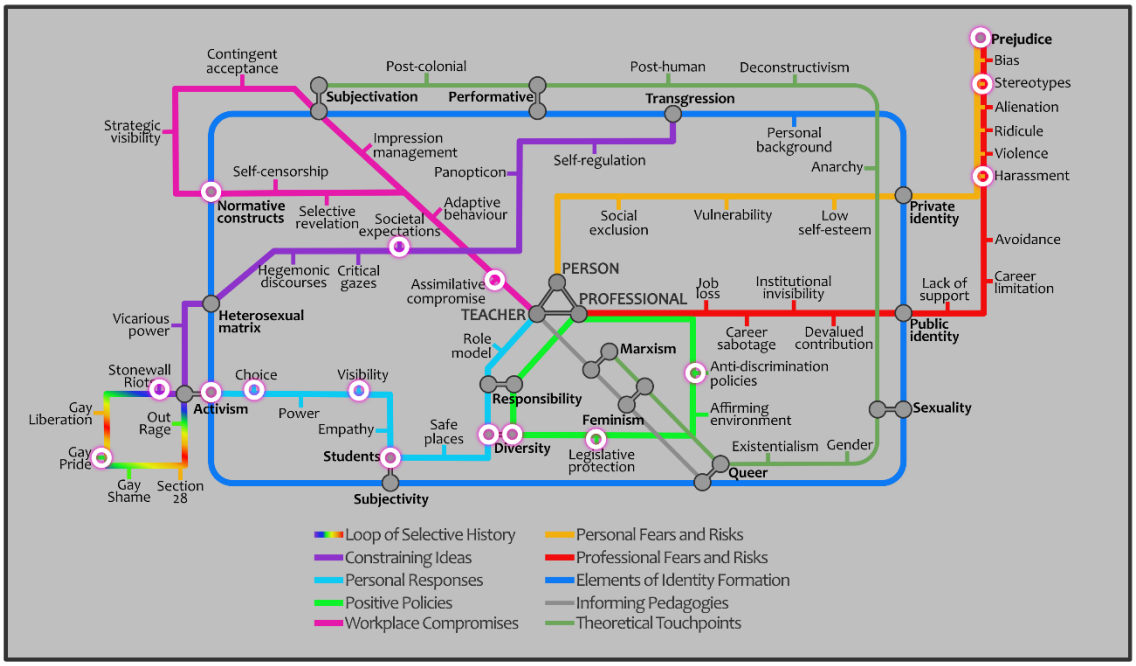


Figure II: Conceptual touchpoints from Carl's main engagement.

Max (in person)

Max is a member of both ethnic and religious minority groups. His life experience, and the stories he told, are informed by this heritage. It also shapes his attitude towards his teaching and professional identities. He described teaching as something he 'had always done' from unofficial tutoring as a student, supporting school children, and teaching English as a second language before moving to the UK. Before his PhD he worked in professional laboratories. He is relatively new to higher

education and was only appointed to a permanent lecturing position during this project. He never anticipated becoming an academic and sought commercial employment after completing his doctorate – he found that he was considered overqualified for most of the positions he applied for – but he was certain that he did not want to be an academic.

Max identifies as a gay man, and early in our first engagement I asked him if this influenced how he taught:

> "Probably, I want to think it doesn't, but deep down I think it probably does. Right. Because I think our identities somehow can be involved in different things. I can't really pin it down and specify it, but I feel it does."

The wishful ambivalence of his response is interesting, and it establishes a theme that would recur across all our engagements – one of recognising the role of being a member of a sexual minority, and this conflicting with a feeling that it shouldn't play a role.

He went on to discuss that he thinks it influences his positive relationships with female students – and speculated that he would be more reserved with them if he were heterosexual. His comfort with women, he described, as going back many years to when he was a student in an LGBTQ+ repressive country.

> "I was the only [man] that could communicate with female students much more easily, although I was not out. Right. And I never thought at the time, I didn't have this concept of me being gay or identity, but I found it easier to communicate with females. And I still do."

I asked if he considered himself out now:

> "Oh, yes. I think my sexual identity is part of me, but I don't write it on my forehead. I don't know if I do something that is considered as, I'm not sure I like to use that word, but camp, I don't know. I think even very masculine gays sometimes have a little streak of campness. So that can give it away. I never talk about it, like going to say, this is my sexuality because it is irrelevant to students or to colleagues, to whoever. But during the conversation, they understand because if I talk about my life, if I talk about my partner, if there is something about my personal life that I'm talking about, I never hold back, like not mentioning about my partner as him and I think they may know what my sexual identity is. So, I don't care about it. I think I'm very comfortable in my skin. I'm quite relaxed about it."

Max felt that being open had a positive effect on his relationships with students,

> "if I was not open about who I am, then it would probably make me a little bit tense, and I couldn't build the relationship the way I want to build. And I think it's important for a student just to see you are, you're just, you are a human".

I asked if he felt this was particularly important for LGBTQ+ students:

> "Definitely, definitely, because if they are, if they are struggling with their sexual identity, I believe that it really can help them to come to terms with their sexuality or say, well, that's normal, it's nothing to be ashamed of. Or I can be, I can progress, I can do well, I can be an academic. There is nothing that can stop me from being successful, so I think it is important."

I asked him how he felt about the suggestion that LGBTQ+ teachers had a responsibility to be out, as suggested by Toynton (2016).

> "No, I wouldn't say that because it is very personal. And we don't know what people have gone through in their life, what's happened to them. If someone is not comfortable to be out, then I wouldn't make that compulsory and say it is a responsibility. But I would say it is a preference or I would say it is something very positive if someone can be out and open about their sexuality."

I was struck by the empathetic view of the feelings towards people with different life experiences that might influence their choice to be out. One of the possible explanations for this was revealed by what Max told me next. When he first came to the university to do his Masters, and later for the duration of his doctorate he was married to a woman and could not be out. He met his 'lover' (his chosen word in this part of the conversation), whilst completing this doctorate. He felt that there was a gradual realization by their colleagues of the relationship during this period. When he later returned as a member of staff he was

> "completely out, even if I feel some people may not like it, still that's the last thing I care about because I'm just myself".

Throughout the engagement, Max would repeat the assertion that "We have to be ourselves", although not always expressed exactly like that. Although he found academia to be an accepting and open environment generally, he also noted that one person being open, makes it easier for others to be so too – creating a positive cycle for all. I was interested to know if there were, despite this perception, moments – particularly in the classroom – where he did limit his self-expression.

> Well, I try not to self-censor, but I might do... It's difficult to tell. I think I don't, in general, self-censor, but sometimes I regret sometimes I may be like too open or... I'm not a very dry personality. I always make a joke and things. And sometimes I think, maybe that was too much. Right. Maybe it's too much in other people's faces, maybe I shouldn't say that, or maybe I should have more control of my hand movement, maybe I was too animated or something like that. Although I don't consider myself as a very animated person, but still, sometimes I'm a bit mindful of that."

Later in the engagement, Max would express a similar anxiety, but in this instance the concern is not one of self, but whether his behaviour reinforces negative stereotypes,

> "sometimes I feel that probably I share too much, or it is too like a stereotype. I show like a stereotype of a gay man, and I think maybe I don't do a favour for other people because I create, or I add to that stereotypical thinking".

This observation was illustrated by him talking about his dress sense and choice of colourful outfits. Given his stated comfort and openness about his sexuality, I think there is a dissonance with this and his repeated articulation of concern about his behaviour and appearance and how it might be judged. Perpetuating stereotypes was a recurrent concern. I think Max's behaviour and attitude are linked to his repressive context as a young, closeted gay man, the hostility with which his sexual realization was met, and the isolation that he experienced in a professional context linked to that. He describes his wife as initially "supportive" when he came out to her, also recognising how "how disappointing, how devastating it was for her", a while after that "life was hell". She falsely told their families and friends that he "was having sex with all different men, all across the country". He interprets this as prejudice informed by a stereotype of gay men as promiscuous. Similarly, later, once he was completing his post-doctoral studies, he was verbally confronted in the street by a (straight) man, claiming he had been looking at him in a sexually suggestive manner. He interpreted this as further evidence of the promiscuity stereotype. Although he did not express this concern about stereotypes as such, it was primarily about the epistemic violence of such ideas, and how they – in their tremendous variety – play out for all members of sexual minorities.

It was always interesting to me that regardless of the position that a collaborator may have claimed, such as Max's openness or Peter's comfort with the complete opposite, there was an inevitable, unprompted moment of seemingly contradictory insight. Peter felt 'sad' about the limits he put on his openness, and here Max recognises, and identifies, a range of behaviours that make him feel self-conscious and exposed. He went on to generalise this realisation:

> "I've never had negative feedback, no-one has said anything, but it is just us, the reality is, it doesn't matter how comfortable we are in our skin, how comfortable in our environment, or how confident we are. I think we are still deep down struggling with some of the stuff about our identity."

I replied that I recognised that, growing up in South Africa, which had a very socially conservative and masculinist culture – and that we internalise a lot of the values we grow up with, and that this may intensify any feelings of 'imposter syndrome' for LGBTQ+ academics. Max recognised this experience too:

> "I think it's the heteronormative environment. And since you're growing up, it's always like that male role model and that you should be. As much as you may think that you are confident, you still deep down have some of those residuals of lack of confidence or things that you should have been, and you are not. And I don't think I can get rid of them completely. All I can do is to recognise them and live with them. I don't know how much I can link it to sexual orientation, this lack of self-confidence. But I think sexual orientation plays a role, even if it is a small role."

The emotional reality of this experience is profoundly articulated in what Max said next:

> "When I go to a lecture or doing something or even between colleagues, I ... have a presence, and they have told me, they said, when you are somewhere, we can see you are present there. But sometimes I feel, I look like a big cat or a lion or something, but still inside me I always have that little kitten, which sometimes is not sure, sometimes its trembling".

The image of a scared kitten is so powerful as an expression of vulnerability. Max started the engagement with statements of personal bravado and professional confidence. How things unfolded over the time, shows how fragile elements of our self-image can be when exposed to empathetic scrutiny.

We both reflected on the impact that the context of our upbringings has had on our feelings of confidence, and possibly worthiness, in professional contexts. Arising from this we discussed the perception that the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights (or at least LGB rights) was over.

> "Oh God, yes. That's definitely a thing. And that's not just in university, that's not just in one workplace. It is very general everywhere. They think, people think, oh, you have equal marriage and that's it. So, you're equal. It is not. We are far from being equal still. Everywhere. It is just equal marriage. It doesn't mean we are equal. And yes, I very firmly believe that that's a very common belief people have that because of the gay rights and because of all we achieved in the last few decades. Everything is 100% right, and we don't need to do anything else. And we are equal, and we have to be confident, and we have to feel that there is no

> difference, which is not true because even if you fix every single law, if you fix every single workplace, still people's feelings are not something that you can fix."

The concluding sentence in this extract reveals the complexity of the relationship between legislation or policy and lived experience – the emotional reality of people's lives – for Max, the related dissonance seems both insistent and persistent.

Max felt that complacency about the lived realities of LGBTQ+ people, where inequality is often manifest, was problematic, along with a lack of awareness of the history of LGBTQ+ rights movement, noting the rising threat of right-wing populism to existing, hard-won rights.

> "What I want to say that, yeah, there is still lots of work left. But yeah, many people think we are getting there. The other thing is, you don't think the rights you have today, you will have tomorrow, or in five years. In mid 1930s, in Germany, you could live with your same sex partner without problems. By 1939, they were in concentration camps. And I think the escalating of the events we have in the last few years here... I wouldn't say that all of the gay rights and things will be stripped off. But when right wing people have more power, it is not unlikely that some of the rights will be limited, or we just become more vulnerable. I'm sure you're aware of that in the last few years, and we have much more hate crime against LGBTQ+ people. It's just escalated. Why should that happen? If we are really, if we are accepted, and if we are 100% like anyone else, why hate crime should escalate?"

Like Carl, Max is married to his partner. I asked if being married made it easier to be open about his sexuality in a professional context. His response, which echoes a sentiment expressed by Carl, highlights the utility of adopting normative practices that echo those of heterosexual relationships.

> "It doesn't make it more comfortable, but it does make it easier. Because rather than saying I'm gay, I can just, during the conversation, I say, my partner, I'm not still 100% comfortable with using the word husband. But I say partner, and I mention his name, or I say he, so then people get it. But I have to say, sometimes when I have a student from a background that I know, generally, is homophobic, not that they are homophobic, but they are from backgrounds where homophobia is very common. I feel a bit uncomfortable. And I don't think I should, we shouldn't... As I said, well, that may be a bit difficult, but I have to do it and I have to be myself. And, well, if someone don't like me, then it's not my problem."

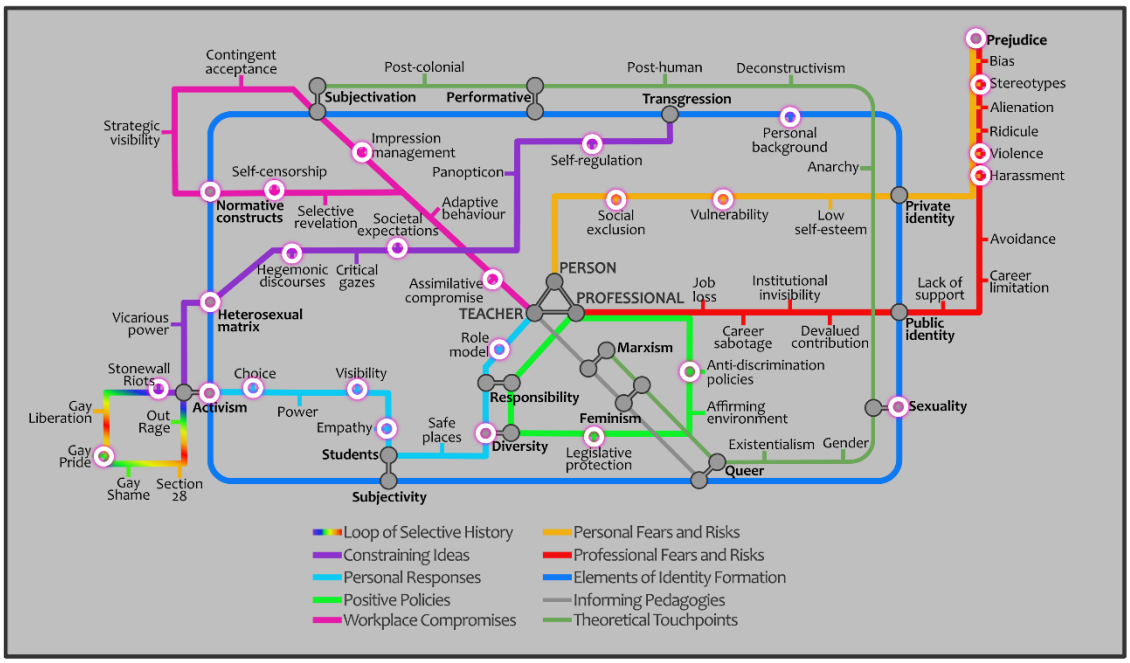


Figure 12: Conceptual touchpoints from Max's main engagement.

Sarah (in person)

Sarah identifies as a lesbian woman – "that's the end of the spectrum I sit at" – and is the most experienced academic of all the collaborators and has worked for her employer for over two decades. She has filled a senior role for the past few years. This position gave her an insight to some of machinations at her institution.

As with all the engagements, it cannot be detached from those that happened before it and it has been shaped by my changing levels of comfort with the research process as well as the content of what others had already presented to me. I was slightly anxious about this engagement given Sarah's role. When Sarah felt strongly about elements of the conversation we were having, and being a very considered person, emphasis was articulated through repetition rather than volume or speed of talking – it worth noting where such repetition happens in the extracts that follow.

Sarah came to her academic position, via a diploma in a context which involved outreach. She went on to do a degree and later PhD in an environmental discipline which she notes

> "situates me in a STEM discipline very clearly".

I asked her about her experience as a lesbian woman at her institution.

> "I think it's probably been much more open in recent years. I think initially, it's difficult to comment on because as an individual joining an organisation and settling into an organisation and getting to know people that you're working with, it's quite difficult to know how much you can disclose and how much to kind of keep private as well. So, I think it's been less of the institutional influence and more of the settling in and new colleagues arriving or getting to know other colleagues and things and, I guess, things in my own life changing as well, which just give opportunities to kind of be a bit more open, I suppose, about identity. So, I wouldn't put it down to an institutional change."

Two things stood out for me in this response – firstly, that it is personal feelings and experience that allowed her to feel more open, and not institutional change. I think this speaks to the dilemma of institutional culture, and whether it is primarily shaped by people within the organisation or by institutional policies and frameworks for employees. It also sets the focus of much of Sarah's thinking about pedagogic relationships – personal comfort and how that is driven by a combination of temperament and experience. Elaborating on the events in her life that have made it easier to open up, she noted the development of friendships with colleagues, as well as accidental disclosure, or where the gender of her partner was implied during a conversation. The most significant thing, though, was having a civil partnership – which was discussed by colleagues when it happened – and which, she says, surprised some colleagues – "big events like that will be discussed", she observed.

Given the observation that her becoming progressively more open, was not a result of any institutional changes, I thought it would be good to focus on the university's EDI policy environment. As a result of her role, Sarah is familiar with the content of these policies, however she stated that is has less relevance to her personally than

> "what happens day to day and how I interact with my colleagues".

In a student-facing pedagogic context Sarah talked about how she strives to create a community of equals in the classroom.

> "So, in my practice as a teacher, I've always had the approach where everyone's on an equal footing. I guess if you were to, I don't know, if you were to audit what I do in the classroom or how I approach my modules, then I hope it would align quite closely to the EDI framework. But I think part of that just comes from how I want to organise my classroom and what I want my classroom to be like as well, in terms of the community and the learning that takes place as well. Less policy, less framework orientated and more about human beings, you know, human beings working together and building up a community."

So while aligning her pedagogic relationships with the spirit of an EDI framework, it was not a direct influence on her teaching style and relationships with students – just as it had little impact on her relationships with colleagues. Sarah was clear that openness about her sexuality is not an element of her classroom persona.

> I don't give anything away at all in the classroom. I don't know what the students think or what they surmise, but I don't give any indication at all. I never have done either...I guess because I don't feel the need to kind of label myself in front of the students. So, in a classroom setting, I'll be non-committal about [my sexuality]."

There are moments of professional alignment between Sarah's teaching and her partner's profession – in these cases she has used information gleaned from this personal relationship in her teaching, saying "my partner works for the [discipline-related government department]" – but without revealing anything that she feels unnecessary in that context,

> "I think in a big classroom setting like that, I don't feel the need to identify who I am or what my lifestyle is".

Context does influence the level of openness in Sarah's relationships with students.

> "The only time I've sort of said to a student or given a student any inkling is if I've had an academic personal tutee talk to me and they've been quite clear about their orientation and there's been an issue that they've had. And to put them at their ease, I've said to them, don't worry, I've got a partner, I'm gay as well, so don't worry about it. I've used it to put them at their ease and to help them out. And that's normally with students who I've known for a few years as well. So, for me there's a big difference between the individual, the conversation that you have - trying to put them at their ease, and the wider classroom setting; it's about the relationship that we build up with our students."

With students that Sarah had had less interaction with, and whom she did not know well, she was not comfortable with any personal revelations,

> "I don't know what they're like or what their perspectives are, or their viewpoints are on different orientations. So I prefer not to go into that".

The concern about not knowing how students would react opened a very personal avenue of discussion which focussed on her relationship with her parents and their attitudes to homosexuality:

> "It's partly because, and it partly comes back to being judged as well. Because of the upbringing I've had, the judgment has always been there. And I think probably, I don't know whether that's the case for lots of people, but I certainly carry that through. So, I would prefer not to volunteer the information. Maybe if the scenario is right or I think it will help, I will do that. But otherwise, no. Because our upbringing probably determines how we view being gay anyway, whether it's acceptable or whether it's wrong in some way. And if it's wrong, then we will be

> judged for that by society or by family or friends. For me, that's had a massive impact. Massive impact. And that's the reason why I won't volunteer the information."

She elaborated:

> "I didn't tell my folks until, how old was I? I thought, well, it was about 10 years ago, just under 10 years ago. But I had to be pushed right to the brink to do that. There were some really horrendous things happening at the time. And it was just an additional pressure that I just couldn't contain any longer. I kind of weighed it up and thought, it's probably no worse for them to know than it is to try and hold it back from them now. But otherwise I probably wouldn't have said anything. I would have carried on as I was. But it got to the point, where I just had to say something. [My partner] and I had been living together for over a decade by that time. And so mum and dad must have had their suspicions... I had the classic response from them when I told them. You know, so, clearly not something that they had hoped, you know, had wished for, for me. But there we are. Yeah. Yeah. But they're fine. They're supportive about it. But their reaction at the time was exactly what I'd expected from the upbringing that I'd had."

Sarah felt that it was more important that in her teaching she represented a wide section of the community – especially as community vulnerability falls within her subject expertise. She felt this approach presented her as open and encouraged students to be open-minded and supportive – fostering a collaborative teaching experience. This description suggests a quite strong personal engagement with students and a "relationship of trust", although constrained to within the boundaries that Sarah had already described to me. I asked if there was a tension between striving for this relationship of trust and her choice not to disclose anything personal, not only sexuality.

> "There's almost like a disjointed approach really. So, there's two things going on really. There's the educational pedagogic environment and everything that I'm giving to the students to help them learn, you know, and for them to develop and flourish. And then underneath that there's this internal can't quite be who I want to be in the classroom because there's just that element that I can't talk about. So, I can't go in and be 100% me. If I was married with kids, you know, and straight, I would probably feel much more comfortable about going in and talking about what the kid's been up to or whatever. But there's always a slight awkwardness I feel because I'm always having to check myself when I'm talking to the students about something that I've been doing. And it's almost like having an... it must be like somebody having an alibi and having to just make sure that they're keeping the story consistent, making sure their alibi is watertight all the way through. It's ridiculous because it takes so much energy to do."

The use of the word 'alibi' can be seen as quite revealing – I would say it means something relied upon to prove innocence, or to prove not having been somewhere. In the context of this discussion, it suggests how openness about sexuality is linked

to something unacceptable. This extract reveals both the extent of the effort involved with non-disclosure but also the personal costs – which Sarah seems willing to pay. Sarah also felt that given her appearance and dress, and her (expressed) interest in a particular sport, some might read her as a lesbian – but she avoids any direct confirmation of that. In addition to this, Sarah noted that she had been outed to students in the past by another member of staff.

> "They've had it from other colleagues or whatever. And I know that kind of conversation happens because I've overheard it so many times. But that's because that's how those colleagues, kind of build up their relationships with the students. And that's how they kind of keep the kind of social and then the interactions going with students when they are on field trips and day trips...But they won't necessarily use very clear language. They will just insinuate. They will make comments that allow somebody to put two and two together. So that happens. Yeah, that does happen. Yeah, and it's quite difficult as well because that then sets up a situation where I know how that colleague is with students in informal settings. So if they're saying what they are saying about other colleagues, what they're saying about me, you know, and does it matter? Yeah, it does matter."

Elaborating on how it mattered, Sarah considered the impact it had on trust in her professional relationships with colleagues.

> "So, yeah, it makes me very careful, I think, about what I what level of detail I will discuss with certain colleagues. And I think that's quite a problem sometimes. If I do need to talk about [institutional] changes that will be happening or whatever, and want to sound people out, then I have to be very, very careful. And some of some of my decisions and conversations I have with colleagues about what's happening structurally or developments that are happening, I'm really careful about now, based on how I've seen them interact and their level of indiscretion. And how confident I can be that they will be discreet. Yes, it's quite an insight. Yeah, it is quite an insight."

She speculated about the motivation of those that would discuss the sexuality of a colleague with students:

> "You can read so much into that, into why they need to do that. What is it about that individual that means they have to almost try and come down to a really informal relationship with the students to kind of, you know, bob along with them? What is it about them as a practitioner or an individual that makes that OK? Is it that they are insecure about where they stand relative to the students? Or is it their quality of teaching that they worry about? So, they've got to make up for that and be the kind of the student's mate. The common denominator is that they will talk about things that make other colleagues different in some way. I don't like it. I don't like it. I don't like it at all."

With hindsight, and in the light of this discussion, I suspect that I have been the subject of similar discussions between colleagues and students. This may be related to my own self-consciousness, particularly when meeting new students for the first

time, but there have been moments where they seem to arrive with preconceived ideas about me...but as I said, this may just be my own demons taunting me.

Our discussion contrasted the type of relationship with students that was promoted by such behaviour with the type of relationship that Sarah had articulated for her teaching. As in the other engagements, I asked Sarah about her opinion on Toynton's (2016) belief that LGBTQ+ teachers have responsibility to be 'out'.

> "Oh, oh, responsibility is quite a strong word. Because that suggests an obligation. But as a practitioner, and as somebody who is interested in student wellbeing and the student experience, and the equal access for all, and wanting to build confidence in students, I can understand where that position comes from. But I think you can also extend it beyond the responsibility to provide touch points. It's almost a responsibility to provide safe spaces for students as well. Particularly when we think about the age, most of the students that we teach in the age range, the age range in which they are discovering who they are. So, it is important, I feel, sometimes to be the person that they can look at and think, oh, so it doesn't matter really then who I am, because I can still get a good job, I can still earn well, I can still achieve. That does go back to some of the examples I've given you where if it's an individual student who's in trouble and is really struggling, that's the point where I'll make the decision whether to disclose or not. So, I can understand that viewpoint, but I think we have to use that approach very carefully. I think it's up to the individual to judge when the conditions are right to do that. I wouldn't want to walk into a classroom and say, welcome to the module, by the way I'm gay. I have never done that, and I never will either."

Her response is characterised by her considered approach to things and her commitment to student wellbeing – where contextual considerations would allow her to decide on the appropriateness of disclosing her sexuality to a student. Other collaborators have tended to respond to this suggestion of responsibility by framing it purely in the context of the tutor's comfort, not articulating specific concern about

Assumed to be straight

At the very onset of this project, I was having coffee with some colleagues, one of whom (a cis hetero man) asked me about the project. He was shocked to hear that mediating one's expression of identity in a classroom was a concern at all. When I explained that within our current (heteronormative) cultural context, everyone is assumed to be heterosexual, and that declaring oneself to be anything different put one in a position of potential vulnerability (as does not declaring oneself, sometimes), he said, "I had never thought about that, I have learnt something today".

Good outcome, I thought.

the student's context. Sarah's response is the most nuanced [33] and, in many respects, the most supportive of Toynton's (2016) suggestion that teachers have a responsibility to be visible/out, in comparison with the other collaborators.

Sarah had a similarly thoughtful view of the introduction and specific identification of LGBTQ+ people in teaching material. Like the other collaborators, she identified the lack of out scientists in her discipline as a hindrance to pursuing this, noting that:

> "Very often the material that I use, or the visual material, especially videos, it's so obvious when we do have somebody who is probably gay or lesbian. Because of the mannerisms and the like that we can identify. And sometimes, yeah, that does, when you sort of trace it through, it does become quite clear that they are either gay or lesbian. That's their orientation. Within the scientists, no, but within the activists, maybe, yeah, just by coincidence, it comes through. When we watch [some expert's] TED Talks, they may talk about their family and kids, but don't specify whether they've got a husband or whether it's a wife, but in the way that they present themselves and the way they dress or mannerisms, I guess the assumption is that they are just straight."

Sarah was, in some ways, optimistic that considering the sexuality of people in teaching material would soon cease to be a concern, as alternative family structures and lifestyles become more common place. She felt that until

> "we start to see that generation coming through, who are children at the moment, but come through as young adults into our higher education settings, there will still be those kind of assumptions".

I agree with this observation – things are changing and will continue to do so but wonder if it adequately considers the weight of the heteronormative history of science adequately.

The discussion about non-traditional families and the legal normalisation of lesbian and gay partnerships led to a discussion of Pride. Sarah's attitude is very positive recognising its transformative value for many. Her response shows the same level of individual reflection and self-knowledge as her other observations during the engagement. It is interesting that although she recognises the dissonance in her position, the recognition is not a surprise to her, but a considered, deliberate compromise. This is different from most other collaborators who often seemed

[33] I hope this is fair to the other collaborators, and not an artefact of my changing levels of confidence with the process of having these intersubjective engagements. I cannot entirely discount that as a possibility...but I do think that right from the start of the project I gave collaborators space to articulate their thoughts and feelings as fully and completely as they wanted.

surprised when given an opportunity to reflect on elements of their choices or strongly held beliefs about themselves. Sarah said:

> "If people have the confidence to do that, to be involved in that, to be happy to be visible and to be seen by others in that setting, I think that's fantastic. But I think that's got a lot to do with the way in which we are as individuals, and it's not just in terms of our orientation, I think a lot of this is about us as individuals and whether we are introvert, extrovert, whether we are confident, or whether we lack a bit of self-confidence, I think that kind of contributes to it as well. So I'm very much somebody who kind of looks at Pride from the outside and thinks, that's amazing, that would be brilliant to get involved in that, but I'd never dream of doing it, because of who I am, separate from orientation, who I am as an individual."

Sarah then discussed the television show 'Queer Eye', the strength of her feeling about the positive impact of openness and her awareness of her own position and the potential of our pedagogic relationships is clear.

> "I've got huge admiration and complete awe for people like that, and there's a part of me that would like to be that for my students. I'd love to be as self-assured and confident about who I am, to be able to do that, but I'm not able to, for one reason or another. But to be able to be that kind of person, to be as out as that, to be as transformative as that for people, and to facilitate that transformation, would be incredible, because surely this is the environment within which that kind of transformation can happen...over time, over the three years that we're with our students, surely that's the time when we can have the biggest impact, and the biggest positive impact. So, there is a bit of frustration in that I don't feel I can quite get there."

Sarah did wonder if working in a STEM discipline made it more difficult to be that open and transformative person,

> "It might be quite challenging in the STEM disciplines as well, because we are all quite scientific and quite... we're quite rational people, I think, as well, certainly in the way that we present ourselves professionally".

I told her that Cech *et al*. (2017) had described the culture of most STEM disciplines as stridently masculine. This chimed with her experience as a student in a STEM discipline:

> "All male... All of my lecturers were male. Yeah. I didn't have one female lecturer. How about that? That might just have been the options I was choosing, and it just happened to be the way that the department was made up at the time as well. But no, they were all male. I've only just thought about that. I've only just realised that."

Sarah also reflected on the prevalence of stereotypes around gender and sexuality within her field:

> "Because when you think about, so think about lesbians who are in the STEM disciplines. Are we looking at women who are a little bit more towards the butch

> end of the spectrum compared to the more kind of feminine end of the spectrum? Is it that evident? I mean, it's the norm, if you see what I mean. It's horrible because I hate that kind of distinction. I don't like the butch and the femme and all of that. We are who we are. But if we were to look at behaviours and attitudes and the like, there is a link. Well, there is a trend that I've definitely seen in my professional life. Definitely. Definitely."

I am not concerned about the veracity of this observation – more important is the pernicious power of normative stereotypes in Sarah's framing of this extract – even as she recognises its divisiveness.

Interestingly, Sarah did not feel that she had to work harder than any of her colleagues "to stake her claim". But she went on to acknowledge that her "really strong perfectionist tendencies" may mean that she works to higher base performance level anyway – and acknowledging the personal cost of this trait:

> "Apart from linking to me or having any connection to me as a woman in academia or orientation or anything like that is a personality trait, which is about perfectionism, which is about having failed so badly at school. Right. And it is stressful. It's really, really, really stressful. You know, it makes me feel quite, you can probably tell, you know, it's so stressful in the job, and this is what I mean about serendipity, I worked hard, [got promoted], worked hard, [got promoted], innovated, worked hard, [got promoted], you know, and it's continued. So, you know, [got promoted], [got promoted] [34], you know, it's that reinforcement all the time and work hard, and don't let the teaching drop, don't let the teaching drop."

Then came an important moment of acknowledgement, that her perfectionism, while linked to perceptions of historic underperformance, may also be linked to potential negative attitudes from others about her sexuality:

> "...the difficulty I have is perfectionism. That is one, that's probably another reason why I won't disclose who I am because being perfect or wanting to be perfect all the time is about not wanting to be criticised or not being able to cope with criticism very well in terms of taking it internally and it has quite negative impacts. So, part of this is probably related to sexuality as well, which is really interesting, really interesting kind of conundrum for somebody and sometimes that can hold us back."

While I wouldn't describe myself as a perfectionist, I do recognise that getting hung-up on details is part of my self-validation and measure of self-worth that is inseparably linked with being made to feel inadequate for so much of my life. Relating this to Sarah, resonated with her own experience:

> "so exactly the same as you've described, the self-worth and being worthy of being their daughter was about achieving and it was very clear at school that not

[34] These words trace Sarah's career progression and have been redacted to preserve anonymity.

> achieving was, yeah, was a real problem and so that must have helped to kind of flick the switch. But linked to that also is, how the hell can I tell them that I'm gay, because that is clearly not acceptable, but I've got to be perfect, I've got to be the right daughter for them and then that's tied up in our self-worth, as you say. So, part of my self-worth as a teacher and as a practitioner is about how I'm perceived in the classroom. So, every single session has got to go perfectly, it's got to be prepared perfectly, it's got to run perfectly. In my mind, students probably don't notice. What would derail that would be to be open about myself, because I don't know how the students are going to react, so therefore I don't know how to control for that and to get the best possible outcome. Which probably makes me sound like a complete and utter power freak, but I'm not. It's about a really complicated personality trait through learning and learned behaviours and learning what gets the reward I suppose, what makes me feel accepted and belonging."

The discussion about belonging, led to the (inevitable) issue of imposter syndrome, which had been raised by Peter and Max too. I wondered if she thought it was more significant for LGBTQ+ people.

> "I think being gay or lesbian probably adds an extra layer of complication for want of a better word. It has for me, it definitely has for me, because it just makes me think, oh god, not another thing. But it's a thing I can't manage myself out of. No matter how much I try, it's here and I have to just lump it. The lesbian thing, I can control to some extent in terms of who knows and how I want to talk about that with colleagues or how open I want to be with colleagues. So yeah, it probably does have a bearing I think for some of us."

We discussed the inherent loneliness of being an academic (which Peter also raised), where we work across many teams and student cohorts often without spending enough time to develop a relationship with them, with students, in particular, as we usually only interact with them *en masse*. I talked about my personal decision not to be more 'out' specifically (although that played a part) but to be a more personal teacher – so more open generally as a human being, more fully myself, and trying to respond to students as individuals – complex human beings – too. This did involve extending elements of my module content to include, for example, LGBTQ+ hate crime as a focus for spatial analysis. Much of this discussion was framed by Judith Butler's (1991, p. 16) famous question "We are out of the closet, but into what?", and I told Sarah that a result of this decision was more self-consciousness and feeling more exposed. I described my ambition in this regard as being authentic – not in an essentialist way, but in the sense of relating to others in a more complete way – less constrained, more spontaneous, more directly affective – more aligned with key elements of queer pedagogy. Sarah responded:

> And I know we talk about how sometimes we put on a performance in front of a group, so we're probably never truly who we really are. And we probably wouldn't want to be because it's not appropriate, really. But I think sometimes that element of not wanting to be honest and open, it can be a hindrance. I don't feel that I can be completely, yeah, completely authentic, and completely honest in what I'm teaching, particularly in terms of human vulnerability to [environmental issues [35]] in particular vulnerabilities and refugees and the like, without being able to go into that. There was a really good example this morning. I'm teaching about the Central American migrant caravan at the moment, which hit the headlines in 2018. A reporter followed the fate of some of these migrants. And one of them is a gay man. And she was telling his story. As I was scrolling up through the Reuters article on the screen this morning, I was thinking, how are they going to react to this? How are they going to react to this? How are they going to react? How are the lads in the group going to react to this? And that always makes me slightly cautious. And I think, hang on a minute. You know, I've got every right to represent his story and to make these students aware that persecution, persecution is about the social group that you belong to. And your well-founded fear of persecution can be because of your sexual orientation. And we need to get that across. And I didn't quite manage that this morning, but I've got a second chance to do it tomorrow morning when we look at the ethics of [environmental issues] and individual circumstances. And so, talking to you now makes me think, no, I'm going to do that. I am going to do that. I'm going to make sure we talk about that because it's so important. I will use that as an example with the central migrant caravan as well, as there is the MS13 gang, you know, who, who will seek out gay and lesbian people and, you know, and will, will murder them."

I don't know if Sarah did follow through, but she also noted that there might be a perception that if we talk about LGBTQ+ issues, we are talking about ourselves and acknowledged the discomfort that creates... But as we were reaching the end of the engagement, we started to reflect more broadly on our roles as teachers, the formative impact some of our teachers had on us, and what that means for our own practice, Sarah summed it up:

> "We do have that opportunity. We are in that position where we can have some quite significant transformative impacts on people through quite small gestures or conversations or behaviours. And I think that's profound in terms of the job that we're in and the kind of privilege of the position that we're in. And I think, you know, that that's why sometimes I feel quite, yeah, just, just lacking that authenticity in the classroom, which comes back to that wanting to just be a little bit more open. So the student who is sat in that group, who doesn't want to identify themselves or whatever, can kind of look, look back at the session and think, yeah, so it's okay. It's all right. You know, there's a little bit of reassurance there that I've got from, from the session. Just from the way that that lecturer was acting, all the behaviours that they were modelling, it's going to be okay, and that's important."

[35] Specific discipline replaced with generic term to maintain anonymity.

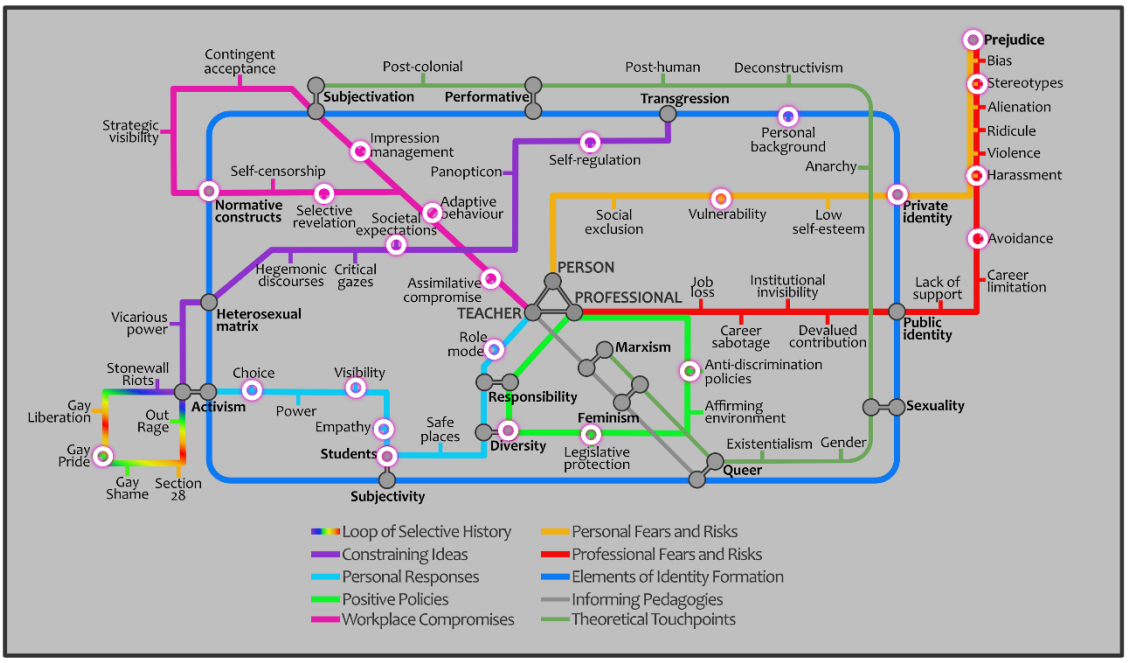


Figure 13: Conceptual touchpoints from Sarah's main engagement.

Cathy (online)

As noted earlier, I was very uncertain about moving the project online, not knowing if the personal connection I was trying to foster in the engagements was achievable when the interaction was mediated through technology. It is worth noting that this engagement happened only three days into the 1st UK lockdown, when our experience and familiarity with 'remote' interaction was limited.

Cathy is employed as a researcher but with an increasing level of contribution to teaching – from about 10% to about a third of her time. She had previously worked in professional setting before returning to education to complete a PhD to support a career change to higher education teaching and research. Cathy was made aware of her current position, by her wife (her choice of language) who works at the same institution. She described herself as "still learning" about teaching. She was born in continental Europe and identifies as a lesbian woman. She is the most institutionally 'out' collaborator.

When asked about how she negotiates her professional and personal identities, she answered:

> "I always try to keep a professional relationship with the students in the sense that the way I talk to them is neutral and unassuming. And I try not to make assumptions about where they're from, where their background, and I expect the

> same treatment from them. I try to be approachable and friendly, but I'm always very aware that it's good to have that separation."

There is a sense of dispassionate engagement with the students, where the relationship is clearly defined, and this is confirmed by the follow-up which focussed on elements such as not answering emails on weekends, and "being upfront to them about it". The expectations of professionalism in both directions of student/tutor relations are very strictly regulated in traditional classrooms. Cathy consistently expressed a willingness to engage with students differently, but felt it was a risk to do so in the absence of guidelines that bounded the scope of such redefined ways of relating. In addition to getting advice from colleagues, she noted that she aims to emulate the experiences or people that she regarded as role models:

> "I do have some role models that I try to follow and try to learn from, both from my past, from my lecturers when I did my degree and my masters, [who have had a] very strong influence, I've got a particular person in mind who is very skilled. I will never dream of becoming as good as she is in her career and research. But I try to remember what I liked about her approach and try to apply it."

Cathy did not feel that she had stricter boundaries between personal and professional identities than her colleagues, noting that she mirrors what she sees in the teaching teams of the modules to which she contributes. But she also says:

> "I would probably say that I'm better, and I'm not saying that my colleagues aren't, but it's definitely the thing I'm always aware of is trying to not make assumptions about their lives and what's going on. So, I always say, OK, if there's something going on, that's fine. If you need to leave the room just do that respectfully. So, I try not to jump to conclusions. And yeah, that's something that I'm always very aware of."

I asked if, given the clearly defined professional approach to student relationships, she felt her sexuality played a role in those relationships.

> "...as I was trying to articulate my professional relationship with the student, it did cross my mind that my sexuality, my experience as a student, even before university, in high school, etc., did inform, definitely did shape the way I would have wanted to be treated and I expected to be treated as a student. So, I would say that in that way, in the fact that...I don't come with, well, at least I try not to come with my pre-set ideas of who they are and what's going on in their lives and their skills. Definitely that's informed or shaped by my experience as a lesbian student, a young lesbian student in the past, and also as an immigrant."

She felt that her relationships with students were informed by the intersectional "coming together" of her sexuality and migrant status. She sees this as producing relationships where:

> "I would like the student to think of me as someone they can rely on, and they can trust. In telling them good feedback and giving them good feedback, constructive feedback, helps them to grow, because I'm probably the traditional idea of the educator. So giving them an insight into my values and who I am and what I value, being very open about it, because I think that's about also honesty, you know, the topics I teach have got a strong, probably political and emotional dimensions, you know. I'm very upfront and very open about it. So, I try to be a trustworthy lecturer and give them honesty and professional honesty and the best advice I can give them without necessarily giving them the impression that I'm their friend."

Like all respondents Cathy expresses a concern about the bounding of relationships with students but has perhaps developed a style that allows a greater level of personal revelation, a greater bringing of herself to the classroom than Sarah has managed to do (which causes her some disquiet).

I asked whether, in the light of her institutional openness and commitment to honesty, she thought her students were aware of her sexuality?

> "No, I don't. So, it seems funny, I'm always surprised when people don't assume I'm a lesbian, because I don't do anything to hide it. And I wear, I mean, that's a small thing, but I always wear my ribbon and I've got a story, staff story published on [my institution's] website. I mean, I'm completely out with my team with everyone in the workplace. As I said, my wife works [at the same institution as me] and she's also out. I go to Pride. So, I don't see why they should assume that I'm straight. Probably some do, they imagine that I'm married because I wear my wedding ring. But I don't think I've ever, I don't think I've ever specifically, I don't think I've ever came out to a student, but I also did not come out if it makes sense."

The complexity of the closet is illustrated by Cathy's observations in this extract. She is out and not out – because each interaction with new people requires a new coming out. Even if you are deliberately open and ostensibly "out", unless specifically confronted, heteronormative assumptions permeate the world outside of the closet in influence how people are perceived.

The discussion had raised the issue of Pride, and I was keen to hear Cathy's view, particularly given the range of attitudes that had been expressed by other collaborators.

> "I think Pride is very important for our community, for what it represents and as a political movement, it is a pillar of our tradition, our community, and I wouldn't give it up. I've always gone to Pride. And I know what it means not to have it, you know, in the cities where you're studying and where you're living, and seeing the involvement of the institutions, you know, seeing the mayor marching in front of the line and marching with your employer, I think, it's one of, it's been one of the most liberating experiences in my life."

This is the most political perception of Pride across the engagements, but it also is the one that moves beyond the 'party' and reflects a strong personal political investment in the event. I think it is important to note that Cathy is also the collaborator most involved with Pride, and she also has a very positive view of her institution's involvement.

> "And then, starting to work at university, I've been able to wear the university t-shirt and say, my employer is marching with me. It's not just supporting me from a distance, it's there. And it's there with the whole city. That type of institutional signal, institutional culture and presence makes me feel like I'm protected. I'm, you know, 'They're with me'. It's not just we tolerate you. It's fantastic. I think it's one of the best things of working here, really. This kind of, well, I mean, in my experience, it's been the most friendly place, you know, with so many role models and with a clear institutional culture that I know will stand up for me."

She elaborated on her perceptions of the impact of a LGBTQ+ positive institutional culture.

> "I never felt like there wasn't a safety net. I mean, obviously, [the university] is part of a society and it's part of a context, so we can't really be in a bubble. But I probably have got, I don't know, my background probably makes me start from a lower starting point. So, I see the benefits of working here. I never doubt that [the university] would tackle homophobia, transphobia. They've been very clear, very upfront. And the presence of role models in senior roles is definitely a sign."

There are two observations I would make, the first is positive, I think the cynicism and negative views of some collaborators about Pride are more likely derived from having limited (or no) involvement with aspects other than the 'party'. The second, is not negative but concerning. Cathy frames some of her positivity around personal and professional protection – whilst this reflects the reality of pervasive hetero/homonormativity, I always find it distressing that something as fundamental as feeling safe, occurs so frequently in discussions of the experiences of LGBTQ+ people. It also is the lens through which the role of institutional policy is brought into focus (this would re-emerge as a concern later in the conversation I had with Cathy).

In following up on my reflection about personal safety and protection, I asked Cathy if she had experienced moments where she did not feel safe.

> "If you consider I grew up in [a socially and politically conservative country] in the 90s, then you can imagine what kind of difficulties I had. I wasn't out at all until I went to university and, and there I had a couple of, well probably one episode that really was quite threatening and scary. And then throughout the university, in the [social] context, I'm talking about a very traditional context, I never, other than to my closest friends and flatmates, really felt able to be out. I never imagined it was

> possible to be out in the university context, and certainly not in the workplace. This was one of the main reasons why I left [my birth country]. There's no reason to assume that things haven't changed. I'm sure that things are much better now, but back then it was, I could never have imagined myself being out in the workplace. There wasn't ever any sort of opening or even a neutral approach to you as a person that would make you think actually it's fine to be out."

She contrasted this with her experience in the UK – which is better but not entirely unproblematic.

> "The UK I found much better. I've been always quite lucky to be around people who are very progressive and even within academia, my departments have tended to be accepting. The most I could say is about sometimes feeling a bit different is when it has to do with the assumptions. So, people assume that I'm married to a man, so that's the first thing. Or in conversations around children and motherhood that tend to automatically exclude me when, why would they do that? But again, nothing directly, directly homophobic. It's more heteronormativity that I've experienced here as opposed to straight on homophobia a few years ago."

She mentioned role models in senior management as an indicator of institutional culture and values, so we discussed role models a little more. I asked her if she had been aware of any LGBTQ+ members of staff at her university, to which she replied, "No, absolutely not. No, not at all. Not at all". I asked her how having visible LGBTQ+ role models might have changed her experience:

> "It is about having role models that make you feel like you can be someone, isn't it? So, if I had had a lecturer that was out openly, then that would have made me feel like I also could be a lecturer who was out. And for me being out is very important. I mean, I'm stating the obvious here, but it's quite oppressive, isn't it? If you don't choose to be private, if it's not your choice not to come out, then it becomes just suffocating, isn't it? And once you make such a big effort to come out to your family and your friends and people from your hometown, etc., and you get past that, then I think you become a bit more uncompromising and you expect more, I think. Back then, going back to your question, sorry, it went off a bit on the tangent here, but I would have felt definitely more excited about the subject [I was studying], maybe more happier to see that, really, it wasn't any obvious professional impediment."

The importance, for Cathy, of being out was clear, so I asked about whether she agreed with Toynton's (2016) framing of being out as a responsibility for LGBTQ+ teachers.

> "That's an interesting one. I think that I would be happy to do that, but I would need some, I don't want to say training, but I would need to have a conversation about how to do it, when to do it with the department, for example, with the module leader, whoever would the person responsible to do that. But then that's because I am happy to do that. Why would you put the burden on someone who isn't prepared, isn't ready? We are all at different stages. People realise that they're queer or LGBTQ+, or how they want to define themselves also late in life. So, what do you say then? Oh, by the way, I'm not gay anymore, how would you do

> that? In principle, I can see how powerful that would be, but in practice, I think, it's a bit tricky to do it in practice. Hmm. And I think it would need to be, yeah, really on a voluntary basis. I wouldn't know how to make it an expectation. Yeah, I think that word responsibility is really quite strong. But we say the same thing about actors or football players. If you are in a position of power or influence, then you're obliged. And I am the first that gets frustrated when some actors or some footballers or people that are famous and could make a difference don't come out. But then again, what do you know what's going on in their life and why they, you know, it's their choice. I would want to see more of it. I would want to, to see more actors, etc., doing that, particularly women, particularly in my country. But then, yeah, it's too personal, I suppose... but personal is political, yeah, it's an interesting one."

The extract shows both a recognition of the value of out role models, but also shows a compassionate consideration of people's personal circumstances and choices about revealing their sexuality. This is a view held by most collaborators. Cathy speculated that an element of a reluctance for people to be out in STEM disciplines is the lack of visible high-profile LGBTQ+ academics in most STEM disciplines. This led the conversation back to her position as lesbian STEM tutor:

> "that suggestion of, you know, having the responsibility to come out, that kind of threw me, because, you know, why wouldn't I do it? There's no reason why I wouldn't do it. I think there's still, yeah, I think it of reinforces the idea that as long as there is an institutional and professional context around it, I'm happy to play my role as much as possible, but whether I feel more inclined to come out to be up front with the students, then I think I would say, there's still the kind of professional boundaries that I wouldn't want to cross, and certainly I wouldn't want to put the students on the spot, or, you know, in any way implying that they also need to come out. As I say, I don't do anything to hide it, and I'm always unassuming, I always use, when I talk about hypothetical partners or things, I always use they, I always signal to the students that I'm that type of person, if you like. It's a difficult one. Yeah, I'm not sure, I'm not sure, so would there be a support, like a sort of mentor for LGBTQ+ students? If [my university] asked me to do it, and if it was part of institutional policy, and that would have been...they gave me the reassurance that has been thought through, and that, you know, the implications and the safeguarding issues had been considered, then yes, I would agree then, I would agree to do it. On the back of my own motivation, no, I wouldn't do it alone, because I wouldn't, I'm not sure I would be able to help them necessarily, just because I'm lesbian, you know, I've got a very unique experience, so I would still be very careful about offering that type of support to students. The same as, you know, with mental health issues, [the university] gave me very precise guidelines that, you know, once the issues cross the mental health boundaries, then I have to hand it over, and I'm very careful with that, because I know that the whole policy has been thought through to protect the students, and I would want to see the same before doing more, that is more than, you know, including LGBTQ+ activists or, you know, important scientists."

There is an appeal to policy here that is not unlike the one made by Peter, although the motivation is different. Both feel strongly that elements of their experience and behaviour within their institutions could be simplified through clear policy and

guidelines. Collaborators often had a strong belief that personal vulnerability can be reduced through institutional interventions, despite all of them expressing moments of disquiet and self-censorship within institutional policy contexts that they recognised as supportive and protective. This echoes research of Benozzo *et al*. (2015) presented in the section 'Queer at work'.

Cathy noted that even with such guidelines, institutions would need to be wary of any additional stress it was placing on LGBTQ+ members of staff:

> "I think we need to be, well, we need to be careful on two levels. On us, on the burden that we put on us, because as we know, as members of the LGBTQ+ community, we have to come out, you know, every time. And every time is a bit of an effort. I'm not saying that I've got issues anymore. You know, my family are all absolutely fine, happy, etc. But every time when I'm in a new context with new people, there is a split second that requires me to, okay, now I need to, there is a hurdle in front of me, and I need to do it and I'm trained to do it. So I'm thinking, would there be an added burden that every time I need to, you know, think about how to do it?"

She also acknowledged the impact such interactions could have on students, particularly those who live places explicitly hostile to LGBTQ+ people.

> "The other thing that I was thinking is that, talking about the fact that I would want [my university] to be behind me if I was asked to be a more open, direct role model in the classroom, there are some students that come from places where homosexuality is illegal. And we need to be also mindful of that. I'm not going to say that we can just say it's fine to them, because it's not fine for them. So, if someone came, say, from Europe, and not even all of Europe, but say, the UK or Italy, Belgium, then I would be able to negotiate that a bit better. But I wouldn't want to say something that resulted in, in some sort of behaviour that would put the students that come from other places, like Hungary or places where homosexuality is completely illegal, that would put them in danger. So that's, that's why I would want university reassurance, because I'm not an expert in inequality policies or things like that. I would want the reassurance that negotiating these boundaries would be within what's safe."

All that being said, she felt that an institutional policy that attempted to respond to this conundrum would be possible, but

> "it would open such a lot of... it would open more questions than it could answer".

Aligned with the very positive endorsement of what she perceived the culture of her institution to be, and what it meant to her, she returned to the idea of an enabling environment and supportive culture for both students and staff.

> "The way I see it, I think, [my university] is creating an, is working on creating an environment that enables people to not hide, at least, if they don't want to, and using every opportunity to reinforces the idea that they are with us, and they come with us at Pride, and they would stand up for us if there are homophobic

> incidents, and they create a culture that values diversity. I think that's more, more important than maybe spending, you know, a lot of resources on training me how to, you know, come out in the classroom, or things like that."

I was very interested in Cathy's general optimism about her experience of being a lesbian STEM academic. As the engagement was ending, I asked her if, given her experience, there was still a need for 'the angry queer' in the room?

> "I can also translate it to the angry feminist, you know, like the angry, the angry, yeah, man-hater. It's, it's always funny because, you know, now I'm much happier, but a few years ago I would say, why shouldn't I be angry? We are discriminated against, we can't do the same things as everyone else, you know, why shouldn't we, and I think that, yeah, the sort of struggle and, and to a certain extent what transgender people are going through nowadays is a sign that we need to be prepared to be angry. Again, working in institutions that support you helps, but I think that not being angry and not being switched on and constantly monitoring is not something that we as a minority can afford, unfortunately. And we see that with Brexit and with Trump and [right-wing populist movements in my country of origin], that things can get worse. So, we need to even more be prepared, to be careful that we don't go backwards because historically things have got worse again and then got better again, and so on. But, on a personal level, I understand why someone wouldn't want to make constantly that effort, it's exhausting and there are times where I just leave it, I just leave it because I'm exhausted and it's tiring. So, I completely understand. But collectively, overall, unfortunately, I would like to have the luxury of constantly not having to do that because the norm, unfortunately, is still what it is? And we've got to, well, I don't... I'm not even sure that we are completely equal, frankly, still in society."

It was sobering note right near the end of the engagement, and it echoes elements of Max's observations about the precariousness of LGBTQ+ rights – perhaps even human rights in general.

Right at the start of this extract, Cathy is reflecting on the past, but it seamlessly transitions to the present – perhaps subconsciously. I think this is characteristic of so many moments in this series of engagements – everything is / seems fine until a moment of realisation prompts recognition of the compromise, the censorship, the defensiveness, the sense of threat, the isolation, the lack of confidence, the vulnerability, the need for protection... The moment of realisation of how being a member of a minority, an invisible minority, plays out for people. There is no universality in the experience other than in its varying levels of discomfort and personal cost.

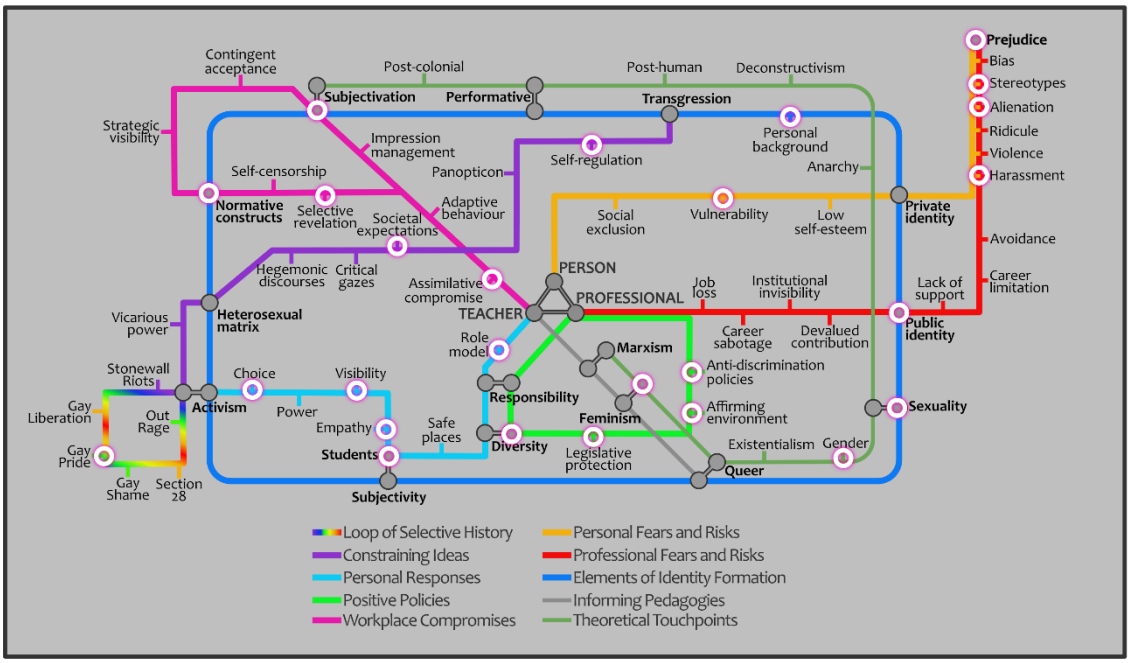


Figure 14: Conceptual touchpoints from Cathy's main engagement.

Sensemaking: Main engagements

The following constellation of related ideas started to form immediately after the second of these engagements and continued to do so until they were concluded. It has continued to evolve since. I am presenting these here as a framing response that went on to shape the second engagements where my initial thinking and integration of ideas were discussed with the collaborators. I will, where appropriate, link back to key thinkers, themes, and research evidence, as a key finding of this research is the powerful commonalities between the collective experience of the project collaborators, elements of queer theoretical thinking, and evidence presented in the extensive body of research, both quantitative and qualitative, published about LGBTQ+ workplace experiences.

The first thing that struck me across the engagements is that corroborating previous research all the collaborators use impression management behaviours in professional contexts (Ozturk and Rumens, 2014; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009; Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger, 2009; Giuffre, Dellinger and Williams, 2008; Adkins, 2000). Peter is the most extreme example with his 'don't ask, don't tell' approach.

Sarah's perfectionism and controlled management of classroom situations is closely related, and James's coded revelation is a similar way of managing relationships.

Cathy and Max regarded themselves as out in terms of their relationships with colleagues. Max's engagement was very interesting as he was very aware of appearing confident and being completely out to both colleagues and students, but with no prompting acknowledged that this often disguised a profound sense of self-consciousness and even fear. Cathy's relationship with colleagues is completely open, but she is very wary of the complexities of being open with students – where she has a very defined formulation of what she feels is acceptable. that the complexities can be managed through clear guidelines and policy. Carl is a noteworthy exception, regarding himself as equally and fully out to both colleagues and students. I suspect that this is linked to the potential, and perhaps expectation for less formality in the relationship between technicians and students.

Cathy, Sarah, Carl, and Max are married, and have used this as a way of coming out to colleagues, by referring to their partner using gendered pronouns, or traditional descriptors such as 'wife' in Cathy's case. Their responses suggest that this provides a (homo)normative (Duggan, 2002) security in their understanding of other's perceptions of them (and their sexuality), and situates them, via their relationships, within Rubin's (2012) charmed circle of acceptability. It is interesting that in contrast to this, James specifically resisted the normative expectations that legally recognised lesbian and gay relations created – calling it the "fetishisation of the family unit".

All the respondents had experienced serious homophobic incidents, either personally, professionally, or both. These included hostility from within their families, threats of physical violence from strangers, or intimidatory behaviour from students they teach. All but one collaborator had experienced some form of hostility or micro-aggression at their current institution. The value of James's queer research was questioned. Sarah had been outed by a colleague. Cathy was excluded from conversations about raising children. Max experienced stereotyping based on assumptions of promiscuity, and an expectation to behave in a camp manner. Peter

had an almost opposite experience, where he was not recognised as a member of a minority when he applied for an EDI champion role. Such experiences are repeatedly documented in related literature (Reggiani, Gagnon and Lunn, 2023; Yoder and Mattheis, 2016; Partridge, Barthelemy and Rankin, 2014; Cech and Waidzunas, 2011; Bilimoria and Stewart, 2009).

Pride events were generally regarded positively and considered an important declaration of institutional allyship. Only Cathy had participated in Pride-related activities organised by her institution – the public declarative and symbolic value of this was very meaningful to her. Sarah wanted to participate, but simultaneously reflected that she was "not that type pf person…not brave enough". Generally though, collaborators were ambivalent about their institutions' actual commitment to LGBTQ+ issues and regarded their efforts as inconsistent and tokenistic. Prasad *et al*. (2011) note that such symbolic gestures, occurring only once or twice a year, such as during Pride and LGBTQ + History months, can be negatively received especially in the absence of meaningful policy, activity, or actual inclusive practice.

Max suggested that the historical significance of Pride had been lost alongside its relevance to the ongoing struggle for recognition and rights. Cathy pointed to the rise of right-wing populism alongside an increase in homophobic and transphobic attacks as a particular concern, and Max also noted that current rights are not guaranteed to last – with a striking reference to the notably 'gay friendly' situation in Berlin in the 1930s. All collaborators did agree that there was a sense that the struggles for LGBTQ+ rights ended with equal marriage recognition and its assimilative promise, but that this was unfounded and did not reflect their experience. The growing force of homonormative expectations exacerbates this perception, and it is interesting that all four of the collaborators who are married acknowledged its value in easing their coming out to (and acceptance by) their colleagues. Grant (2016) and Robinson (2012) highlight the impact of the depoliticization and assimilative practices as amounting to queer erasure but rendering LGBTQ+ issues invisible or no longer worthy of concern. This perception is

brutally exposed as unfounded and uninformed by existing research as well as the stories told by collaborators in this project.

Carl and Peter felt that some sub-cultures of the LGBTQ+ community behaved inappropriately (presented in an over-sexualised way) at Pride events. Concerns about stereotypes, and experiences of being stereotyped, concerned most of the collaborators. Nassar-McMillan *et al*. (2011) note stereotyping as a widespread experience for LGBTQ+ people. The experience of collaborators was very varied and sometimes nuanced. Max was simultaneously aware of sometime being 'camp' but was also recognised as a 'flamboyant' person – creating a tension between self-awareness and behavioural expectations of others. He had also been victim of the 'promiscuous' stereotype of gay men, during his divorce. Sarah described herself as presenting 'somewhat on the butch side' when thinking about how she is perceived by colleagues and students, and acknowledging in the same sentence that she is uncomfortable with the butch/femme stereotypes of lesbian women. A final example comes from Carl who was asked, when he announced that he had married his male partner, who the wife was...a response which he found shockingly archaic. While this final example is extreme, and shows and external perspective, Sarah and Max's experiences are more complex, as they reveal the extent to which such socially pervasive constructs about LGBTQ+ identities even inform our thinking about ourselves, reflecting the process of subjectivation (Foucault, 1979) very clearly. Further consideration of the presented identities of the collaborators from a theoretical perspective shows that most recognised differences in the performative identities (Butler, 1999) between their personal, professional, and pedagogic contexts. For Peter, the distance between these performances was relatively small with all being informed by a series of negative personal and professional experiences. The conversations with Peter suggested a fixed perception of a single identity. For Max, the distance was similarly small, reflecting his confidence and commitment to being out – but he also expressed the most profound sense of vulnerability that this decision created in some contexts. Sarah's experience in this context has the most facets, with an out identity with family and friends, a cautious,

guarded and slightly distrusting identity with colleagues (in a general sense, where personal relationships have not been established), and a more constrained identity in relating to students. James spoke directly of different identities, for example, he said "I also identify as a researcher", suggesting a clear awareness of the performative nature of his identities.

The engagements with Cathy and Max also revealed strong intersectional (Crenshaw, 1990) aspects to their identities. Cathy spoke of her experiences, and how they influenced her teaching identity, as a woman, as an immigrant and as a lesbian. Each of these inflected her identity at different, often unexpected moments. She experienced a profound sense of otherness when she spoke directly to students of herself as an immigrant. She was disappointed in herself when she referred to her wife as her partner during a conversation – not understanding why she had done it. She had a very strong sense of how these two informed her experience as a woman; and she related the identity of the 'angry queer' directly to the 'angry feminist' – recognising the way in which they interact and inform each other.

Most respondents were not active participants in institutional LGBTQ+ activities, and staff networks were not regarded as an important aspect of their professional experience (although this would change for some over the period of the research project). Max is the only person to have related a specifically negative experience in reference to staff networks (a sense of not having been supported when he reached out at a difficult time of his life), most were simply not engaged because their experience with the network had not been enticing enough to remain engaged. Peter's tentative engagement was unsuccessful as he felt the subject matter (HIV) and related emotive content, were too intense. He also felt that the low numbers of attendees created a heightened sense of vulnerability, rather than a sense of community. Sarah is an exception, having not engaged at all with the network. Research has suggested the value of networks in creating positive workplaces, but they have to be dynamic and responsive to members to be successful (Lee, 2023, p.1195).

Peter was particularly scathing about his institution's EDI initiatives., which he saw as disproportionately focussed on some designated groups at the expense of others. Such perceptions have been shown to reduce feelings of security or belonging within organisations (Reggiani, Gagnon and Lunn, 2023). He very (very, very) strongly felt that LGBTQ+ inclusivity had a much lower profile than initiatives related to ethnicity or race. Carl, and active network member, recognised that his institution was not "pushing forward...gay diversity" but was relying on the staff and student LGBTQ+ networks to do this – but noted that his institution was usually supportive of any ideas raised by the network, and that it had been consulted during the development of an institutional transgender policy. During the second engagements, all collaborators conceded that Peter's observation may be valid, although none felt as strongly about it as he did. I will elaborate on this in the next section. However, it is worth noting that corporate EDI initiatives that are perceived as manifesting a discrepancy in how different groups are treated result in negative emotional affects, such as anger, lowered self-esteem, increased stress, disengagement, and dissatisfaction (Mor Barak *et al*., 2016). This list describes Peter's experience disturbingly well.

I think it is also perhaps important to note that Peter's engagement was strongly focussed on him defining a (narrow) relationship structure for engaging with students. It does not resonate with the pedagogy described by James, or the contextually nuanced views of student relationships that were suggested by Cathy and Sarah during their engagements, all of which have a queer, affective pedagogy flavour (hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2000).

Whilst there were varying levels of satisfaction with the visibility of LGBTQ+ support, all collaborators felt strongly that their institutions' policies related to workplace bullying and LGBTQ+ rights would protect them if they needed it, and it acted as a reassurance of their institution's commitment to EDI. What I found disquieting about this element is how quickly the focus shifted to the ideas of safety and needing protection when it came to thinking about how their LGBTQ+ identity played out in a professional context. Workplace climate – as presented by formal institutional

characteristics – is shown to have less influence on positive workplace attitudes and wellbeing than supportive workplace relationships (Webster *et al.*, 2018). This is problematic as disclosure is required for the latter to be realised, and disclosure is inhibited by negative perceptions of the former. It is also the community that Peter feels is so sorely lacking in his professional context.

James's engagement is something of an outlier, in that the focus was more directly maintained on classroom behaviours and relationships with students. It had a stronger pedagogic focus than the others. I think this can be seen as an expression of James's reliance on theoretical ideas as a way of managing levels of self-disclosure through coded self-revelation. Whilst personal relationships with students were discussed, they were contextualised through pedagogic approaches to education within his discipline. Even within this defined horizon, James was quick to point out the personal vulnerability and discomfort that engaging with students holistically – as opposed to didactically – creates. He acknowledged that it is something that he struggles with. It is, however, a recognised element of queer pedagogic relationships (Letts and Fifield, 2017; Jannat, 2021). Unlike other collaborators, he thought that institutional policies were unlikely to be useful at the level of individual relationships with students. This is an interesting departure, as it implies that personal pedagogic relationships sit somewhere beyond the reach institutional policy, but also, possibly an acceptance of the unavoidably personal and intimate nature of such relationships (Jannat, 2021). Along with Cathy, Sarah and Max, James presented an awareness of the complex and personal relationships that characterise teaching, and while none would recognise the terminology, I believe these nuanced and reflexive conceptualisation of teaching hint at an anarchic model of relating as described by Heckert (2010a), and eros in pedagogic relationships (Jannat, 2021).

James was the only collaborator to have done queer research – and so also the only one to have had its value questioned. The complexity of marginalised researchers doing research on marginalised communities has been examined by Veldhuis (2022). She notes that such research can have negative career and personal impacts. It is

also frequently regarded as less objective, and of lower value, than research on majority populations. Interestingly, research also shows that LGBTQ+ academics who do not disclose their identities produced fewer peer-reviewed articles than those who did (Nelson, Mattheis and Yoder, 2022). This augments arguments for inclusive workplaces, by adding considerations of productivity to the well-rehearsed value-led arguments.

The second engagements

Whilst still open discussions, the second engagements were more structured as they were shaped by the headline findings of the first engagements. The prompts I used for these discussions were shaped by my engagement with the data during the process of transcription, and the mapping of the arising ideas against the conceptual topology presented in Figure 7. The prompts were not presented in a questioning format, but as openings for reflection and comment – I tried to be as non-directive as I could in these, as in all, engagements. And whilst, acknowledging my privileged position as the instigating and reporting collaborator, I was an active participant in the exchanges responding to observations and enriching the context of elements on which individual collaborators chose to focus.

Second Engagements: Method – Reflexive thematic exploration

I am going to approach the presentation of the second engagements by using the principles of inductive, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). This approach will enable a conversation across the second engagements that involves all the collaborators. Reflexive thematic analysis aligns with the research ethos of this project. It recognises the intersubjectivity of qualitative engagement. However, in this instance, the ambition was not a pseudo-quantification of the results (which would run counter to the ideal of personal engagement on which the project is founded), but only to use the tools of reflexive thematic analysis to explore commonalities across and between the conversations that I had with the collaborators.

A schematic of the analytical conversation is presented in Figure 15. My role is to act as a central point within the series of conversations through which the relationships and synergies between them can be revealed. All collaborators are presented as coalesced into a unit rather than as isolated individuals. The glow from each collaborator intersects with that of their neighbours and the glow from me (the instigating collaborator) suggesting the more integrative discussion that this series of engagements was fostering. This representation also reflects that the contributions of the collaborators in the main engagements have been integrated then re-presented to them as a point of departure for these engagements. The analytical

approach is presented on the arc of intersection between me and the other collaborators.

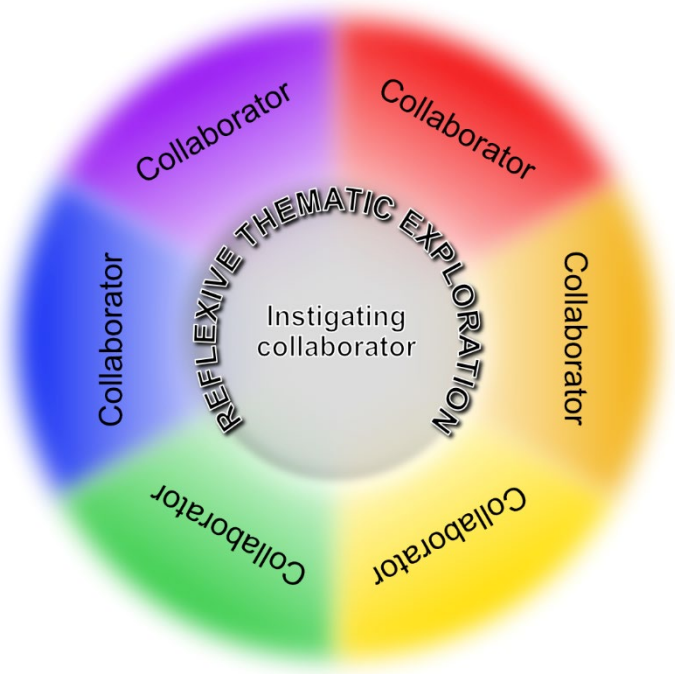


Figure 15:The interpretative strategy for the second engagements.

The combined second engagement transcripts were loaded into Nvivo 14, which I used as an environment for managing the coding process and enabling a conversation to be realised across the engagements and between collaborators, but not as an analytical tool. Putting the collaborators in conversation with each other at this point allows an exploration of the issues, ideas, experiences, hopes, and fears between them. The reflexive coding and subsequent theming revealed commonalities and enabled an examination of the synergies across the second engagements in response to identifiable common concerns and ideas.

It is hoped that this approach will assist the development of practical recommendations from this research. The themes (in simple alphabetical order) that emerged from this process were:

- Coming out
- Complexity of LGBTQ+ issues
- Emotional costs
- Homophobia
- Institutional structures and support
- Normative forces
- Optimism
- Pedagogy
- Pride
- Queer theory and sexuality
- The staff network
- Student relationships
- Workplace experiences

Across the engagements, the most common area of discussion focussed on the institutional level of their universities – the culture, policies, and actions in the context of LGBTQ+ staff experience. There are no unanimous ringing endorsements or damning denunciations. The engagements revealed a diversity of positions. Collaborators often highlighted policy as one of the framing tenets of their perception of institutional culture. The value of policies around EDI and workplace bullying were acknowledged as reassuring for the collaborators, who were aware of their position as an invisible minority within their institutions. Cathy expressed it very clearly,

> "I know that procedures are in place. I trust the institution that it's there. I don't need to be aware [of it] all the time...I find it already draining- Brexit and racism and all that. So that's why I say I see the value of working at [my institution] because I know, I trust, I know it's there".

She acknowledges, though, that her background may influence this position,

> "but then I'm very procedural because I studied public administration and governance".

Max had a similar confidence in the policy context of LGBTQ+ staff,

> "if I needed support, I would get it. The institution would support me".

There was a feeling, though, that there was not enough guidance and support with respect to their teaching relationships with students (as LGBTQ+ / role models / mentors / visibility) which resulted in a reticence to choose visibility in classroom situations, Cathy, again,

> "I'm willing to be X, but I'll only be X if the institution is condoning that and setting the parameters".

Sarah presented a more profound personal awareness of vulnerability (a recurrent theme that I will explore later) in a teaching instance:

> "I know that I've got the safety that's provided by the EDI guidelines and our approach as an employer and support from colleagues, where I probably would feel less safe to do something, would be to be openly out in front of the students, because I would feel so vulnerable, so exposed. The EDI framework that exists in policies and on the internet and whatever, wouldn't, wouldn't protect me at that instant moment in which I received negative, negative feedback or negative reaction from a student in the classroom."

The throwaway remark of "that exists on the internet and whatever" is worth noting; other collaborators felt the policies, whilst reassuring, were not readily accessible. Max noted,

> "But not very many people know where they would have to go to if they did actually need it. It's on the internet, but apart from that, I don't know".

Carl, an office holder in an LGBTQ+ Staff Network, also acknowledged this distance between policy and awareness,

> "general lack of knowledge of what to do if you were involved in some kind of homophobic experience".

Collaborators were generally surprised by the extent of commonalities between their collective experiences and other research focussing on LGBTQ+ workplace experiences. Sarah was intrigued by this,

> "what does it suggest? It's just that it goes beyond your, the independent institutional sort of approach, doesn't it? But is it the fact that we're all working in institutions that don't have appropriate, I don't know, awareness, perhaps, and or awareness training...".

Institutional visibility of LGBTQ+ issues was a contentious issue. As in the 1st engagements, Peter had strong opinions on the matter:

> "I do feel at the university sort of, it's not promoted anymore, it's not talked about, it's not the flavour of the week".

He repeated comparisons with other legislatively designated groups,

Queer guerillas reclaiming Alan Turing

For a while, there has an ongoing war of attrition with an unknown adversary. There is a large picture of Alan Turing along with an inspirational quote in our building. During LGBTQ+ History month, a Pride sticker was repeatedly put on this display - like a lapel pin. It was removed within a day, replaced, and removed again - every time. This went on for weeks. Upping the ante, the message "Removing this sticker is a homophobic act" was added to a sticker. That one lasted two days.

Every so often, a further attempt to reclaim Turing as an LBGTQ+ hero and martyr is made, never with any lasting success - the stickers are always removed.

Appendix 6 presents what happened next.

> "So now it's all black history, black lives...disability doesn't even get a look in either. You think, well, you're supposed to do equality and diversity, diversity being the word ...Where's the disability, where's the wall of disabled champions, where's the wall of gay heroes or trans people who've made a difference?".

He concluded,

> "The institutional recognition of the LGBTQ+ is crap, because actually they don't recognise it".

Cathy does not see the EDI space as one of competition,

> "obviously, if we advance equality for one group, we'll advance equality for everyone. So, I don't feel particularly in competition".

But she does recognise a difference in messaging institutionally:

> "I've noticed that there's been attention to BME people. But also the trans issues have been quite high profile. So, if you're talking about lesbian and gay and bisexual people or, you know, non-trans, okay, maybe there's been less messaging around that. But if we include transgender people, I think the messaging has been quite strong and clear."

Carl recognises a disparity in representation,

> "we're in Black History now ... there are university initiatives, their posters, the SU is involved. But for LGBTQ History Month, there's nothing. Centrally".

As an office holder in an LGBTQ+ staff network, he noted that feelings of unequal emphasis across the networks was not unique,

> "the Black & Minority Ethnic staff network felt it was more their network that was not valued".

Perhaps Carl's observation that institutions need to be more involved with the staff networks is key,

> "some of the networks feel they are giving feedback on different policies ...and it isn't being listened to. It just didn't seem to go anywhere...".

Supporting the creation and running of them is not enough. Minority-focussed networks need to be more than sounding boards; there needs to be integration and communication between the networks and institutions which should inform debates around EDI issues at the institutional level. Peter, again, cynically observes,

> "it comes back to management ticking boxes rather than actually doing the job that needs to be done".

Staff networks generated a lot of discussion, and collaborators had different experiences. Sarah and James had never been involved, Cathy and Peter had attended some meetings, but did not feel that it offered them what they needed, e.g.,

a sense of community, or a useful resource. I would regard myself as something of a lapsed networker, I have presented talks on a few occasions, but my engagement has been sporadic.

Cathy explained what she would like from the network as follows,

> "I would like more of a, more of a relational experience, maybe. Maybe a space for these type of slow deliberations about sharing educational practices and things might be useful".

Peter's experience was not one of community,

> "The staff network... it's disastrous, isn't it? I've been to one event with them, and it's really poorly turned out. It's just three people".

Carl recognised the conundrum of creating a successful network – people will attend if they feel it is worth doing so, if there are useful activities, and if there is a sense of community, all of which rely on an engaged and diverse membership, but

> "obviously not everyone's a member of the network. It also only catches the people who are willing to be, not necessarily out to everyone, but out to other gay people in the institution. And not everyone engages, like the network engagement has been shocking, I think after March we kind of like, we'll just give up now...".

He also explained how they have tried to involve the members in shaping the activities,

> "we put out surveys, like trying to improve the network and like get more engagement and people that are engaged in that, like you need to tell me what you want to make it better. We had maybe six, seven people reply".

Workplace experiences are closely linked to institutional policy and structures, as they influence the type of culture that it is hoped will be realised, which in turn influences behaviours and experience of both staff and students. None of the collaborators had experienced extreme homophobic incidents in their current employment, and for the most part felt that their institution was a good place to work. However, that is tempered by an across-the-board adoption of impression management behaviours and self-censorship. Peter, had particularly unpleasant experiences with a previous employer:

> my old boss used to make jokes, fags and whatever, and it just wasn't a safe space to talk to people about that, because although they didn't direct it at me, if that's their thinking, then that actually... they don't necessarily think about what they're saying, but people that witness that, it's actually ... this isn't a safe space, this isn't somewhere where I can be me, this isn't... and then all the barriers come up"

He explained his adaptive adopted behaviours,

> "you just build all these mechanisms of coping and having a secret identity. Which is really sad".

Even in the 1st engagement Peter, recognised the personal costs of his choices, and again it is the closing aside "which is really sad" that speaks more powerfully than any description of what types of choices are made, and perhaps even why. Peter even presented a sense of self-blame for his emotional response to overhearing a hostile conversation amongst colleagues,

> "Don't eavesdrop on a conversation and get upset because you eavesdropped."

This is echoed in Sarah's self-reported lack of confidence about being out or participating in Pride, which arises from a perception of the unacceptability of her sexuality to her family – and the associated guilt. It is also worth noting that Sarah experienced the most extreme hostile experience in her current institution – being outed to students by a colleague. Her strategy to overcome her lack of confidence and feelings of inadequacy is to be "be really, really, really good" at her job. The lasting impact of negative, professional and / or personal, experiences should not be underestimated.

Cathy, is probably the most institutionally visible collaborator, having participated in an LGBTQ+ staff profiles project. However, she too has moments where self-censorship occurs, as she reflects on having described her wife (her preferred description) as her partner in a conversation,

> "And I thought, why did I do that? Normally, I wouldn't hide...But there are moments where it kicks in- this self-censorship".

Sarah summed things up,

> "the types of self-protection practices we put in place do constrain the types of relationships we have with students and colleagues".

Although she also recognises the value of being a role model to LGBTQ+ students:

> "it's something that strikes me quite often about this, is you have to think about those students, who are in that group, who we're interacting with, who might not feel confident about coming out, who might be really scared and really not know what, you know, what this is all about, and what to do. And of course, if we are happy to be quite open about who we are, then it gives them some sort of sense of security, of hope, of comfort, maybe, that they can be who they want to be, they can be accepted, they can be successful. If they see us, see us as successful

> professionals, then it's about the role model, isn't it? I think that's really important for us to keep an eye on."

Despite this compelling argument for being out to students, Cathy does not feel able to do that. It is interesting that her closing remark suggests a distance from the idea, rather than engagement. A measure of cognitive dissonance is evident in the stories of all the collaborators – which points to the complexity of the lived classroom experience for LGBTQ+ tutors, especially in the context of relationships with those they teach.

Even outside of discussions around sexuality or role models, Cathy recognises that there is

> "kind of a tension between the spontaneity and the, well, the discomfort of accidental disclosure",

and recognises that much of this anxiety could be resolved through deeper relationships with students:

> "So maybe investing more time with students in that trust building... the mutual trust and respect, and it takes time, you know, and maybe if the culture were this more open and deeper conversation are normalised, instead of, okay, we have to do this, this and this, but you know, just take time to breathe and reflect, and give the lecturer and the students the time to build that trust."

Cathy also makes an insightful observation about the role of LGBTQ+ role models in an educational institution, they are important for students, but they are equally important for other LGBTQ+ members of staff:

> "this is an area where role models and norms can, for example, you know, see how other people do it and experience safety...So I'm sure that having role models would help me, you know, a lot in seeing, okay, well, I can do that with students, I can do that with colleagues and feel safe".

I would suggest that similar levels of trust to those she refers to in fostering supportive relationships with students, also apply to relationships with colleagues. The above discussion reveals a range of factors that collaborators considered in their relationships, out or not, with colleagues and students. McKenna-Buchanan, Munz and Rudnick (2015) list five inter-relating criteria that govern decisions about disclosure in the classroom, cultural, gender, contextual, risk-benefit and motivational. They also found a general willingness to self-disclose in response to self-disclosure by a student.

Interestingly, Cathy also related a story where she felt extremely self-conscious – but it was not related to sexuality, but rather where she explicitly acknowledged her country of origin and nationality. Her emotional response to this disclosure surprised her, but it may also hint at the intensified, yet generalised, vulnerability LGBTQ+ tutors may feel about any personal revelation which sets them apart from a perceived norm.

James focussed on the value of defying student expectations as a way of promoting trusting and 'relaxed' relationships with students:

> "Expectation: here is James. James will critique your work. James will treat you in a certain way and talk to you in a certain way. But then, you know, kind of, James comes in, starts laughing with you and telling you stories. And there's this kind of. Yeah, pretty more kind of laid back, relaxed relationship forming. That hopefully isn't scary. Yeah. it can be this lovely kind of break between the expectation and the reality."

It is worth recognising that the tension arising from spontaneity in the classroom, that Cathy alluded to in an earlier extract, may manifest in situations such as the one described by James, but I also think the power of the phrase "lovely kind of break between the expectation and the reality" regarding the relationships we have with our students should not be overlooked.

Carl recognises the potential obligation that being out to students might imply, to be responsible for

There's a queer in my curriculum

The first time I chose to make sexuality part of the content I presented to students was anxiety ridden. I had discussed what I was planning to do with the module leader and why and had their support. I was talking about a Victorian environmental and vegetarian activist, Edward Carpenter. He was also gay, and a political activist about sexuality, within the confines of his time.

As the moment drew closer, the moment that the terrifying, related PowerPoint slide would appear, I could feel my throat constricting, and was convinced the pitch of my voice was rising as I became more tense, and that my face was flushing. The slide came up, I said what I had planned to, and there was no shocked outrage...

Students came up to me afterwards and said it was interesting, one asked about Edward Carpenter.

This has inspired me to be more of a pedagogic activist, and I have now included some queer content in almost every module I teach.

> "pastoral care of LGBTQ students as LGBTQ members of staff. Visibility and things like that put you in that position".

Managing relationships with students from different cultural and religious backgrounds was raised by most collaborators as a complicating element in the context of role models and normalising non-heterosexual relationships and identities – but it was never regarded as an institutional issue. I find it uncomfortably ironic that despite this view, disclosure by students was consistently problematised. Max felt this could be addressed institutionally by providing training to staff who were willing to take on that role. In the final engagement he would tell of his involvement with supporting LGBTQ+ students from religious minorities. Similar complexities have been revealed in the context of Christian colleges in the US (McKenna-Buchanan, Munz and Rudnick, 2015).

Collaborators frequently had quite complex relationships with normative ideas – both heteronormative and homonormative. It is worth noting that four of the collaborators described themselves as 'married' and were in some form of legally recognised partnership. All of them said that this made it easier for them to come out – mainly using gendered pronouns in reference to their spouses. Sarah recognised the acceptability of their relationships,

> "because we are starting to conform to the cultural norm, which is that you are married or in a civil partnership".

James (unmarried) has a more ambivalent and queer view of gay marriage and its normative baggage:

> "[Marriage] is how people see, how people see the definition of a family as being contingent on the definition of gender roles. And those roles for me are standing as the kind of foundation stone of the wall that's really disallowing us to properly engage with the idea of fluidity of gender, fluidity of relations. I think of homosexuality as something that can't be formed in the 'normal way' and forces a new perspective".

It is interesting that when Carl told some of his colleagues that he was married to a man, one jokingly asked who the wife was,

> "and I thought, really, really, is that still a thing?".

In the context of the discussion of STEM workplace experiences and teaching Cathy observes,

> "by not saying or acknowledging the gender and sexuality of a scientist is almost by default making them male and heterosexual".

During the engagements, particularly when talking about teaching, the queer element of decolonising the curriculum was raised, and the above quote from Cathy introduces this very clearly. I feel quite strongly about not only selecting content and contributors that defy the straight male stereotype (of most STEM fields), also to make explicit who they are and why they were selected. Sarah noted in this regard:

> "...it needs to be more than us within the LGBTQ community teaching about this. It needs to be the, you know, the mainstream kind of heterosexuals, you know, it needs to be those colleagues as well who are bringing these elements in authentically. Otherwise, it can come across as, you know, the LGBTQ community, kind of banging a drum".

She went on to elaborate on this idea:

> "I think it's got more power probably sometimes if it is a straight colleague- the difficulties that this scientist had as they were going through their scientific career or whatever, you know, and still to be able to publish a groundbreaking study such as this is incredible now, when we look at some of their experiences, and how they were pushed to the periphery, and the fringes of science and of their particular communities as well. You know, I include some of that in my module. Judging by how much that captures the students' interest and imagination, one can only then kind of roll that forward and think about how similar stories about black and minority ethnic or LGBTQ scientists would hold the same kind of interest."

The reticence of LGBTQ+ staff in a range of disciplines, including STEM, to make themselves vulnerable has already been discussed. Members of invisible minorities experience the double bind of minority status enmeshed with the personal and professional security provided by self-selected invisibility. Most collaborators framed their situation as one of vulnerability in both personal and professional contexts, also highlighting the rise of right-wing populism as a further source of concern. Carl noted:

> "After Brexit, hate crime surged against all minorities, which I think is a really worrying reflection. And the fact that, you know, the people I'm talking to have experienced what other gay people, lesbian people around the world experience routinely, and continue to experience."

During the second engagement with Cathy, she turned the tables on me by asking if I would present this research at a departmental seminar. My response to this suggestion echoed elements of her first engagement where she discussed being "an angry feminist". I said,

> "I think I would. It would make me feel quite uncomfortable, I think. But I think I would. Yeah, it's interesting. It's far easier to talk to a thousand strangers than it is to talk to thirty people you work closely with. I wish I was more of a campaigner in many respects because I think you kind of need angry people on the edges to really push the agenda, but they need to be brave. And I'm not very brave".

Peter raised concerns about the unpredictability and irrevocability of choosing visibility – he even suggested that he would feel uncomfortable just being visible, regardless of the reaction he may receive:

> "Once it's out there, it's out there, you can't unsay it. That's the big risk, isn't it? You've got to try and figure people out and go, well you will be OK... Sometimes you think, oh, we're getting there, and then they'll say something, and you think, no, not yet. I think if the relationship I have with [office mate] were to change, I think I wouldn't want to be there as much, because I would feel that it would be hostile."

Reflecting on the value of having members of staff visible in high traffic areas in the building, Sarah recognises both the value of being visible for those who chose to themselves, but also for those who choose not to be visible:

> "Yeah, the idea of having the LGBTQ heroes is brilliant, because those of us that would be, and I would use the word brave, you know, those of us that would be brave enough, be prepared to be visible like that, would already have reduced one of the barriers within the classroom. Because, our image will be on in the corridor, be visible. And then, of course, when we walk into the classroom, that initial tricky barrier has gone. There is no control over who sees that image in the corridor, or what they say about it, or we probably hope, you know, we don't hear what they say, hopefully, hopefully not, if it's a negative thing. It does starts to sort of dissolve one of those initial barriers for all of us, I think. But for people... but you've got to have the confidence, self-awareness, and courage to say, actually, I'll add my own mugshot to that list of LGBTQ heroes."

It is noteworthy that Sarah does not feel brave enough to do this. In many instances, collaborators held contradictory positions, Carl recognised that

> "people's beliefs and their behaviours didn't always align";

and Sarah suggested that people who recognise their professional experience as

> "positive and affirmative, ... still experience feelings of vulnerability in standard professional situations".

Cathy, as the most institutionally visible collaborator, made a plea for understanding, empathy, and forgiveness for others and, importantly, ourselves:

> "But if people are willing to start their journey, I think it's important to understand that not everyone starts from the same point and that we'll fail, we'll make mistakes. And as long as it's acknowledged, I think we can move on. And then next time... It happens to me, sometimes I make assumptions that are biased, and I say, I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have done that. And I reflect on it. And the next time I try not to do it."

The idea of empathy as a point of departure in professional relationships, with both colleagues and students, is profound. It is a foundational tenet of this project, but it is also recognised as a central tenet of inclusive education (Moriña and Orozco, 2022), and is certainly an explicit element of queer pedagogy.

Sensemaking: Second Engagements

The second engagements did not elicit any surprises. At the end of the first engagement themes were emerging, with each collaborator, in many ways, representing something of an archetypal position in response to mediating their sexuality within a professional context and the associated relationships with colleagues and students. Presenting the ideas that emerged from the first engagements to collaborators in the second engagements, provoked further reflection – but did not prompt any profound shifts in perspectives. It is interesting that being made aware of other collaborators impression management strategies was seen as a validation of their own strategies.

There was a strong sense of openness to the validity of others' experiences and choices which, most importantly, also fed through to consideration of the relationships we have, or would like to have, with students. So, the idea of compassionate, empathetic, intersubjective engagement with students as individuals and not as members of an aggregated cohort became a common point of discussion. However, the perception that this is premised on having both the personal confidence and courage, alongside institutional guidance, and support, was also reaffirmed.

In the conversations, people were also surprised by the pervasive experiences of homophobia, from blatant hostility to microaggressions, that all collaborators had experienced to a lesser or greater degree. It is noteworthy to me that all these experiences continue to have an undeniable and powerful shaping influence on the attitudes and behaviours of collaborators which – to borrow a phrase from Peter – "is sad".

Perhaps less disturbing, but still important, is the recognition of the hegemonic power of heteronormativity – and its othering of LGBTQ+ people. It must also be recognised that most collaborators used normative ideals, specifically gay marriage, to reduce the awkwardness, and ease the process of coming out to colleagues.

Whilst surprise was expressed about some of the experiences of other collaborators, nothing was made of the fact that all collaborators were self-censoring, modifying behaviours, and limiting self-expression – often motivated by considerations of not feeling safe, even within institutions whose policies they trust to protect them from grosser forms of homophobia in the workplace.

It is important to acknowledge that the source of this dissonance invariably lay in experiences that were not linked to their current employer, or indeed, any negative experience in a professional context (with Peter being an exception to this). Not feeling safe turned into a sense of vulnerability, especially in the context of relationships with students. Even the most out and confident felt anxiety around being openly LGBTQ+ in pedagogic and pastoral relationships – especially given the absence of guidance on how to perform such relationships from their institutions. Most felt that having such guidance or specific policies would make them feel more confident in such relationships – but some felt that they were not able to start such relationships at all.

The heated issue of institutional commitment – beyond supporting Pride – coalesced around equitable visibility with other designated groups. There was no emergent consensus – most collaborators agreed that there were differing levels of visibility during designated months. However, no-one, including people in leadership positions in staff networks, could explain why this was, or indeed who was sponsoring and producing materials linked with other high visibility campaigns. It is also important to note that other staff network leaders expressed similar concerns about *their own* Cinderella status. Cathy's observation about it not being a competition echoes the sentiment so eloquently expressed by Audre Lorde, that there is no hierarchy of oppression (Lorde, 1983).

The complexity of making an impactful intervention in the workplace experience of LGBTQ+ staff is laid bare in this constructed conversation. Their institutions can and do, for most collaborators, provide a sense of protection from homophobia through its workplace policies. It seems, however, that collaborators still experience their professional relationships through a pervasive heteronormative culture and feel unable or unwilling to put themselves in a position of perceived vulnerability – in particular, in the context of relationships with students, which move beyond the ambit of equality legislation and employment policies. In contrast to any policy environment, corporate culture perpetuates a sense of discomfort, through a perceived lack of personal existential safety.

A colleague of mine once described teaching as emotional labour – it was something of an epiphany moment for me. I think that feeling the need to consciously behave in a manner that is self-protective in addition to the normal emotional load of teaching, makes the workplace for LGBTQ+ tutors even more challenging. Cathy described the process of being / coming out as exhausting. Collaborators who have chosen not to disclose their sexuality, framed their choice in terms of not feeling confident, being isolated, and seeing it as an additional responsibility, which they (currently) do not feel equipped for, or comfortable assuming.

The third engagements

For me these were profoundly important, not from a data generation perspective, but in terms of whether the intended, empathetic ethos of the project – informed by Heckert's (2010a, p.185) "direct relationships" – had been realised in practice. In the preceding years of the project, we had all become accustomed to online meetings, and I gave collaborators the choice an in-person or online meetings for these engagements, to avoid imposing any inconvenient travel requirements on them. Given the required move to online engagements at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the recognition that a technology mediated engagement did not seem to hamper the rapport that could be established. This formed part of the empathetic engagement of the project.

Like the previous engagements, these were open discussions, but I did ask all collaborators to reflect on their experience of being part of this endeavour. The focus of these discussions was on individual experience, and as I did for the first engagements, I will present these as individual encounters in the order in which they happened. Although the conversations invariably moved beyond the experience of collaborating on the project, I will try to focus on this.

However, the reflections frequently have a bearing on broader issues that were informed or prompted by collaboration in the project. I will present these as part of the outcomes of these engagements. They often contain collaborators' practical suggestions on how they could come to feel more empowered and perform less constrained professional identities.

The focus for these analytical engagements returned to the individual collaborators. These conversations were about their individual experiences, and it is inappropriate to treat them as a cohort of collaborators in this instance. It is important to note that at this point in the research, the relationship between me and the collaborators had developed, and that my understanding of them as individual collaborators had become contextualised within the collective set of engagements to which I had had the privilege of being part.

A schematic representation of the analytical conversations is presented in Figure 16. The dark bidirectional lines show the individual engagements, but they coalesce into a single analytical conversation at the connection to the instigating collaborator. This represents that whilst the experience of collaborators remains the primary currency of analysis, the project arising from the instigating collaborator is the focus for these engagements. The glow represents the expanded influence of individual collaborators on the project because of the deepening personal relationship the sequence of engagements enabled.

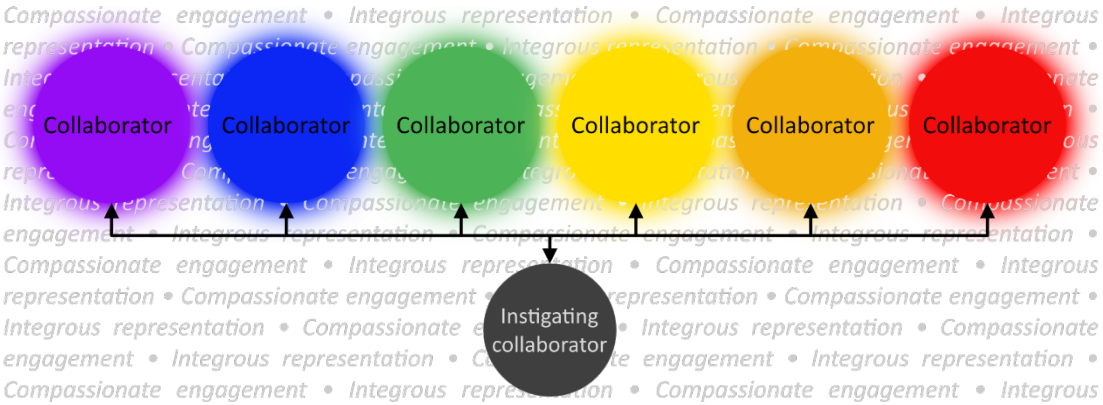


Figure 16: The analytical conversations of the final engagements.

Carl

The first observation Carl, who described himself as out to colleagues in the main engagement, made was about how participation generated discussions beyond the engagements. I asked him what his experience of being part of this endeavour had been.

> "I think it's been really interesting. I always remembered after our meetings where we talked, and it was interesting to hear other people's opinions about, like language. We talked about that I don't like the word queer and that you didn't mind it. In my office, we're almost all gay or lesbian or bisexual. There's one straight person – which is weird. We always had really interesting conversations, and I would come back and talk about what we talked about [with my colleagues]. So, it used to spark a longer debate in the office."

I found this interesting as I had not anticipated that collaborators would talk to colleagues about their participation in the project. The scope of the discussions that Carl had with his colleagues extended to beyond the engagements themselves into broader institutional debates and contexts.

> "We would talk about the use of language, how we all felt about the word queer. I know we talked a lot about trans issues and how [the university] was trying to address those, we talked about the gender-neutral toilets. We all thought that was a really good idea. And I think of everything that we talked about, but it was usually an extension of what we talked about in each meeting. Those are the ones that really spring to mind."

The discussions also influenced discussions beyond Carl's [36] immediate colleagues:

> "And being, [active in] the staff network as well, it would always generate lots of really in-depth conversations in work where I was like, 'what do you think about this?'- just trying to ask other people's opinion. It's been really insightful and thought provoking, especially because it continued when I was in the office as well."

As staff networks, and in particular levels of engagement, had been a significant element in the earlier engagements with most collaborators, our discussion turned to the difficulties of promoting participation.

> "I think [participation] has dropped back. I'm going to create some socials and some meetups and see how we get on and just keep trying... just keep trying. But I know all the other networks are having the same problem- that people want to be part of the network but don't really engage with it."

Most respondents had attended at least one network meeting – but none had found that it provided what they wanted, and none were regular, committed members – which Carl's observations above suggests is not unusual for staff networks at his institution. He did not think it was related to the type of meeting,

> "I understand that an event that was going to talk about, I don't know, how we were going to help create the new trans policy, that people maybe wouldn't want to come to such a really focused meeting. If it was just let's do lunch, or go for drinks after work, people were coming and we did have maybe 10, 12 people sometimes, but then that also dropped off. I don't know why it goes up and down."

He remained committed to the network despite the difficulties,

> "I'm going to try again and just see what I can do. I'll keep going... I don't think we cannot have the network. I think it's really important".

The conversation towards the end of the engagement turned to broader issues, in particular the increasing hostility faced by LGBTQ+ people from the rise of right-wing populism globally (Azis and Azarine, 2023; Campani *et al*., 2022; Alves, Segatto

[36] Carl had become a senior office bearer in the LGBTQ+ staff network since the 2nd engagement.

and Pineda, 2021; Korolczuk, 2020; Adam, 2019). The optimism that Carl previously exhibited, remained undaunted.

> "I just found the whole process really, really interesting. When I think about things we've talked about, there's so much we have in common with generations that have gone before us in terms of the impact of being a member of a minority. And again, it's just that there is still so much work to do, I guess, in trying to improve things for people who come after us, which I think we should be trying to do. We are getting there. We are moving in the right direction. I think within our lifetimes I think we'll get there."

Peter

Peter held the strongest views about the separation of personal and professional life, yet he also recognises the personal costs of his dogged Don't Ask, Don't Tell relationships with colleagues and students. In the light of the vehemence with which he held this position, I was particularly interested to see how being part of this project may have influenced his position.

> "I think it's given a bit more confidence into being who I am. I think I do feel a bit more confident to be myself more at work. There's more of a community. I think it's not quite so ostracising. I mean, my last place is quite heterosexual and it's very difficult to be yourself around that kind of audience. Whereas, you know, having, having a project like this, although it's only a small project and it's quite anonymous, it's still creating a sense of community that I've never really had...and we don't have [where I work] and I think it should be a bigger community than it is...having a sense of community, a sense of belonging that you don't necessarily have in the workplace gives people more confidence to be who they are. It's the advocates, isn't it? It's the first people to speak up..."

I was surprised by this response. It speaks about the power of a sense of community for minorities, and it speaks to the strength of his desire for that sense of community – which is probably intensified by his choice to not permit expressions of his sexuality, in any way, at work. This is, again, the dilemma of invisible minorities, where choosing visibility is choosing vulnerability. In this light, I think what Peter has to say about "the first people to speak up" and their role in creating a sense of community is important. In a professional context where he is very aware of being a member of a minority, he recognises not only the importance of the 'advocates', but also of allies in creating a sense of community and a sense of safety.

> "you've got to have people willing to take the plunge first. So you need to have allies lead the pledges, if you will. There are not many LGBTQ+ that I know of in [my] department, not many that make themselves visible, you know, not that I know of, male or female. I think having that safe channel, having that right to feel safe. I think it's something that... it's the right to feel safe that I've struggled with. But I am who I am, you know, I've had bad experiences. So it's once bitten, twice

> shy. But it's having the place and the ability to feel safe, and having others that you can talk to and associate with, which offers clarity.

There is a profound sense of isolation in Peter's words, and I am particularly disturbed by the idea that 'the right to feel safe' is something to be desired rather than an inalienable and automatic part of professional experience. Across the engagements, fear, safety, and protection are recurrent frameworks which influenced the professional identity expression of collaborators.

He discussed the value of visibility of both other LGBTQ+ people and allies,

> "I think it is useful, particularly for students as well, because they have that person, they know they can talk to that person about some of these issues".

However, he was sceptical about the motivations of people to, for example, wear a rainbow lanyard,

> 'They just, you know, want to feel a part of something. I think it's a bit like religion. It's about being a part of something rather than the religion itself'.

He considered training in, what he called, "proper allyship" to be a crucial element in community creation. He felt that it is an institutional responsibility to train people to be allies, not only to gender and sexual minorities, but all identified as EDI target groups. Part of the training should also be about signposting to organisations that can offer further support. He had a very clear vision of what allyship meant.

> "Training is what would make you a true ally. It'd make you someone who understands what they're going through, and it would give you an opportunity to go, OK, so these charities actually really can help. And you can have other people share their stories; so you can set up that community from that training. The training would be having someone coming from Stonewall or wherever and they talk to you around these sensitive subjects. And then you get that community within the people that are doing the training and then you're able to offer that support. You have people come in and do talks about their experiences so you can keep yourself current. And to me, that's what an ally is...an ally is someone that can go through the process with you, even though they're not experiencing it."

At the same time, Peter held a strong view that such support and allyship should not be "a referral system" with trained allies responsible for supporting those wanting support – and came back to the idea of a community, where support was available, but not advertised. He was also concerned about the boundaries of such relationships, particularly with students,

> '... you see them struggling, you see them sitting on their own and, I just don't know how to kind of break that. I don't want to fill the gap as a friend because

> that's not my job, not my role. But what you want to do is to help them feel a part of something'.

In this engagement, as in the earlier ones, Peter was extremely ambivalent about the role the staff network currently played in creating a community – although he also sees such structures as important in this regard (even using the words 'network' and 'community' interchangeably). He felt that 'issues'–based events did not foster a sense of community.

> "I went to a cinema show. It was the first time I've ever been to anything like that. I wasn't made overly comfortable. I don't know why. I think it might be the topic of discussion. They had loads of guest talkers come in with HIV and things and start talking about their experience and everything. I went to see a film and it turned into this talk about AIDS and all these people dying. So, it got quite heavy quite quickly. I was a bit overwhelmed and underprepared."

There is a perhaps a question here of how an entity, like a network for a minority population, goes about creating an environment that is attractive and encourages new members, and simultaneously responds to the needs and interests expressed by existing members. The LGBTQ(IAPPTS)+ community is diverse – and within each community identified by a letter in the acronym there is further diversity.

> "I think the problem is we're trying to create something central. And I think what we need is something that's relevant to the to the community. I think to have one central staff community is a great idea, but you're never going to get it. What you want are smaller communities that then come together to make a wider community. And I think this is why your research was interesting. I think that the struggles in STEM are different because we're different to humanities. I think this is the problem- we have these different communities. We try to shoehorn one size fits all and this actually doesn't work because, you know, actually the needs are different. So, I think having more local communities rather than a central community would be more useful, more conducive [to creating a community]."

He was sceptical of his institution's motivations regarding all, but in particular, LGBTQ+, EDI initiatives,

> 'at the moment we've got a central thing. We've got a central community that's absent. And I think we're trying to make something that doesn't exist, but the university can tick a box and go it's there'.

Peter's experience, and that of other collaborators, reveals the complexity of creating a forum that provides something of value to all potential stakeholders. It is reasonable to ask whether it is acceptable to expect this responsibility to be carried, alongside professional responsibilities, by volunteers within an organisation.

I asked Peter if his classroom behaviours or attitudes towards in class relationships had changed during the project – he said no, and presented some examples of how he continued to challenge behaviours that he felt were unacceptable in both students and colleagues. Peter is not concerned about self-expression in pedagogic relationships at all.

> "You know, I like the professional boundary between staff and students in the sense that whilst I'm in this room, it doesn't matter who I am or what I am. I'm here because I'm in charge and I'm quite authoritarian. My students even told me I was standoffish, my master's students, which I've taken as a compliment."

Peter experienced participation as valuable – giving him a sense of community that he felt was lacking, and it prompted him to think about the issues that emerged from our discussions, but it did not shift his position on any of them, in any meaningful way.

Cathy

Of all the collaborators, Cathy is the most familiar with qualitative research approaches. At the inception meeting she was asking methodological questions and giving me reading recommendations! During this final engagement she was seconded to an external organisation.

As with all final engagements, I started by asking her how collaborating on this project had been.

> I think it's been interesting to talk about something that has always felt quite personal – you know I'm out at work, so that wasn't really an issue, but to talk about it in a quite extensive, in-depth way, specifically on the impact on work and how you live your sexuality at work with someone that is also part of the same organisation, I think has been quite insightful. I felt it was quite deep, what we explored. And I don't think I'd ever done that. Obviously, I talked about it many times with colleagues or with my wife, but not in such a focused and, yeah, deep, detailed way, deep, deep, meaningful way. And that's in terms of the topic itself and the situation that we both are in, in terms of workplace, but also, I think it really reinforced the idea of the method itself. It really reinforced the idea of the strengths of qualitative methods in looking at deep issues, you know, deep processes and relationships between the individuals and organisations, and broader societal issues. I don't think that a survey, a questionnaire would have come anywhere as close than potentially even a standard more structured interview. I think that was very interesting. I've never been part of such an extensive method. And I think the three moments of engagement felt nice from a participant perspective because it doesn't make you feel like you, OK, you spend, you know, that one hour of your time and then you never hear again about the project. You feel like you're part of it and you see the evolution and you see where it's going, and you feel your contribution is valued."

Apart from the personal experience described above, I also asked about whether her thinking about herself as lesbian in a STEM discipline had changed.

> "Yeah, I think so. Again, because there's been, like, continual engagement. I knew it was coming, even though we haven't spoken every week, there was engagement with the ideas that we've been working on. I think that it did make me think more and re-evaluate the way I, for example, work with students. I wouldn't say that it's changed the way I work with students, but it's made me more aware of the dynamics that might kick in, which is a good thing. And I think this awareness, is not something easy, or that a lot of people understand. It's been a nice reminder that ... I don't know how to explain it in words that might be useful for your transcriptions, but the awareness has been there, and it's been nice. You know, the whole journey of my life, being lesbian has had a massive role. And that's true in my work today as it's all connected. It's made me see the connections, I suppose, between everything. It's been useful. Interesting."

I told Cathy that my experience had, in many ways been similar, and that I had been motivated by the project to be bolder both in how I teach and in the material I present – and that there are moments of physical and psychological discomfort for me, that arise from this newfound boldness. She responded:

> "I don't want to make assumptions about your life, but growing up, every signal we received was about...that it wasn't safe to be out, it wasn't acceptable. So, you know, it's not surprising that it's still nerve wracking. But almost like a gym, isn't it? You keep doing it and it will become easier...every time, hopefully, will be easier. I think you've probably become better at managing that voice, you know, that you've got internalised. As you said, maybe it will never disappear, but you know that it's fine. So, you manage it and try to overcome it. Or sometimes you don't, but it's getting easier and easier, even with students to be confident that you're doing something that is absolutely legitimate and you're explaining, you're exposing them to aspects that are part of life. So, in a way that is professional and that helps them to develop as people.
>
> I believe in the power of education strongly, but it's also about growing yourself. If I am the adult that I didn't have growing up, that surely will help the insecure part of myself as well. Now I'm an adult, I know it's fine and I've got control over this situation and I'm going to act like I would have liked my role models to act in the past. And that surely, I hope in the long term, will help me with being more confident."

Cathy had explained in earlier engagements that the context of her childhood, adolescence and early adulthood was one of social and religious conservatism. She concluded this discussion by saying,

> "It's a bit like being a caring parent for yourself. Not necessarily a parent, but a caring supportive grown up. Be your own grown up. Yeah, that's the value of reflecting on these things and sharing experiences."

We discussed what it was like at the organisation she was seconded to, given her very positive appraisal of her work experience at her university. She was very positive and discussed it from a personal and institutional perspective.

> "I realise how lucky I am because [my department] is very progressive and inclusive. Immediately, I was out, and I met other gay colleagues that were openly gay in the institution. And it just makes such a difference. Going back to the institutional questions because that was the thing at the first meeting. I don't know if you're familiar with the critical realist ontology. That's my [research] approach. It's about the fact that institutions have an influence on individuals, but individuals also have agency to change the institutions. I see that dynamic in relation to being gay at work. It makes me feel so lucky [to work here] that I wouldn't trade it for anything else. It is so important. It affects your confidence so much, being able to be yourself. It's incredible. It's something that you hear growing up, you know, you have to be yourself, it's important, blah, blah, blah. But until you experience it... you think you can hide and just perform at the same level. But I don't think so. The amount of energy that it takes... that constant vigilance is really demanding."

This is very telling given the observations that most collaborators made about organisational culture in contrast to organisational policy. Most felt secure that the policy environment would provide support *in extremis*, yet all adopted defensive behaviours to make them feel safe at work. The critical realist ontology that Cathy refers to is a useful position from which consider socio-cultural interventions that may be useful institutionally in addressing the experiences of collaborators.

Cathy reflected on the intersectional experience of being a lesbian and an immigrant, and the pressures she felt about being good enough, about having to prove herself – in a similar way to the professional behaviours Sarah discussed during her 1st engagement.

> "The performance one is also interesting, a lot of people, you know, they become quite perfectionist in their approaches to work, because they have to make up for [being gay]. It's true. Definitely. It's a bit confusing for me, because I also got the immigrant element that comes into play. I'm not sure which is worse. But this idea of having to constantly prove that you're, that you're valuable, that it's not just that people were doing you a favour to hire you. Definitely, that's in play. But it's confusing for me, because the two factors, they're both, I'm sure that there's a bit of both in that. For example, with family members it definitely happens. The sense that I could only introduce my wife, my partner to them, if I was absolutely 100% certain that that was absolutely the one, the perfect one, and absolutely no drama involved whatsoever... in a way that my cousins, my straight cousins, never had to think about. But this kind of having to prove yourself constantly, it becomes intertwined with the being an immigrant. It's a bit confusing. But on the other hand, being an immigrant has helped my being gay. So it's a confused space in my mind. But it makes sense, you know, because I come from quite a historically homophobic place. Well, I mean, in relative terms, talking about Western Europe."

It is interesting that the example Cathy chose to illustrate the pressure of perfectionism does not relate only to work, but to familial pressures and personal relationships too.

The engagement ended with Cathy saying,

> 'I have to say, I feel at the end of this, it felt all very positive and open'.

This was the experience – one of compassionate and open engagement – that I was trying to foster throughout the project, I was pleased that it had been realised with Cathy, who as I said, is an experienced qualitative researcher, and that she also recognised the difference in what we were trying to achieve together from more traditional, qualitative methods.

Max

Max described himself as sometimes feeling like a trembling kitten inside despite appearing confident as a lion. As someone who regards himself as out, but also embodying the self-awareness and vulnerability of this position, an aspect of his response to participating in this project has been to get involved more directly in activities, becoming an office-bearer in his institution's staff network and supporting students that share his ethnic and religious background.

> "I was involved in some of the LGBTQ+ History Month things, I invited my students as well as wider student [body] to get involved. I thought that that can help them to just come to terms with what they are and make them a bit more comfortable... One thing that I did, which is one group of probably LGBTQ+ students, where there may not be a lot of them, but is the one that can really fall through the gap and perhaps they have the worst condition is LGBTQ+ [religious adherents]. So what I did this year, in LGBTQ+ History Month, because I'm also one of the staff network coordinators for LGBTQ+ staff at [my institution]. I got in touch with one of the charities which supports [such religious] LGBTQ+ people, and I arranged for someone to come and talk. So we had a talk by them... If students can just see that there are things that they can use, resources they can go to or there are opportunities to learn a little bit more. And those who got involved, they really found it useful."

Max also arranged LGBTQ+ History month events more directly aimed at staff.

> I organised a LGBTQ+ walk in [the city where I live]. So we had a walk, and he took us to different places and some of the [local] history of LGBTQ+ people, which go back to 1800 something. And it was like, for example, one of the cases... I think these two married men, they were really in love. When they were found out it led to them being executed and things... Some were very dark, sad things, but also looking at the pubs and this was very interesting. But there were a few other things. But yeah, all in all, it was quite good."

Bringing 'out' the dead

There are many, if you choose to look, historic STEM notables who are reputed to have been LBGTQ+, often by inference as their lives may have required a level of discretion we would not recognise, or direct evidence of their otherness, may have been destroyed to 'protect' their legacy.

Lady Evelyn Balfour, founder of the Soil Association, had two significant monogamous relationships with women, each lasting decades. Her family dismissed speculation about her sexuality by saying 'Eve is just Eve'. Similarly Rachel Carson, writer of the influential book 'The Silent Spring' is known to have had a close relationship with another woman, which lasted for over forty years. Before her own death, Carson destroyed all correspondence between them. Alexander von Humbolt's sister burnt all his letters upon his death. He left his entire estate to his longstanding "personal servant", Johann Seiffert.

How are we to respond to the erasure of historic LGBTQ+ identities? Is it ethical to out the dead? Is it justified to reclaim them as our own? Historians and scientists have argued that the sex life of scientists doesn't matter. Maybe that's true for straight scientists...

He was the only collaborator who turned outward in response to the project – responding not with introspection but with action – and I think this is because of his point of departure, already out and managing the internal conflicts that that sometimes created. While all other collaborators were guarded in their relationships with students, in particular, Max adopted a position of proactive, contextually appropriate, normalisation.

"I think I just act naturally without putting a flag to say I am LGBTQ+, or I am gay, I find it is useful, just to drop the hint when you're talking to a student or when you're talking to staff. Not if it's not relevant, but when it is relevant, like if people are talking about their partner. I feel comfortable to talk about my husband and to say it in a way, to say it very naturally- to suggest this is just normal. So I just try to normalise it, for students to be...whatever they are."

We discussed the difficulties of queering the curriculum in STEM disciplines and the difficulty in finding historic LGBTQ+ people to celebrate. Max was not the only collaborator to raise this, and it prompted me to think about not only the importance of LGBTQ+ role models for STEM disciplines, but also why there is such a paucity in comparison to the humanities. The inset contains my reflection on the issue at the time. Max described a situation where homophobic responses were presented in response to the subject he was teaching.

"But the other thing is sometimes, you know, in teaching and learning material, something may naturally seem more related to LGBTQ+. In that situation, when students did relate it [to LGBTQ+], which was not right – in this case blood donation. I used that as an example of something that happened, and this was not right. Because if you look at the evidence, actually, this was based on biased

> opinion, not based on the scientific findings. That sort of thing gives students a bit more awareness."

In the closing minutes of the conversation, Max reflected on his collaboration in this project. His thinking reflects his practical engagement with students and staff in response to the ideas we discussed.

> "This project, working with you made me think about my environment a bit more, how I fit with that, how I fit with other things, and how I can help other people, including the students and colleagues, fit into this environment. And that thinking, when it starts, it continues, even if I don't mindfully think about it, because it started somewhere in back of your mind, it just carries on."

He elaborated on his experience as an out gay teaching academic, and the increased importance of allyship as we move into a future where other members of the LGBTQ+ community have become the focus of hostility – ending with a general commitment to support of gender and sexual minorities.

> "I personally always felt that I'm okay, I don't feel discriminated against or uncomfortable- even with my students if I think they may not accept because of their background or whatever, I just think, they need to be familiarised with it. And here is where they can be familiarised, even if they don't like it. That was the extent of it, I didn't think much more about it. But talking with you, made me think that I need to be more active, not just for myself, because if you think about, well, the gay rights movement and all these things, what now? It is an issue that is continuing, like trans people have more issues now, and how I can be the ally that some straight people were who helped us [homosexuals] to fit in. And now we are more comfortable, what we can do to help other people, whether they identify as trans or non-binary or any other group, anything but straight. What can I do to help them?"

Sarah

Sarah's institutional role means she takes a slightly different view of things than other collaborators. It is interesting to respond to the conversation of this last engagement in the light of her perfectionism and the professional distancing that characterises her engagements with students. During the session we moved between an institutional view of LGBTQ+ experience shaped by EDI policies and more personal reflections on pedagogic relationships.

Her response to the initial request to reflect on being part of this endeavour reveals the tensions that would be elaborated upon as the engagement progressed.

> "I think it's been quite helpful for me to hear some examples from other colleagues, so other contexts, that's been useful. I think just to sit down and have the conversation as well, because otherwise, normally, we don't talk about these kinds of aspects, I don't think. We're very good at talking about inclusivity and

> diversity on a wider scale. We think about decolonising the curriculum as well, but we don't necessarily unpick some of the more detailed elements of inclusivity and diversity. So it's been helpful to have those conversations as well, certainly as we've met up anyway. But otherwise, you see outside of these conversations, I've not spoken to colleagues about some of the topics that we've discussed. With my [leadership role] hat on, I think a lot of EDI is driven by whatever is the topic of the moment, centrally. So if the decision is that, you know, we need to address metrics around the awarding gap, or non-continuation, then we tend to take actions that will help to improve those metrics. And so right now, it happens to be actions that will improve metrics around black and minority ethnic attainment, decolonising the curriculum, you know. I find it's very, very compartmentalised."

I have already expressed my personal disquiet about the comparisons that were made by some collaborators about their perceptions of disparity in how different designated groups were treated within the university. It is interesting that Sarah's view does go some way to explaining how this perception may have come into being. She described elements of EDI implementation as "reactive, rather than proactive", and observed that it is easier to focus on decolonising content around more literal understandings of colonialism.

> "I think that that's the other element of probably a finding, tentative finding of this whole thing is about broadening a view of decolonising the curriculum. It should be challenging all kind of normative powers, patriarchy, heteronormative, racism, class issues, that should all be up for grabs. And neurodiversity as well. Yeah, we just, we just don't seem to be able to grasp the scale of it. I think, I think, you know, as practitioners, I think it helps to have a particular focus. I think that the task itself would be quite daunting, if we were, if we were to look through our own materials and think, okay, let's see if we can, you know, address as many of these diversities as we can. I do think about it, though, when I'm, when I'm teaching, I think, am I just sort of teaching, I think it'd be a bit harsh to say I teach to the stereotypes, but it sometimes I think, I would like to sort of broaden this out a little bit further."

I observed that there is an emotional burden of vulnerability for queer staff broadening out understandings of decolonising especially if it falls outside of the current higher education EDI focus – which is driven by the awarding gap for black and minority ethnic students and to a lesser degree neurodiversity. Linkages between heteronormativity and decolonising, however, are usually not institutionally recognised. Sarah replied:

> "And we shouldn't feel vulnerable in those kinds of proactive, pedagogic decisions. But I know as well that if we go into a class and we're taking that class for the first time and starting to see what sorts of personalities we've got in that group and reading the group... you know... we're constantly judging, aren't we? What's appropriate? What's right? You know, are there students, even to the point where, if I cover some of specific elements, is this going to trigger some issues for students because of the trauma that I have to talk about. But then at the back of

> my mind also is that, you know, I have a very diverse range of students and there is likely to be at least one, if not more, representative of the LGBTQ+ community. And of course, I don't know what they, you know, think when I walk into the room and start teaching them, you know, how obvious am I? What have they heard before? You know, we all know the students chat amongst themselves... So, you know, it's that difficult point at which we think, well, shall I do it or not?"

Sarah is talking about impression management here, and while there are intimations that relate to sexuality – this conversation was more general than it might appear. Two things stand out, one is that personal discomfort / vulnerability is acknowledged as part of certain types of pedagogic relationships, the other is the concerns around pastoral care of the students and their experience.

She mentioned in previous engagements how her partner's professional context informed elements of her teaching – giving direct real-world stories and insights. She reiterated in this engagement how, when she used this information,

> 'I'll always be deliberately ambiguous. I won't say she is, or he is, I will just say that I've got a bit of insight into this, you know, and a bit of lived experience of what it's like to have to respond to situations like that. But- so it's interesting- always very careful, always very guarded'.

She contrasted her own professional caution with the confidence of her partner in her own work situation – attributing it to a

> 'completely different, completely different culture'.

I raised that other respondents had said that they felt their institutions commitment to LGBTQ+ issues seemed inconstant, with peaks of visibility around LGBTQ+ History Month and Pride, but nothing in between. Sarah recognised a difference in institutional culture between her and her partner's workplace –

> 'we are streets apart in terms of comfort about visibility'.

But simultaneously, she recognised the specifically personal element of visibility, especially in the classroom.

> "For me anyway, it is about judging the room and the group, and seeing what I will be able to discuss with them and what I won't. But also the reluctance, to put everything out there, because it's also wrapped up with our own personalities. You know, if you're quite gregarious and, and yeah, I think sort of, you know, you're quite happy to be an extrovert, and quite confident and self-confident, then it probably isn't even an issue that you would think about. But for those of us who are quieter, you know, and more private, and probably are more typical of somebody that you would see in STEM disciplines, then we probably wouldn't want to share very much about ourselves anyway, because it's about being private

> and that's part of our character. So it becomes tied up with your own personality too."

Sarah elaborated on how these situations of vulnerability need to be supported for both staff and students, and that it is neither easy, nor something for everyone.

> "It's about the skills to facilitate that kind of approach as well, isn't it? It's not just being the LGBTQ+ person, it's about how you approach this in a classroom setting, or a tutorial...it's got to be thought through so carefully from the institution through into the classroom. If as an institution we're going to try to improve the visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ within STEM, then I think we've got to do that with a mind of supporting staff to be in situations like that, where they can have those conversations. Because I think it's quite difficult for individuals to go from cold, to having those kinds of discussions or including that kind of material. We have to think about how we support colleagues, how we equip them with the skills and the tools to do that. Same is true for LGBTQ+, for neurodiversity, for decolonising the curriculum, it's those really tricky, uncomfortable areas that require emotional intelligence. I don't mean that in a judgmental way, I don't mean somebody who's not prepared to have the conversations is a Luddite or whatever. But, you know, you have to pick the people really, really carefully, because they've got to have the positive conversations with students about all of these elements of diversity. And with each other."

At the end of the engagement we returned to how collaborating on the project had been, and its value.

> "I think open is a good, good description because it's been about sharing experiences as well. And I think that's helpful, isn't it? Because when you are the sole practitioner in the classroom, it can become quite isolating. So it's been helpful to hear about others' experiences. And it's been useful to realise this is a wider issue within STEM disciplines. But how we start to change the culture, I don't know. But it's certainly been helpful, these very open conversations. It really does sort of help us to take stock and think, wow, you know, for a university based in [a reputedly liberal city], which is quite diverse in its population. We're still not quite giving the LGBTQ+ community that presence on a day-to-day basis. And that's the thing, it needs to be, as you say, normalised on a day-to-day basis. I think part of it is, because we are still dealing with an age group of people who are still finding themselves and still wanting to fit in and, you know, clinging on to norms as well. And giving them the confidence to see that diversity is not threatening, that it's okay, is a big job, I. But it's also, I think it's a really important one."

James

James is the most theory-focussed of the collaborators. Looking back across the full series of engagements, as they were ending, I realised that while our conversations were illuminating and entirely relevant, of all the collaborators, James revealed the least personal information. It was therefore not surprising that his initial observations about collaborating can be seen as a continuation of viewing the world through a theory / method lens.

> "I think it's been open, which is quite nice. I don't think that we would have reached the level, the depth of conversations had you had a set of questions prepared and had you been fishing for any answers. I think that it was a lot more, or it allowed for me to be a lot more creative with my answers. I feel that it was appropriate to the methodology that you seem to have presented throughout our discussions. I mean, looking at theoretical frameworks as well and what you actually do, because it's, you know, we've been talking about Foucault and Deleuze and whatnot, and using them with a particular aim that you would be fishing for would not be a good thing to do. I'm just saying it as an interviewee, it just sounded reasonable."

We spoke about the research dilemma linked to qualitative research broadly and how to validate anecdotal evidence as data in the context of meaning making. James had used Deleuzian approaches in his own research and offered the following:

> "It's [about] how we, as researchers, treat participants and how we kind of understand them. We need to think beyond the very structured way of thinking in social sciences research...there's nothing wrong with that... it just feels like you want to be talking about more about the kind of rhizomatic approach where you're kind of disputing the normal methods and almost kind of writing something that is so specific to the people that you've been talking to, that it just can't be divorced from them or you. And for me, in a sense, what I've been telling you about is not generalisable. I don't feel it is. Maybe it is. I think it's, it's so specific to me, and how I kind of make my way through life with my students... That's the nature of interviews. It's always going to be idiosyncratic, and all conversations will be different. And I don't think that there's any, there's anything wrong with that. See, I don't know what I'm talking about."

This extract in many ways captures both what I am trying to achieve and the dilemmas it presents. It is a key responsibility of researchers not to waste participants' time, and a key indicator of that is that the research should be useful and make a contribution. The closing remark is telling, it is a moment where the mask slips, and suggests self-doubt – immediately after what I would regard as an insightful reflection on queer research methods (although James did not describe them as such). I don't think that this is imposter syndrome, but it is related. It is something that I experience very strongly and that coalesces not around self-doubt, but around adequacy – is this / am I anarchic / queer enough? To what extent does my own mask slip?

James talked about his queer research and how it influenced his relationship with students, and generated excitement.

> "I had been writing this paper for a while...and I was struggling to find a hinge to make a point that was trying to make. But I couldn't find the perfect thing... And in the end, it turned out to be very much about queer thinking and queerness. As

> soon as the students found out about this... they started getting interested in what I do academically. I think it's the fact that what I did wasn't that dull academic paper ...what I was doing was a little bit more bolstered, perhaps questionable academically, but it definitely had an exciting element to see that perhaps the things that are seen as silly by some can have a place in publishing in highly ranked journals. This idea that sexuality is, you know, why should we study it? I was reading Judith Butler's Gender Trouble recently, and someone said, oh, that's gender studies. How is that relevant or important? I was like, well, I think it's good to be introducing these things so that we have a chance to reflect on that aspect of ourselves and kind of give it a place and give it some dignity. And it's that way of thinking about sexuality that actually has as an exciting element to it. And talking about these things has, I think, a place in not only the student-teacher relationship but in academia."

We went on to discuss the unavoidably transformative process of being part of a research project – particularly one like this.

> "The actual process of becoming a researcher doesn't only impact on you. It impacts on everyone that you talk to and who is in your study. In fact, I could add something about how it's changed the way I approach teaching. It probably adds something very imperceptible, maybe not something that I would write in a report for a module or something like that. But it's about the kind of relationships with the students that I've had and the conversations that I've had and how much closer I've gotten to them. In [tutorials] we talk to each student for half an hour every week. So we develop a very kind of tight bond. But I think I started opening up a little bit more. And as a response, I had students opening up to me. Especially the queer students, who were going through difficult times. But I think they felt at ease to share certain things."

There is direct recognition here of transformative experiences within pedagogic relationships. Cathy may have experienced something similar based on her reflections on participation in this project. However, most collaborators' transformative moments, where they occurred, were more constrained within their existing professional identities. What James said in this exchange reminded me of a classroom experience I had recently had, which I told him about.

> "I've had a related experience. I teach a master's level module. It's a really small group, nice to teach...about ontology, epistemology through to that critical theory and approaches to knowledge- kind of stuff. And for the first time, I did a whole session on queer theory. And we went through it, and I had my slides, and it was fairly traditional. And then at the end of it we were sort of chatting about it, and it was very much a shared conversation- because it's a small group. Then one student stood up and said, 'I'm a gender fluid Pakistani lesbian'. Then another person stood up and made a similar personal declaration, and then somebody stood up and said, 'I'm neurodivergent'. It was it was a really profound moment because it was a moment of complete trust and shared vulnerability and I just thought, 'Gosh...', but it requires... and I think this is the double bind mentioned by queer pedagogy; it's about making yourself vulnerable- and accepting that kind of emotional complexity as a teacher. That experience for me was exactly that- it was making yourself vulnerable to allow others to be to be vulnerable with you and for both to be empowered by that as well, in a kind of ironic way."

We discussed how this element of vulnerability may be particularly frightening for LGBTQ+ teachers who may be managing their professional identities specifically to avoid such vulnerabilities, as Peter and Sarah do. James suggested that it applied not only to 'queer' teachers.

> "I think it goes for all teaching styles and all teachers, not only queer teachers. That idea that you're not telling your students what to think, you're expecting them to have a conversation with you. And it's not centred around the teacher, it's about them. You need to share your vulnerabilities to show that it's OK to be vulnerable and it's OK to be wrong and it's OK to change your mind and it's OK to not be certain about things, because you're not actually the teacher."

The engagement ended soon after this exchange with James offering some encouraging words,

> 'I think what you're doing is very interesting and it has been worthwhile spending so much time on it. And it was it was lovely to be part of it as well'.

These concluding remarks, alongside the preceding extract, confirm James's engagement with a fundamental tenet of queer pedagogy – the deliberate engagement of affect in the learning process and relationships.

Sensemaking: Third Engagements

These final conversations with collaborators prompted reflection about whether I had managed to embody the ethos that I aspired to in the design of the project – compassion, openness, collaboration, and transformation. I think there is a contrast to be drawn between the experience of the collaborators, and mine, as instigating and reporting collaborator. I will reflect on my experiences in the concluding chapter.

I do not feel compelled to unpack these final engagements in as much depth as I did the preceding ones. As I have been thinking about their individual experiences and reflections, I realised that they all engaged with and responded to the project in a way that was personally consistent. Their fundamental positions about their teaching identities, as LGBTQ+ STEM academics, remained quite fixed. Whilst all recognised a value in participating and recognised the opportunity it offered to think about the issues that emerged as one they had never had before, and one that was valuable to them, there were no Damascene moments.

I believe this goes back to the unanimous recognition of the vulnerability entailed in adopting more provocative classroom identities (Jannat, 2021). Despite the, similarly, unanimous recognition of universities as places where they could be confident of support in homophobic extremes, none felt that their organisation adequately fostered a culture of inclusion for them to be willing to extend their current self-imposed limits of expression. The data and related theoretical and evidential elements have been explored in the Sensemaking section linked to the first engagements.

I would like, at this point, to make an observation about my perception of the series of engagements- with a specific focus on the professional identities of the collaborators. In a speech delivered to an audience at the University of Cape Town in 2011, Gayatri Spivak said, "I can only speak to you as a stereotype of myself" (Spivak, 2011), reflecting the complex relationship between the identity that a person might claim for themselves and the expectations that others interacting with that person may have of them. But I think it can also be interpreted in the light of the entrenched attitudes that someone might have, informed by their experience and their values, and how these attitudes become integral to the persona they present to the world. This idea is best represented by Peter. He is very invested in his negative experiences (personal and professional) linked to his sexuality, and his professional identity is defined in reference to these experiences. They have defined a rigidly constrained, defensive posture towards the world – and Peter can only speak to others in terms of that stereotype – one he holds about himself. It is noteworthy that whilst all collaborators did reflect on changes in how they thought about their identity as LGBTQ+ STEM educators to a lesser or greater degree, they all did so without moving very far from their original positions. This suggests the strength of their investment in the way they have resolved the acknowledged complexities of their professional roles and identities – so they were talking to me as a stereotype of themselves – but a stereotype formed and performed by them, rather than exclusively shaped by the observer of the performance.

The observations of collaborators in these engagements pointed to a consistent experience of feeling that the conversations were deep and meaningful, experienced

as open, and that they felt they had been heard. I am, in the light of their feedback, confident that the approach to the research relationships based on equality and compassion (Heckert 2010a), and good listening (Lavee and Itzchakov, 2021) was successful.

The next and final chapter of this thesis will present and discuss the contributions to knowledge arising from this endeavour. It will consider whether the project achieved its aim, what was learnt, what the implications are for HE and STEM disciplines and how they respond to LGBTQ+ concerns. It will also summarise what has been learnt methodologically from research approach and present how it is formalised into a framework for structuring autoethnographic research. It will consider the value the proposed framework in addressing the complex problem of quality in qualitative research.

Our eventual fate will be the sum of the stories we told...

Crystal Woods

This project set out to explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ STEM academics. The process was to be responsive to the concerns of the people who had volunteered to collaborate – and not directed by me. The aim was not to develop any generalisable truths, but to present their stories and reflect on the ways in which they manage their professional relationships with colleagues and students. The project was focussed on providing a space for open discussions and the revelation of collaborators' experiences, thinking, and priorities. It hoped to contribute to greater awareness of the experience of LGBTQ+ STEM academics, and perhaps inform debates about workplace polices, and the fostering of inclusive cultures within HE institutions. Now, at the point of conclusion, I believe, that the project has been successful.

This chapter will present and discuss the contributions to knowledge arising from this research. These will be contextualised in reference to the aims of the research and be presented in three sections. The first focusses on the contribution to knowledge regarding thematic, practical, and institutional aspects of being an LGBTQ+ academic in a STEM discipline – although the recommendations would probably hold true for many HE staff across a range disciplines and from a range of minority communities. The second section presents the contribution to knowledge from a methodological perspective. Finally, I will present a closing section – a personal reflection on what doing this project has meant for me, and how I see its impact continuing to unfold now that it is over.

Safe to be ourselves

In this section, I will draw out some practical learning points that may go some way to resolving the professional tensions and emotional load experienced by all collaborators. I fully recognise the specificity of this project as well as the contextual and personal nature of the experiences that this project has revealed. However, the commonalities of experiences and attitudes, and the synergies with extensive research from across the world, suggest that these are issues that transcend individual collaborators, and enable the proposal of interventions that could be made at institutional level.

> *"There is more than one kind of freedom. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it."*
>
> *Aunt Lydia in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaids Tale*

The fictional Aunt Lydia's distinction between freedom from, and freedom to is useful in framing how project collaborators negotiate the complexities of both institutional contexts and teaching environments. For example, some experience a "freedom from" identity concern through the separation of professional and personal identities based on a received notion of professionalism, and through relying on institutional policy to protect them from grosser forms of homophobic aggression. Conversely, the STEM educators I spoke with feel limited regarding 'freedom to' be queer educators due to, for example, a perceived lack of queer role models (besides, of course, Alan Turing) to integrate into their curricula, or indeed, the previously researched perceptions of the masculinist, heteronormative character of STEM disciplines (Cech, 2022; Cech and Waidzunas, 2011, 2021, 2022; Cech *et al*., 2017; Bilimoria and Stewart, 2009).

This dichotomy concerning freedom feeds into contemporary debates and controversies around university campuses as safe spaces, and related discussions about free speech and hate speech. In this light, I think we can reframe the dichotomy as 'safety from' (for example, physical threat, homophobic abuse or micro-aggressions) and 'safety to' (present oneself without self-censorship or fear of negative consequences). The double-bind of being part of an invisible minority, where you are automatically afforded 'safety from', and the emotional and personal complexity of becoming visible, which is required to claim 'safety to' must be confronted.

The absence of these basic safeties is revealed repeatedly in research into the workplace experience of LGBTQ+ people although it is a lack of 'safety to' that is

most often associated with negative workplace experiences . The evidence suggests a heightened sense of professional vulnerability – such as more trenchant criticism, fear of dismissal, reduced promotional opportunities, or even physical threat – should they stop self-censoring, is not an unusual experience for LGBTQ+ people across a wide range of professional contexts (Adkins, 2000; Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger, 2009; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009).

The culture and behaviours that give rise to this lack of 'safety to' have arisen over millennia, and are in many instances, strongly – perhaps even subconsciously – entrenched. The history of homosexuality and contextual responses to it, presented in the chapter Gayja vu, reveals a mostly vociferous antipathy, particularly in the post-Classical period. And while research suggests that social attitudes are more liberal than in the past (Clery, 2023), the incidence of LGBTQ+ hate crime has increased considerably over the last five year (GALOP, 2021).

Before continuing with a discussion of this project's thematic findings, I need to address the elephant in the safe space. It might be observed that there is a philosophical incongruity in representing LGBTQ+ people as a collective or unified identity in this research. This is true, but I would counter any critique based on this by referring to supporting research and experience of the collaborators – the battle for dignity, safety, and freedom from the many fears and emotional burdens that LGBTQ+ people experience is far from over. Gayatri Spivak accepted the requirement for 'strategic essentialism' (Eide, 2016) – adopting an essentialist position to respond to injustice and discrimination as a collective. I do not believe that we have the luxury of abandoning such practices – yet.

The stories told by my collaborators show how they have defined their own professional spaces as LGBTQ+ STEM academics. The character of those spaces often revealed a level of personal compromise, compensation, or constraint that was needed to feel safe. Reggiani, Gagnon and Lunn (2023) explored the experiences of visibility of LGBTQ+ academics and PhD students in the UK. In their research they found a consistent perception that universities were not responsive to the concerns

and experiences of their staff, despite being compliant with anti-discrimination legislation. Regardless of the level of outness of their collaborators, all reported that the effort required in navigating their visibility caused emotional labour and distress. Many were fearful of professional retribution based on experiences of hostility, indifference, or dismissiveness.

Women identifying as LGBTQ+ experienced sexism and homophobia, even if they were not visible – simply by being in a homophobic environment. Despite many of their participants having negative experiences, visibility and representation were discussed in positive terms. The labour of navigating visibility was seen as an unfair disadvantage to LGBTQ+ staff. Shifting the focus to individual visibility in the absence of meaningful, transformative inclusion initiatives was regard as tokenistic. They conclude that "LGBTQ+ inclusion must be an institutional imperative rather than an individual burden" (Reggiani, Gagnon and Lunn, 2023, no pagination). Their research chimes very strongly with the presented experiences of my collaborators.

There are 12 key findings arising from the engagements within this project that can be presented. These are not presented in any specific order, and there is no implicit suggestion of importance based on position in the list.

- All collaborators reported homophobic experiences, all in broader societal contexts, and most in their professional lives.
- All collaborators recognised that negative historic experiences influenced their current behaviour and attitudes.
- All collaborators felt confident that the policy frameworks around workplace behaviour and bullying would protect them from direct manifestations of homophobia.
- All collaborators adopted behaviours to mediate tensions between personal and professional identities.
- All collaborators felt that the visibility of institutional support for LBGTQ+ could be more consistent.

- Most academic staff collaborators felt insecure about being out to students.
- Collaborators who described themselves as out reported the value of being in socially (homo)normative relationships in easing their coming out.
- Academic collaborators recognised the additional emotional labour that being out to students would require.
- There was an acknowledged lack of a sense of community – although some collaborators felt uncomfortable about engaging with other LGBTQ+ staff even if more opportunities existed.
- Collaborators felt that their LGBTQ+ staff networks did not meet, or had not met, their needs, or had not provided a welcoming and reassuring environment.
- Whilst recognising the value of role models, academic collaborators felt reluctant to presume such roles without specific institutional support and guidance.
- Collaborators all recognised the importance of pastoral support for LGBTQ+ students but were loath to take on this responsibility without specific institutional guidance and appropriate training.

These experiences also echo those of much workplace-based research (Igboanugo, Yang and Bigelow, 2022; Hur, 2020; Mattheis, De Arellano and Yoder, 2020; Benozzo *et al*., 2015; Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger, 2009; Giuffre, Dellinger and Williams, 2008), which draws a distinction between a diverse workforce and diversity in the workplace, and between a supportive policy environment and an empowering institutional culture…

There seems to be a dissonance between the 'certified' performance of institutions (for example, by being recognised as a Stonewall Diversity Champion), and the experience of collaborators on this project. This may well be associated with the acknowledged conservatism of STEM disciplines. Even if this conservatism plays a significant role in this project's results, concluding that cultural change is driven by institutional leadership and commitment rather than being the responsibility of

individual members of staff willing to be institutionally visible, is unavoidable (Prasad *et al*., 2011). This research has shown a significant measure of willingness in the collaborators to assume more active roles in supporting each other and students, but they do not currently feel empowered to do so.

Given the complexity of teaching relationships, the emotional toll of visibility management (whether in or out), not feeling fully supported by their institution impacted everyone in this project. There is 'safety from', but where is the emancipatory, lived reality of 'safety to'? It is not something that 'out' people can achieve themselves, as the experiences of Cathy and Max attest... 'Freedom to' comes from an institutional commitment to a cultural change, this is how the community, that collaborators miss, may eventually be found.

I think some priorities are:

1. **Commitment to EDI needs to be demonstrated through consistent, clear, highly visible, and continuous campaigns of awareness.** Rotational engagement with issues, e.g., Pride, or any of the declared history months is not enough (Prasad *et al*., 2011). These should be moments of particular focus within an ongoing programme responsive to concerns of all designated groups.
2. **All staff need practical guidance about how they can contribute to re/forming institutional culture** to be truly inclusive (not assimilative, and not merely safe). EDI training needs to move beyond legal and policy commitments, to lived allyship (Pearce and Di Lorito, 2023).
3. **The focus of decolonising the curriculum should be explicitly extended to include responding to heteronormativity** (and other elements, e.g., ableism, neurodiversity). Practical advice should be provided on how to develop and implement learning and teaching focussed responses (Nodin, 2022).
4. **Staff networks need higher profile and greater support**. Relying on volunteers to deliver a pivotal element of EDI strategy seems an abandonment

of responsibility. The contribution of senior office bearers should be recognised as part of their professional responsibilities, and they should be coopted members of institutional EDI committees (Lee, 2023).

5. **A programme of mentorship for LGBTQ+ staff (and students) should be launched.** Mentors should be provided with appropriate training, be supported by the development of guidelines for such relationships and be recognised for taking on such a role through workload management (Wright-Mair and Marine, 2023).
6. **Institutions should actively seek out exemplars of good practice to learn from and emulate.** There are examples of organisations that have created inclusive workplaces. These should be sought out, engaged with, and learnt from.

The why, how, and so what of the project

Although there are guides to unstructured interviews as a qualitative research technique (Robinson, Barron and Pottinger, 2021; Brinkmann, 2014; Ellis and Berger, 2003), and there are guides to autoethnography (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Given, 2008; Anderson, 2006; Holman Jones, 2005), and there are guides to analysing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2019, 2021; Carter, 2014), I have not seen any integrated, generic frameworks for developing qualitative research projects that are open, norm-critical and responsive to power. Such projects may be too idiosyncratic. Maybe formal structuring runs contrary to the philosophical foundations of such projects. My own experience is that developing a coherent qualitative project, which fits within these ambitions, is difficult. There were many moments where I felt that I was floundering or simply lost in a sea of ideas and theories. It is my attachment to the idea of praxis, of theory put into practice, which makes me think others may find utility in what I have done, just I have found utility in the work of others.

This project was founded not on seeking an answer to a preconceived question, but on a way of engaging with people and enabling a space in which such ethical engagements could be realised. The first key formulation aimed to undermine the hierarchies that exist in traditional research relationships. All people directly involved were framed as collaborators; I have highlighted the difference in my role within the project by using the phrase, instigating and reporting collaborator.

As described earlier, it was only at the points of engaging with the collaborators' narratives that my modes of response (I feel uneasy about the word analysing) as the instigating and reporting collaborator became defined – although they were foreshadowed in the theoretical conceptualisation of the project. As presented in Figure 6, the methodological framework for the project was expected to emerge from the engagements themselves.

This type of qualitative research is perhaps at particular risk of a challenge to its quality. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted trustworthiness as the overall goal of

qualitative research, and identified credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as components of trustworthiness. Whitmore *et al*. (2001) suggested the sub-criteria should be explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, and congruence. Morse (2015) suggested qualitative researchers should use more common terminology and included 'rigor' in his list of considerations. Rigor is revealed "through careful attention to detail, methodological thoroughness, the precision of evaluation, and the generation of requisite variety regarding data richness and complexity" (Lavee and Itzchakov, 2023, p. 617).

Hammersley (2007) problematized the issue of quality in qualitative research by recognising the multiplicity of approaches and motivations – including non-epistemic ones – that may make up qualitative research and recognised that local circumstances must be considered when judging qualitative work. The value of specific criteria is, he suggests, secondary to what can only be considered 'judgement'. He also suggests that qualitative researchers "need to give much more attention than is currently done to thinking about the considerations that must be taken into account in assessing the likely validity of knowledge claims, exploring the consistency of these with one another, and considering how they apply in other situations from those in which they were generated" (Hammersley, 2007, p. 291). He concludes that guidelines for assessing research quality are desirable, but that the challenges to developing them are formidable.

I believe that the adoption of structured frameworks can go some way to resolving implied dilemma – reconciling the impossibility of standardised quality assessment methods given the great many approaches to qualitative research. Using a framework to structure and reflect the foundational principles of a project (both philosophical and practical), how they developed, and how they were implemented, provides a point of reference by which a piece of qualitative research can be assessed. I do not believe that this results in a meaningless plurality, where researchers set the limits of assessment for their own work. Rather, I think it directs the assessment to a subset of the established quality descriptors which may be appropriate. Assessors and users of the research can engage with the research, not

in terms of their own disciplines, preferences, or experience, but in a more dialogic, responsive way, reducing the need for standardisation of criteria by relying on a standardisation of process.

I think there is an irony that a structured, facilitating framework that I developed to reconcile the open and compassionate ethos of this project with my responsibilities as a researcher can also provide a point of departure in an assessment of its quality. I call this framework Structuring Openness in Autoethnographic Research (SOAR).

This framework integrates four interrelated spaces, across two phases, within which projects are realised:

Phase 1: Project development

1. **The theoretical space:** reflecting the epistemological and axiological foundations of the project by tracing a history of the development of foundational theories that underpin the development of the later elements that shape and define the project. I am reluctant to include ontology as an element of this space, as I think it is also framed in response to the engagements which resonate with a range of ontological positions. For example, one might suggest that the discussions about the impact of institutional visibility, and responding to that, could sit within a critical realist ontology. However, elements of a more personal nature would require a less socially situated ontology – so something more akin to an idealist position. Perhaps, this is an example of a queered pragmatic ontological position, where we "consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, ...the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (Pierce, 1878, no pagination). It is queered by denying a fixed position or definition for the object of enquiry itself, which shapeshifts from collaborator to collaborator and within each collaborator across time, within and across engagements.
2. **The contextual space:** situating the project and its constituent interpersonal engagements, in broader societal and hegemonic contexts, as well as the ethical context of the engagements. The contextual space also represents the

set of social and personal conditions to which the project, and its series of engagements, are responsive, and from which the scope, methodology and focus of its implementation arise.

3. **The conceptual space:** presented as a set of mapped topological relations which enabled maintaining the focus during the open engagements without being directive. This was an essential tool in meeting the ethical obligations of all interpersonal research – not to waste peoples' time, and to ensure the production of useful outcomes.

Phase 2: Project implementation

4. **The analytical space:** emerging from the synergistic interaction of the other spaces and allowing appropriate and considered analytic responses to the narratives generated across the intersubjective engagements. Although these were considered within the theoretical space, the analytic approaches implemented were shaped by my commitment and responsibility as the instigating and reporting collaborator to represent the individual collaborators stories and experiences with integrity, to recognise and present the integrative synergies of our collective interpersonal experiences, and to synthesise new knowledge from the totality of our engagements.

The SOAR framework is presented schematically in Figure 17.

The four spaces of the framework are presented as white to highlight their position in a sequence of steps involving different stakeholders (both shaded grey). The entire process is divided into two phases. Phase 1 is focussed on project development and emphasises developing a project with theoretical rigour, philosophical alignment, relational commitment, and a clear normative position. The first three spaces of the SOAR framework are associated with this phase. The second phase is focussed on project implementation. It has two key concerns, compassionate engagement with collaborators, and the integrous (re)presentation of them and their stories. The analytical space, which is an emergent element of the project is associated with this phase.

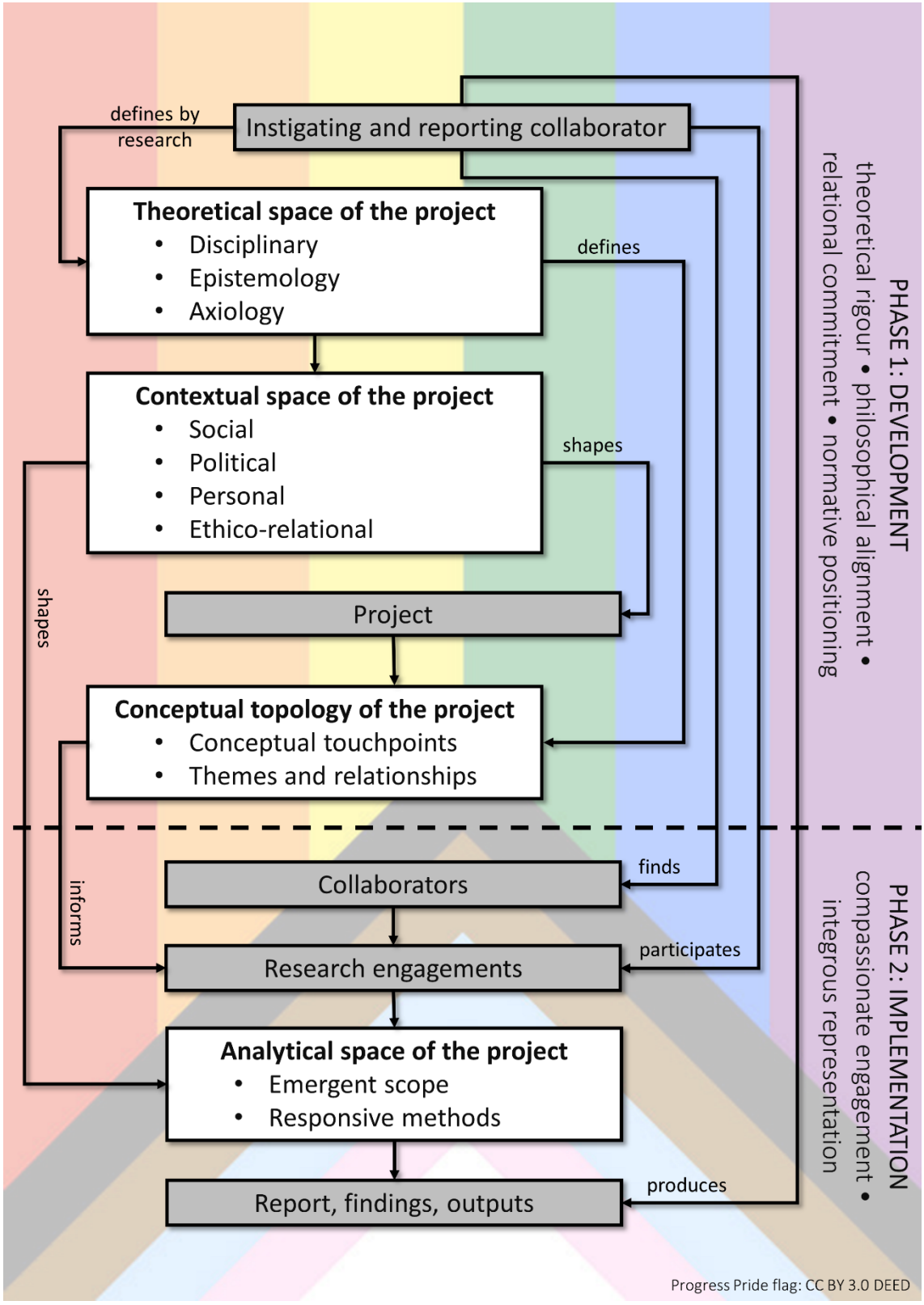


Figure 17: The Structuring Openness in Autoethnographic Research (SOAR) Framework

By thoroughly documenting the research process across these four spaces, the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological foundations are revealed and the coherence of philosophical narrative of the project can be evaluated, which I

would suggest is a primary indicator of rigor. At a more practical level, this research metanarrative also provides guidance on how to assess the implementation of the presented principles as the four spaces progress from abstract theory to social context to conceptual relationships and finally to implementation and analysis. Researchers populate these spaces with foundational assumptions and approaches, reviews of existing literature, and the results of their own research providing both users and reviewers with the information by which they can assess the value and quality of the work. In conjunction with even a loosely stated research aim, the framework provides a set of bounded areas and directions of enquiry for considering the quality of the work.

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Putting my queer shoulder to the wheel [37]

As the formal element of this project draws to its end and given the ideal of transformative engagement on which it is premised, I would like to reflect on my own experience, as the instigating and reporting collaborator. The project sparked from the moment of realising that my teaching practice had always been informed by my theoretical inclinations – founded in my exposure to critical theory as a student of English literature. The idea of praxis, in the context of my teaching career, chimed with my general disappointment with neoliberal higher education, and I was entranced by the idea of critical pedagogies. This is, without doubt, linked to my experience as a student at a liberal university in South Africa during the slow demise of apartheid in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and my necessarily inadequate 'activism', as a privileged, white, middle class, male student. The coalescing of these moments fostered a desire to radicalise myself as an educator.

It is perhaps not surprising that, based on the final conversations with collaborators, I experienced the transformative potential of this project most directly. I have lived and breathed it for almost six years... This is not to foreclose on any as-yet-to-occur transformative moments that the collaborators may experience, but I know that I am not the same person who started the project.

I have always been aware of how I managed personal aspects of my identity, as a gay man, in professional contexts – across my entire working life. It was during a Pride festival several years ago, when I bumped into students that I taught, that I started thinking about what it meant to me to be a gay educator. The students were surprised to see me at Pride – and I was, to some extent, surprised that they were surprised. I realised that in the absence of any specific evidence to the contrary, I was assumed to be straight. At this point, I did start thinking that there may be a pedagogic cost to constrained relating to students. Perhaps, this previously latent

[37] This the concluding phrase of Allen Ginsberg's poem 'America'

thought is what steered me to this research project, a wanting to know how my own experience related to that of other LGBTQ+ teachers in STEM disciplines.

An unpleasant event

I was walking down the corridors between the staff common room and my office - it was during a lecture and the corridors were relatively empty. Two male students were walking towards me, talking, and laughing loudly.

As they moved past me, one mumbled under his breath, "Fucking cock-guzzler". Whether or not they were directed at me, I felt the words as if they were physical blows - whether they were directed at me personally, didn't really matter.

I think it is striking that despite decades of legality, anti-discriminatory laws, and related policies, all respondents had experienced homophobic incidents, and all the academic staff were concerned about being out with students to a greater or lesser degree. All valued the opportunity this project provided to talk about things not usually talked about – and I think this allowed an important aspect of LGBTQ+ lives today to be revealed.

I believe, as do some of my collaborators, that there is a broad societal perception that LGBTQ+ equality has been achieved (Oswin, 2007; Dalton, 1991). Some LGBTQ+ people may believe it too, and others, who remain unconvinced, may feel that they do not really have the right to feel that way. The issue has become depoliticised. Grant (2016, p.2) defines this as "the muting or silencing of personal and group agency, advocacy and action, and the stifling of the involvement or interests of democratic influences". This is no different to erasure. In the same way, assimilation has simply moved the boundaries of acceptability, and created homonormative standards as pernicious as heteronormative ones in their marginalisation of people outside of the "charmed circle" of acceptability (Rubin, 2012, p.153). Robinson (2012) describes the action of assimilative practices as reifying heteronormativity and confirming its norms around sexuality and gender. Depoliticization and assimilation are the new horsemen of homophobia.

The process of framing, developing, and doing this project has provided me with a platform from which I can launch my own little queer boat onto the oceans of higher education. My perception of my role has shifted from a traditional view of education,

I love you

I was helping a third-year student with a technical GIS issue. Through a supportive and personal interaction, he resolved the issue. As I walked away, he said, "I love you, Michael". We had a laugh about it… But when I thought about it in the context of me and how I want to teach, that flippant remark took on a much greater meaning.

to one more directly aligned with anti-oppressive education and pedagogies of desire. It is ironic that it has taken so long for me to realise that the elements of my own education that have had the most lasting impression and value were the elements that were similarly provocative and contentious – although I may not have recognised them as such at the time. I have always maintained that education is, unavoidably, future-facing optimistic activism. We prepare our students for the future, but we should also be equipping them to build and shape that future. I hope I can become a more courageous, queerer teacher. I hope that as I do that, I can also support others to do the same.

Whilst I recognise the immense privilege of my position, and that qualified progress has been made since The Buggery Act of 1533, I must also note that sexuality related hate crime has more than doubled, and gender related hate crime almost tripled in the UK over the past five years (Stonewall, 2023). In the US there has been a 13.8% increase in reported crimes based on sexual orientation and a 32.9% increase in crimes based on gender identity in the last year (Russell, 2023). This is not OK, there is work to be done. And I am putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.

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APPENDIX 1: Choosing a suitable signifier

There are many variations, LGBTQ, LGBTQI+, LGBTPQIA and LGBTQIAPPTS. These signifiers conflate categories of sexuality (LGBPA), gender (T) and sex (I), which has been problematised by (Benozzo *et al*., 2015). The Q-element is possibly more inclusive but is seen as more politicised. Such listings of variations of human experience are also, inevitably, divisive, and exclusionary. For example, people who are neither cisgender nor transgender (identify as neither male nor female, regardless of their biological sex) are not included even in the (lengthy) LGBTPQIAPPTS (perhaps, '+' is the solution?), I think such lists will always be problematic, and any choice is contestable.

'Non-hetero' is succinct, but privileges heterosexuality as a point of reference, entrenching heteronormativity (it reminds me of the use of non-white, used in South Africa when I was growing up). A suggested alternative that captures the many variations, but without such conflation, is Gender and Sexual Minorities (GSM). However, it lacks any political history, and has been criticised for its implicit association with potential discrimination, by using the word 'minority'.

I will use the signifier LBGTQ+, which is familiar and seems suitably inclusive when reporting on previous research, or in general discussion.

However, post-structural interpretations of identities, require particular attention to be paid to how language is used. Within my positional writing I am going to use the word 'queer', because it has no semiotic link with sexuality, gender, or sex specifically, and because of its overt political associations, and the value of reclaiming an insulting epithet.

APPENDIX 2: Queen Victoria and the lesbians

There is an apocryphal story, that lesbianism was never criminalised in the UK because Queen Victoria did not think it could possibly exist – and subsequently vetoed its mention in the Labouchere Amendment of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which criminalised "gross indecency" between men specifically. It is worth noting that up until the introduction Labouchere's amendment the focus of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 (48 & 49 Vict. c.69) was on prostitution, with a clear focus on protecting young girls and women – its title was "*An Act to make further provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the suppression of brothels, and other purposes*". His amendment introduced a clause that criminalised any act "in public or in private…of gross indecency [38] between males".

Two key arguments have been made against this theory. The first is constitutional – it was not within Queen Victoria's power to veto legislation. Queen Anne had been the last monarch to attempt a veto – in 1776. The second, is that lesbianism was too uncommon to receive any specific mention. Although no accounts contemporaneous with the legislation itself exist – by the early twentieth century 14% of unmarried and 20% of married women admitted to having had sexual experiences with another woman (Bement Davis, 1930).

It is suggested that this story may have had its origin by conflating elements of a true story, that in 1921, the UK Lord Chancellor, Frederick Smith, 1st Viscount Birkenhead, argued against legislation criminalising lesbian sex as it would make innocent women aware of the existence of such practices (Doan, 2001).

Another potential 'source' of this apocryphal story links it to a protest for lesbian equality during 1977 in New Zealand, which took a statue of Queen Victoria as its focus. This too has been discounted as references to the original story appeared as early as 1969 – an apocryphal account of an apocryphal event!

[38] This was not defined in any meaningful way and extended the realm of criminal activity from the more specific 'buggery' in the legislation which the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 (48 & 49 Vict. c.69) replaced.

APPENDIX 3: Contextual and theoretical touchpoints

Although the specific characteristics of the project are an emergent property of the research methodology, the list of touchpoints below is based on previous research into LGBTQ+ identities in the workplace. It will not be used as directive in any way.

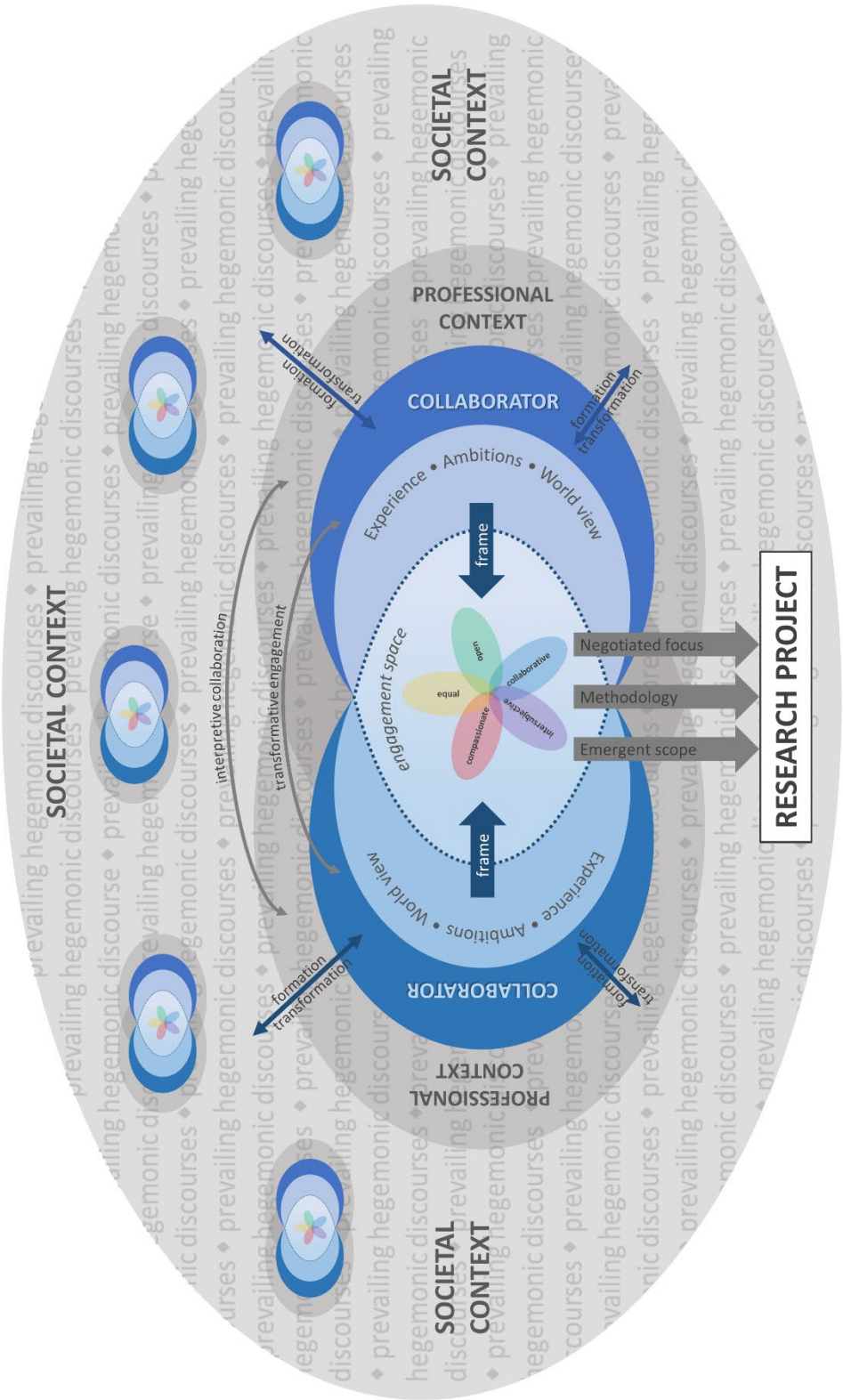
Contextual touchpoints

performance · professional identities · post-structural interpretations of identities · queer · acceptance / tolerance · the gay-friendly closet · stereotypes · activism · invisibility · contingent acceptance · vulnerability · harassment · gay-bashing · unwanted sexual advances · rigidly defined workplace performances · gay-friendly workplaces · strategic visibility · professionalism · gender-transgressive behaviours · acceptability · self-censorship · selective revelation · assimilative compromises · adaptive behaviours · legitimised heteronormative discourses · persistent discriminatory behaviours · homophobic attitudes · challenge prejudice · valorising out · denigrating not out · categorical thinking · performative · subjectivation · constituting identity · heteronormativity · authenticity · identity discourses · asymmetric hetero / gay binary · heteronormative subjection · heterosexual matrix · homosexual Other · essentialist identity · personal risk · social exclusion · ridicule · threat · professional risk · career limiting · devalued · dual identities · public identity · private identity · homo-negativity · normative stereotypes · homophobia · personal background · academic background · legislative protection · proclaimed sexuality · job losses · career sabotage · avoidance · power relations · students · reflected / disclosed · impression management · masculinist gender performances · curricular elements · self-reflexive processes · alienation · role models · diversity · political response · hegemonic thinking · power · institutional invisibility · obligation · safe places · queer students · empathy / hostility · choice · visibility · alienation · activist educator · queerness · masculinist norms · anti-LGBTQ+ bias · white male · gender-based assessment of competency · fear of harassment · physical violence on campus · discrimination · lack of support · lower job satisfaction · anti-discrimination policies · younger LGBTQ+ workers / older LGBTQ+ colleagues · STEM academics · pernicious contexts

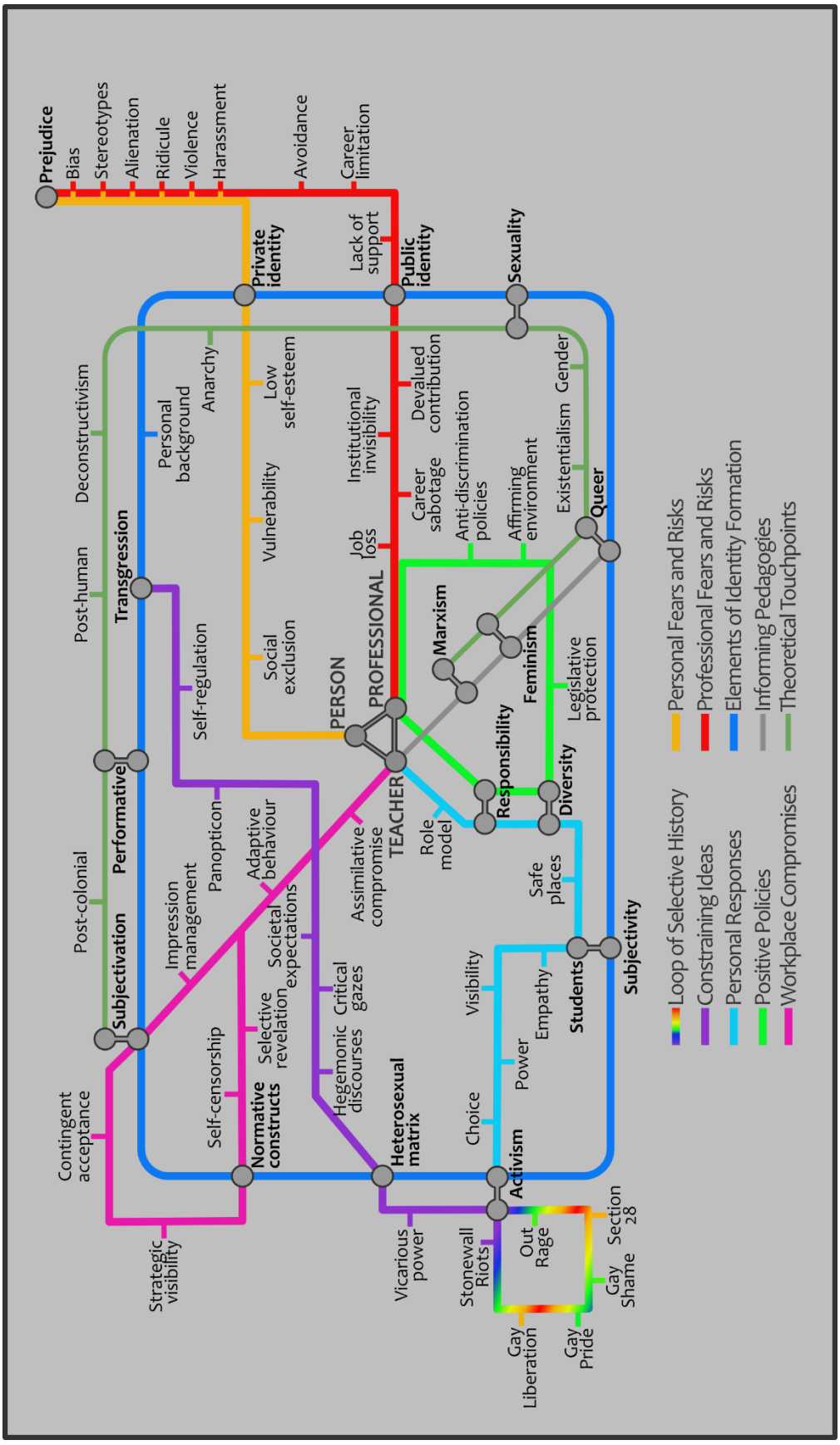
Theoretical touchpoints

existentialism · essentialism · bad faith · responsibility · freedom · gender · spectral conceptualisation of sexuality · Stonewall Riots · gay liberation · feminist · unexamined privileging · queer activism · social structures · operation of power · post-structural turn · normative societal processes · constrained socially constructed identities · panopticon · metaphor · critical gazes · self-regulation · censure · hegemonic discourses · vicarious power · behaviour regulation · subjectivities · performativity · subjectivation · normalcy / deviancy · sexuality · identity politics · universalist · heterosexual matrix · sex-gender-sexuality · bodies · instantiated gender · what we do, not who we are · societal expectations · discourses · mantle of 'reality' · performativity · reified ideology · power relations · gender performance · subversive performance · binary understandings · asymmetric privileging · coercive discourses · fixed identity · post-structuralist paradigm · anti-racist · post-colonial approaches · ontologies · epistemologies · problematic data · momentary realities · destabilised reality · social construction · normative discourses · deconstructivism · intersectionality

APPENDIX 4: Enlargement of Figure 6



APPENDIX 5: Enlargement of Figure 7



APPENDIX 6: Queer Guerillas – Postscript

There was always the possibility that the stickers were being removed by a zealous cleaner. So, a more permanent option than a sticker was explored. A metal rainbow fridge magnet was glued to the wall next to the words 'Heroes of computing'. It lasted two days – then it to was removed. This required considerable effort and damaged the paintwork on the wall, which suggested this was not the action of a member of the cleaning staff. At the same time rainbow stickers linked to other LGBTQ+ heroes in the building were defaced.

In response, an installation was created with police and crime scene tape, alongside posters defining 'hate crime', 'homophobe', bigot' and 'queer erasure'. This was taken down and put up again daily for a week.

When the story was told at a staff network meeting, people were upset...and interestingly there was quite an appetite for activism. The whole story is going to be brought to the attention of the LGBT Diversity Champion.

APPENDIX 7: Participant information sheet

Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and if you have any queries or would like more information, please contact me[redacted]

What is the project about?

The project aims to explore personal and public LGBT+ identities in higher education STEM teaching experiences. I am doing this research as part of my Professional Doctorate in Education, at the [redacted].

You are receiving this information package as you have expressed an interest in participating this research project.

Why is this research needed?

When we teach, we are performing – playing a role – in our classrooms. This research project is focussed on uncovering who we choose to be during these teaching performances. As LGBT+ people, the formation of this public persona, is mediated by considerations of our sexuality/gender in the context of our own personal outness, within our disciplinary contexts, within our universities, and within the higher education sector as a whole.

This project aims to explore the experiences of LGBT+ STEM teaching academics, focussing on how we reconcile our personal and professional (teaching) performances. It offers an opportunity to discuss our experiences and co-create a framework within which they can be considered.

This research is important, as LGBT+ staff responses are consistently more negative than their heterosexual colleagues in employee surveys. Questions about happiness and anxiety, and quality of life show statistically significantly lower responses. Lesbian women and bisexual respondents reported not feeling that that university is committed to embracing diversity or creating an inclusive environment for all staff.

I have chosen STEM disciplines as local and international educational research suggests that levels of prejudice may be higher in this context than in others.

How will the research be done?

The project is taking an unconventional approach. Although I am the nominal 'researcher', my role is equal to yours (as a collaborator) in influencing how the project unfolds, and where the emphasis of any analyses will lie. The interpretative approaches that we will implement, will be negotiated as part of the research process. The qualitative nature of the research means that is likely that direct quotations will be presented as part of dissemination activities.

At the start of your involvement the following personal information will be collected: your name, job description, length of service, departmental and faculty affiliation. This information will be pseudonymised. It is likely that further personal information may be revealed during the engagements. All data arising from the engagements will only be associated with the pseudonymised identity in all published outputs.

How long will the project last?

The project will last for three years, and, if you agree to collaborate, you will be expected to meet with me for a one-to-one meeting, three times over the space of about 18 months. I can travel, and the time and location for the meetings will be agreed once the project is underway.

The first engagement, which will happen toward the end of 2019, will last about two hours, and is likely to involve discussing life histories and teaching experiences – but it will be a responsive, open and unstructured exploration of your experiences and priorities – not mine. At the end of this engagement, we will discuss thematic areas and possible interpretative strategies I could use to re-present and understand your teaching experiences.

The second engagement, about nine months later, will be a joint review of the write-up I have produced based on the first engagement. As it is very important to me that you are satisfied that my interpretation is an appropriate reflection of our

discussions and your position, you will be able to read, and respond to whatever I have produced. Collaboratively, we will modify or add to my interpretation, to ensure you are satisfied with how your experience has been represented.

The final engagement will happen a few months later and will focus on exploring the consequences of the first two engagements on your personal perspectives, your practice, and your teaching performances– investigating if collaborating on this project has, in any way, been a transformative experience.

With your consent, all these meetings will be digitally recorded and transcribed, and the data will be stored in compliance with the information set out in the "How will my data be stored?" section below.

What will be expected of me?

If you do become involved as a collaborator, it is hoped that you will remain committed to the process until all three engagements are complete. It is hoped that our discussions will be undertaken in an open, honest, compassionate, and mutually supportive manner.

What if I wish to stop participating?

You have the right to withdraw from the project without giving any reasons. You can withdraw up until the end of the third engagement. Withdrawal from the project will involve the deletion of your data from all transcripts, interpretative material and unpublished outputs. However, given the intersubjective nature of the research, the influence that you may have had on the nature and scope of project, and on me, cannot be deleted in a similar mechanistic fashion.

To affirm your willingness to continue collaborating on the project, your ongoing consent with be formally sought at the start of 2nd and 3rd engagements. At the same time you will be asked if you are happy for your previous contributions to become a permanent part of the project's data, even if you choose to withdraw from the project later.

Should you choose to withdraw at any point, please write to me [redacted] informing me of your decision.

What support is available to participants?

Research engagements will be guided by the principles of co-creation, collaboration, kinship and a commitment to mutual wellbeing. While it is hoped that participation will be a positive experience, it is possible that emotive issues will be discussed. The level of engagement with such issues will be entirely determined by you. If you feel uncomfortable at any time you can ask for the engagement to stop. Should you need it, confidential, emotional support is available through the SwitchboardLGBT+ Helpline (https://switchboard.lgbt/) – a national charity offering telephonic (0300 330 0630), text, and email support, or through the Samaritans (116 123).

If during the research, disclosure occurs of any event or experience, which may have particular ethical or legal implications, a way forward will be established collaboratively. Additional advice will be sought from my supervisory team, and if necessary, also from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee. In these instances, your right to anonymity may need to be waived.

How will my personal data be stored?

Data will be stored in compliance with university guidelines and GDPR. Further details are presented in the Privacy Notice appended to this information sheet.

Every care will be taken to ensure that neither you nor any implicated associates are recognisable in any of the research outputs. Where it is necessary, additional consents will be sought from people implicated during the series of engagements.

All the information you provide will be pseudonymised at the point of transcription.

All personal identifiers, including institutional and departmental affiliations, will be removed from the interview transcripts, interpretative texts or research outputs. Pseudonymised identifiers, and transcripts will be stored in password-protected files on encrypted media on password protected university computers. Back-ups will be stored on cloud-based storage within the university's IT infrastructure.

All data, including backups, will be deleted no longer than four years after the completion of the project.

How will the results be published?

In all instances the research outputs will comply with the project's principle of anonymity. It is anticipated that the research will be published as:

- A publicly available dissertation/thesis
- Peer reviewed journal articles
- Conference papers and presentations

Who has ethically approved this research?

The project has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty and University Research Ethics Committees. Any comments, questions or complaints about the ethical conduct of this study can be addressed to the Research Ethics Committee.

What if something goes wrong?

If during the project, you feel that things are not as they should be, please contact my Director of Studies, who will be able to address your concerns, queries or complaints, and escalate them if necessary.

How do I get involved?

If you are interested in participating, please contact me to set-up an initial discussion, and so that I can explain the project in more detail and answer any questions you may have.

This information sheet, and any other initial discussions we have, form the basis on which you agree to collaborate with me on this project. You will be asked to complete an informed consent form, which will formalise your willingness to participate. Your consent will also be re-affirmed at the start of the second and third engagements.

Once these initial formalities are over, we will arrange a time and place for the first engagement.

Contact Information

Please contact me using the details below. I have also included the contact information of my Director of Studies and Supervisors, although I would ask that you direct all queries to me in the first instance.

[redacted]

Privacy notice

Purpose of the Privacy Notice

This privacy notice explains how the university collects, manages and uses your personal data before, during and after you participate in this project exploring LGBT+ teaching experiences of academic staff in STEM disciplines. 'Personal data' means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (the data subject). An 'identifiable natural person' is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, including by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier, or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.

This privacy notice adheres to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) principle of transparency. This means it gives information about:

- How and why your data will be used for the research;
- What your rights are under GDPR; and
- How to contact the university and the project lead in relation to questions, concerns or exercising your rights regarding the use of your personal data.

This Privacy Notice should be read in conjunction with the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form provided to you before you agree to take part in the research.

Why are we processing your personal data?

The university undertakes research under its public function to provide research for the benefit of society. As a data controller we are committed to protecting the privacy and security of your personal data in accordance with the (EU) 2016/679 the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 (or any successor legislation) and any other legislation directly relating to privacy laws that apply (together "the Data Protection Legislation"). General information on Data Protection law is available from the Information Commissioner's Office (https://ico.org.uk/).

How do we use your personal data?

We use your personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place on the lawful bases of fulfilling tasks in the public interest, and for archiving purposes in the public interest, for scientific or historical research purposes.

We will always tell you about the information we wish to collect from you and how we will use it.

We will not use your personal data for automated decision making about you or for profiling purposes.

Our research is governed by robust policies and procedures and, where human participants are involved, is subject to ethical approval from either Faculty or University Research Ethics Committees. This research has been approved by Arts, Creative Industries and Education Faculty Research Ethics. The research team adhere to the Ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (and/or the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, 2013) and the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

For more information about the research ethics approval process please see our Research Ethics webpages.

What data do we collect?

The data we collect will vary from project to project. Researchers will only collect data that is essential for their project. The specific categories of personal data processed are described in the Participant Information Sheet provided to you with this Privacy Notice. These include your name, job description, length of service, and departmental and faculty affiliations.

Who do we share your data with?

We will only share your personal data in accordance with the attached Participant Information Sheet and your Consent.

How do we keep your data secure?

We take a robust approach to protecting your information with secure electronic and physical storage areas for research data with controlled access. If you are participating in a particularly sensitive project the university puts into place additional layers of security. The university has Cyber Essentials information security certification.

Alongside these technical measures there are comprehensive and effective policies and processes in place to ensure that users and administrators of information are aware of their obligations and responsibilities for the data they have access to. By default, people are only granted access to the information they require to perform

their duties. Mandatory data protection and information security training is provided to staff and expert advice available if needed.

How long do we keep your data for?

Your personal data will only be retained for as long as is necessary to fulfil the cited purpose of the research. The length of time we keep your personal data will depend on several factors including the significance of the data, funder requirements, and the nature of the study. Specific details are provided in the attached Participant Information Sheet. Your personal data will be deleted as soon as the project is over, but pseudonymised data output will be retained for two years. Anonymised data that falls outside the scope of data protection legislation as it contains no identifying or identifiable information may be stored in a research data archive or another carefully selected appropriate data archive.

Your Rights and how to exercise them

Under the Data Protection legislation you have the following qualified rights:

(1) The right to access your personal data held by or on behalf of the University;
(2) The right to rectification if the information is inaccurate or incomplete;
(3) The right to restrict processing and/or erasure of your personal data;
(4) The right to data portability;
(5) The right to object to processing;
(6) The right to object to automated decision making and profiling;
(7) The right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Please note, however, that some of these rights do not apply when the data is being used for research purposes if appropriate safeguards have been put in place.

We will always respond to concerns or queries you may have. If you wish to exercise your rights or have any other general data protection queries, please the Data Protection Officer.

If you have any complaints or queries relating to the research in which you are taking part, please contact either the research project lead, whose details are in the attached Participant Information Sheet, the Research Ethics Committee, or the university's research governance manager.

v.1: This Privacy Notice was issued in April 2019 and will be subject to regular review/update.

APPENDIX 8: Informed Consent form

Initial informed consent

This consent form will have been given to you with the Participant Information Sheet. Please ensure that you have read and understood the information contained in the Participant Information Sheet and asked any questions before you sign this form. If you have any questions please contact a member of the research team, whose details are set out on the Participant Information Sheet

If you are happy to take part in the project as described in the Participant Information Sheet, please sign and date the form. You will be given a copy to keep for your records.

- I have read and understood the information in the Participant Information Sheet which I have been given to read before asked to sign this form;
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study;
- I have had my questions answered satisfactorily by the research team;
- I agree that anonymised quotes may be used in the final Report of this study;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time until the data has been anonymised, without giving a reason;
- I agree to take part in the research

Name (Printed).....

Signature..... Date.....

Please keep your copy of this consent form and the information sheet together.