"I Truly Think That Some Schools Don't Want To Appear As If They Have These Issues.": Microaggressions Experienced By Queer Educators In Canadian Schools

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Abstract: Queer educators experience their work differently than their non-queer colleagues due to institutional and systemic pressures and influence. Due to tokenism and routine microaggressions, as well as implicit pressure to lead anti-oppressive practices at multiple school levels, these educators routinely experience marginalization and oppression in their work. This research invited four 2SLGBTQIA+ educators to share rich, storied descriptions of their experiences within educational spaces. The study employed qualitative analysis through a narrative inquiry-based lens of the lived experiences of these Canadian educators. The results of the narrative analysis revealed a series of shared experiences of a variety of oppressions that were categorised as institutional, personal, and actionable. Results showed shared experiences of tension between systemic expectations and treatment with participant's needs and well-being. As foundational work, this research illuminated gaps in the nuanced understanding of the experiences of queer educators in Canadian school contexts.

Keywords: 2SLGBTQIA+, Queer, Educators, Canada, Microaggressions, Teachers, Narrative

Introduction

The land that we are writing on, Mi'kma'ki, was colonized long before the authors' present existence, and the oppression of people with multiple points of intersectionality has had historical and ongoing horrific impacts on their lives. Specific sources of oppression include Indigenous individuals and groups having to navigate laws that are racist and lethal (Joseph, 2018; Kubik et al., 2009; McDiarmid, 2019; Morgensen, 2010, 2012; Pease, 2010; Singh et al., 2019). The impacts of colonization are historical and contemporary and are upheld at an institutional and systemic level (Gottlieb, 2019; Morgensen, 2010, 2012; Robinson, 2020; Roscoe, 1998; Smith, 2010; Williams, 1986). In addition to race, gender has been impacted by colonization across many countries and cultures, and the scant literature has been growing since the 1990s to analyse lived experiences of how colonialism has shaped gender Moreton-Robinson, 2020. Like other historically oppressed groups, 2SLGBTQIA+ educators must navigate the world with many different standards and laws that govern their bodies, much of which remains primarily misunderstood or underrepresented (Meyer, 2010; Morgensen, 2010, 2012; Mulé et al., 2009).

There remain significant gaps in the research literature that centre the voice of minoritized groups, which routinely prioritizes the voices of those that hold more privilege (Pillay, 2020). Gender and sexual orientation are societal constructs that have multiple interpretations and understandings. The 2SLGBTQIA+ community has a long history of existence and oppression that has not always been well documented. There remains scant literature available in educational and professional research journals that highlight the unique experiences of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community (Waite & Denier, 2019; Warner, 2002; Wells, 2017). There have been a handful of contemporary educational scholars who have researched and reported the oppressive conditions for 2SLGBTQIA+ staff and educators (Beagan et al., 2021; Byers et al., 2020; Callaghan, 2015; Kearns et al., 2017; Meyer et al., 2015; Mitton-Kukner et al., 2016; Tompkins et al., 2019). However, much of the focus of scholarship has been on the impact of these systems on 2SLGBTQIA+ students (Birkett et al., 2009; Burkholder et al., 2021; Fantus & Newman, 2021; Herriot, 2014; Jones, 2016; Liboro et al., 2015; Morrison et al., 2014; Surette, 2019a; Surette, 2019b). Historical treatment of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has often been violent, with far fewer reports than accurately represent the portion of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community that has experienced discrimination compared to heterosexual and cisgender populations (Barker & Scheele, 2016; Beauchamp, 2008; Gottlieb, 2019; Nadal et al., 2011; Northen, 2008; Simpson, 2018; Warner, 2002).

Numerous studies illuminate the physical and mental health disparities and impact for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and adults outside of the education system (Frisell et al., 2010; Hooper, 2019; Meyer, 1995, 2003; Nadal et al., 2011; Northen, 2008; Snapp et al., 2015; Waldo, 1999). Some of these disparities can be

attributed to the routine microaggressions or everyday slights, snubs, and messages that communicate hostility and disrespect to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Microaggressions are detrimental to people who experience them, and the impact of microaggressions has cascading effects.

A schema is a collection of understandings of how someone comprehends their environment and its information implicitly and explicitly (Clark et al., 1997). This becomes a pattern of thought or behaviour that categorizes the information and then creates relationships. As a result of normative discourses and microaggressions, these experiences of invalidation, insult, and indignity are exacerbated and may become part of that person's schema (Meyer, 2010; Northen, 2008; Sue, 2010). As a person begins to experience microaggressions that play into their schema, and minority stress ensues, the more profound the generalizing impact of heterosexism and oppression is on the identity and well-being of the 2SLGBTQIA+ individual. If positionality, power and oppression are considered, the proliferation of minority stress is exasperated (Crenshaw, 1989; LaSala et al., 2008; Meyer, 2010; Peter et al., 2021).

Choosing to be out and live openly as a 2SLGBTQIA+ educator comes at significant risk, professionally and personally (LaSala et al., 2008; Wells, 2017). There is no evidence that schools in any one part of Canada are significantly more inclusive of 2SLGBTQIA+ students, educators, and parents than their counterparts in other parts of Canada (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Nadal et al., 2011; Rayside, 2014; Wells, 2017). While there have been shifts across Canada in attempts to embed more inclusive curriculum and programming for sexual and gender minority students/youth curriculum and support of these students in schools are often contested by those opposed to policies that challenge heteronormativity, and as a result, schools become a crucial battleground for future hegemony(Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Nash & Browne, 2021; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Within the existing literature, there remains a gap in scholarship that offers a foundational understanding of the experiences within these margins, from which subsequent research can build. Conversely, the literature elaborating on the tokenized 2SLGBTQIA+ educator is even more scarce in scholarship. The dearth of stewardship within academia underscores the importance of studies that explore the experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ educators within a Canadian context. This study serves as preliminary foundational work accentuating the gap by asking four 2SLGBTQIA+ educators what their experience has been navigating educational contexts in Canada.

Key Terms

In this research, we attempted to use inclusive language and representative of current discourses in the literature pertaining to 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. However, since language is ever-changing and culture influences language, some of these terms may only partially represent some members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. For this study, the term *queer* will be used as an all-encompassing term, and used interchangeably, with the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym. The term queer is still a colloquial term with many connotations (Barker & Scheele, 2016; G & Zuckerberg, 2019; Gottlieb, 2019; Latchmore & Marple, 2005). Many queer activists use the word queer as an over-arching term for those people who fit perfectly outside of the heterosexual/cisgender/lesbian/gay mainstream (Barker & Scheele, 2016). The use of the interchangeable *queer* with *2SLGBTQIA+* remains debated, as there are mixed feelings about this word, but the audience reading this needs to have mirrors and windows that represent them, the queer community (Smolkin & Young, 2011).

The term *intersectionality* was first coined by Crenshaw in 1989 to explain how Black women were systematically disadvantaged by being both Black and a woman (Crenshaw, 1989; Gottlieb, 2019; Pease, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). As the word continued to evolve, it became an inclusive term to describe how positionalities of privilege and oppression interact with and depend upon each other at the intersections of marginalized identities (Gottlieb, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

The term *token* in this research refers to the 2SLGBTQIA+ person and represents the concept of tokenism (i.e., the rural token may have unspoken job requirements due to their membership in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community). Tokenism exists to pressure individuals to be a spokesperson and accept increased labour by taking on roles to support the queer community and is rarely recognized by organizations (Beagan et al.,

2021; Calvard et al., 2020; Kanter, 1977; Stroshine & Brandl, 2011). Participants in this study spoke about the tension between a desire to serve the needs of the 2SLGBTQIA+ population and the expectation that they would carry this burden strictly based on their joint membership within the queer community. This is not to negate the true lived experiences of various community members but to ensure clarity in the language that is being used throughout that is meant to include rather than exclude.

Another term relevant to this research is *microaggression.* This behaviour and/or unconscious statement communicates hostile or derogatory massages toward members of targeted social groups (Nadal et al., 2011; Sue, 2010a, 2010b; Sue et al., 2007; Beagan et al., 2021; Calvard et al., 2020; Kanter, 1977; Stroshine & Brandl, 2011). This research, aligned with existing scholarship, will highlight how routinely present and disruptive microaggressions remain in school environments, which continue to create experiences of exclusion, exhaustion, rejection, and frustration. Kendi (2019) attempted to illuminate the juxtaposition of the words micro and aggression that describe such a phenomenon that impacts so deeply and not at a minimal level that the word micro implies.

Finally, *hegemonic influence* describes the undertones of a person's reality. For instance, it may have been the queer person's hegemonic influence growing up to think that homosexuality and a queer identity were wrong through a dominant view. To a young 2SLGBTQIA+ member who is starting to understand their identity, it certainly can impact their schema of the queer community with how the hegemonic influence's belief impacts their collection of what the 2SLGBTQIA+ community is and how they fit into it. As the person grows, they may be exposed to others that do not share their hegemonic influence's belief system, and thus, the schema may shift as to how they understand what it means to be queer. The status quo of a population in an area would consider the power structures that uphold the concept of hegemonic influence (Alimahomed, 2010; Liebler et al., 2009; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019; Yep, 2003). Queer educators would be the advocates questioning and attempting to change the status quo with the privilege they have as educated people in a position of power, as an educator, while having minority status as people who belong to a historically oppressed group, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Positionality Statement

The first author and primary investigator of this study identifies as a white, queer educator who has taught in multiple provinces. The ambiguity of queer is a purposeful choice in disclosure by this author as they continue to unlearn the need for categorization; they are content to identify as queer in academia, as specifics of their intersectional identity are more nuanced than superlative box-ticking. As the primary investigator in this study, they acknowledge that they could very easily be on the other side of this study as a participant. This researcher's positionality provided an opportunity to carve out a safe(r) space during our interviews (Freitag, 2013). Having never met the participants, the conclusion of our interviews was met with community; respect and thanks were given as we were working together to help systems be better for all queer members. While it is impossible to separate themselves and their experience from this research completely, they have been careful of their bias. This is balanced by noting that there were times in this research when their voice and bias needed to be shared, like in this section. The second author does not identify as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community but also has lived and worked in rural contexts across Canada where hegemonic influences were predominantly heterosexist and heteronormative. Together, the research team approached the study and research narratives with curiosity and reflexivity from different positionalities that prioritized each participant's first voice.

Methodology

This narrative-based study was proposed, conducted, and written in Mi'kma'ki, colonized as the peninsula province of Nova Scotia (The Canadian Encyclopedia: Nova Scotia, 2022). Narrative research, by nature, is a co-construction of rich, storied samples of participant's lives, as research and participants create something unique through their conversations together (Josselson, 2013). The study provided formidable data that came from multiple interviews with four participants. Accessibility in language pillared the research writing as knowledge is empowering; this article will also follow that conscious writing style to bridge the participants' rich stories into academic writing (Marsden et al., 2019).

Three primary theories guided this study: queer theory, critical theory, and minority stress theory, which informed the design, implementation, and reflection of the research. Queer theory posits that the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has been impacted culturally and politically due to historical suppression (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gamson, 2000). Queer theory rejects binary distinctions of female- and male-related contexts. For example, gendered language, actions, and expectations of thoughts, behaviours, and appropriate feelings according to those gendered roles (Dilley, 1999). Intriguingly, the heterosexual community is interconnected with the queer community, as heterosexuality/cisgender bodies reproduce dominant status through a dependency on homosexuality/non-cisgender bodies that is uncompromisingly affirmed and safeguarded to sustain itself through performance (Butler, 2004, 2011; Morgensen, 2012; Pease, 2010). Morgensen (2012) concluded that "…colonialism is produced, extended, and illuminated by gendered and sexual power [as a] hallmark of colonial studies…" (p. 3). The extension of power that is upheld depends upon the oppression of those with minority status within the hegemony of gender and sexual orientation.

Critical theory aspires toward empowering individuals to transcend the constraints placed on them by their class, gender, and race (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study aimed to investigate how systems of oppression exist within educational spaces in Nova Scotia, Canada. Critical theory was used to select participants to prioritize historically oppressed voices. As consent and demographic forms came in, all potential participants were informed that selection was based on centring intersectionality (Camfield, 2016).

Lastly, minority stress theory is described as observing the hegemonic views and discourses surrounding the misalignments with minority groups and consequential conflict with social environments (Meyer, 1995, 2003). The concept of minority stress comes from stigma, discrimination, internalized homophobia, and/or violence, as well as how microaggressions perpetuate in the individual over time (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Further, microaggressions commonly lead to minority stress across a variety of environments, not restricted to occupational transgressions alone (Calvard et al., 2020; Frisell et al., 2010; Meyer et al., 2015; Meyer, 1995, 2003, 2010; Mulé, 2020; Tan et al., 2020).

Multiple modalities were used in this study when considering recruitment. Sampling came from a general email out to all of the Regional Centres for Education in Nova Scotia, as well as snowball sampling, also referred to as chain-referral sampling (Browne, 2005; Noy, 2008). Much of the history of queer people has been hidden, and communication has historically been through word-of-mouth to promote safety, so it was deemed appropriate that sampling involved word of mouth; all participants who identified an interest in the study found out about the research through this recruitment strategy (Warner, 2002). Only participants who were unknown to the researchers and who did not have a prior relationship were selected for the study.

There were four participants selected for this study, whom were chosen based on intersectional identities and who brought forward the most diversity in representation of the queer community, based on the people who showed interest in the study. The participants described themselves as teaching for 5-20+ years in education systems across Canada. Three have worked in rural contexts, and one has only ever been in urban settings within the education system. The disclosed identities of the four participants in this study are: cisgender female, genderqueer, nonbinary, white, queer woman, and queer. The pronouns of the participants were: she/her/they/them, she/her, she/her, and they/them. All four participants were in Nova Scotia's education system at the time of the interview. Each of the four participants had two interviews on either Zoom or in-person, based on the preference of the participant. There was about a month between each participant's first and second interviews.

The analysis was done with a deep dive into the data to see emerging themes. Narratives were read several times before analysis began. After several readings of the narratives, categories and themes were identified which emerged across the narratives. The narratives were then read again and specific quotes were pulled from the identified categories. The remaining quotes and segments of narratives left outside of the identified themes were reviewed a final time to see if additional categories or themes were missed. Sections of narratives that were outliers were also given their own category so as to still maintain their validity to continue foundational work. These narrative sections were given in the unique findings of the original work of the thesis (Cole, 2022). The primary themes which emerged after several cycles through the narrative data were: The Work, The Supports, and The Microaggressions of Hegemonic Influence. The complete study's thematic analysis revealed three major themes: The Work, The Supports, and The Microaggressions of

Hegemonic Influence (Cole, 2022). This article expands on the queer educators' experiences of these microaggressions in relation to the institution, self, microaggressions, decisions, and impact when asked the question: what has been your experience as a queer educator?

Findings

Institutional

The omnipresence of a microaggression may come from institutions upholding the status quo, ignorance, unwillingness to relinquish power structures, unspoken curriculum, and lack of mirrors and windows that represent the queer populous (Barker & Scheele, 2016; Calvard et al., 2020; Nadal et al., 2011; Peter et al., 2021; Smolkin & Young, 2011; Sue et al., 2007; Woodford et al., 2013). An example of a microaggression could be only giving binary options in literature or life contexts. (i.e., her or his, girls vs. boys, straight or not, and/or gender reveals). Binary categories are ways to "other" those who do not fit within the binary and, as a result, are examples of microaggressions. The low hum that Kendi (2019) described of a microaggression can be felt and at other times, the phenomenon is not able to be fully described (Calvard et al., 2020; Gerber et al., 2021; Kendi, 2019; Northen, 2008; Tan et al., 2020). Microaggressions are complex due to the intersectionous existence of queer people.

Many of the queer educators in the study shared their observation that topics of diversity and social justice were taken up mainly in surface and performative ways. One participant shared, "I feel like a lot of times it's a box being checked in terms of support" (Cole, 2022, p. 106). The queer educators all shared experiences of how microaggressions exist due to the lack of representation and resources that are readily available to promote genuine solidarity, systemic change, and support of the queer community.

In their interviews, they all shared many instances where microaggressions occurred, and the status quo and heterosexism were celebrated. The queer educators explained that they believed people have the best of intentions, but the unconsciousness with which they are aspiring to help was causing harm through the microaggressions that they were creating. Some examples that the queer educators shared were their experiences with bathrooms, barriers to inclusion, and lack of proactive support. One participant stated an example of an institutional microaggression, "Well, I know the transgender… you know that the document, the policy that's out there. Oh, sorry, not policy. Take my words back, I *wish* it was policy" (Cole, 2022, p. 108).

The queer teachers all shared that the adults in the institution are the ones that need the most education. The participants all explained that the majority of students get it, and there is an underrepresentation of reporting of heterosexism and imposed binary gender expectations that exist in school by the students to the adults. Multiple queer educators in this study shared their frustration with the superficial professional development they have received and that there is no follow through in what was delivered.

Another aspect the queer educators illuminated was the equity hires and positions for equity that do exist are stretched too thin. They shared that there is too much for a single person to do regarding equity as they spoke of the length and complexity of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. One participant explained that the equity hires they know of are not being set up to adequately be supported in the system. As a result, they are having extra content added to their job description. From an institutional stance, the queer educators shared they are around adults in all forms of employment that are ignorant of the queer community in the education system. A participant surmised what it is like to ask for support at an institutional level by saying, "It just feels like I need to do so much work to get support from people that don't understand" (Cole, 2022, p. 112).

Self

The queer educators collectively positioned themselves within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and noted that they are a very small piece of this community. They have lives full of reflection and reflexivity as they, too, may have internalized the microaggressions against their own community. Two participants specifically spoke about how they had internalized homophobia in their past and the growth they have had in learning about what that was about. Whereas another participant shared that they find it much easier to advocate for

racialized communities than their own queer community as they feel they do not know enough to speak about it properly. They shared they aim to learn about the impacts of their privilege and how to be anti-racist. They shared that they identify as a white settler and the impacts that this positionality has had on their experiences in a northern Indigenous community and in Mi'kma'ki. This participant philosophized their understanding of life as, "We're all just like flawed human beings going through life and fucking each other up, and that's how it goes. I just don't want [the queer youth] to hold on to that pain and let it like seep into their life in other ways and just know there's literally nothing wrong with who you are" (Cole, 2022, p. 114-115).

The queer educators have done and continue to do the extra work of knowing themselves, their triggers, and how they are interacting with the world around them in an intersectional manner as they navigate their membership in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community as queer educators. Their examined lives were identified as purposeful in shaping their understanding of their place in this world. When I asked one participant what it would be like if her colleagues had examined lives like she described her own, she maintained that if people cared and knew, they would be doing something.

The queer educators shared that they belong to a community that has a lot of identities within the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym. They find themselves in positions to be allies for community members and illuminate what it is like to advocate for self and community. The queer educators identified feeling, more often than not, isolated in their advocacy and have been put into positions to be tokenized as the unsolicited queer representative of the school. They shared that it falls on the queer folk to constantly advocate for themselves and for their community, to get the support they need. The queer educators noted the need for continual work and advocacy as they experienced microaggressions.

Decisions

As the queer educators identified wearing their multitude of metaphorical hats, they also were in positions where they needed to make decisions around advocacy and participation in the system. These decisions came with complexities that were impacted by institutions, relationships, and job security. The queer educators shared the impact of being the tokenized queer on staff. One participant was asked if they were a *good gay*, unlike the gay that they currently had at the school they were going to, which was described as difficult. The participant accepted the categorization as being a *good gay* so as not to cause waves of activism, allyship, and consciousness-raising. Another participant shared that they were hired to be a ray of sunshine in the school. A third participant spoke about how people just assumed that she was on top of leading the advocacy that is done in the building. She questioned, "I truly think that some schools don't want to appear as if they have these issues…So, if there are none of these incidences ever, or anybody needing supports to call anybody with specifics about what happened within this school, or things that just come up…There's no way every single school is never having incidences, you know?" (Cole, 2022, p. 119).

The queer educators identified being put into positions where they were the only queer representation within their schools, and they were making decisions as to what types of microaggressions to call out. These participants differed in their relationships with being tokenized, which highlighted the inherent problem in the tokenization of queer educators. There is a loss of autonomy and self-determination for queer educators to engage in the work of social justice and advocacy in a manner that feels most meaningful, rewarding, and self-preserving to them. Decisions when it comes to tokenized employability put the queer educators in this study in a mode to choose to participate or risk (under)employment, financial, and relational consequences.

Another decision that the queer educators shared was being in or out of the closet as an educator. The queer educators all spoke of their experiences of fitting into the hegemonic influence that was not designed for them and how they navigated this piece of their identity. Two participants shared they were closeted as they began their careers. One participant could not come out without risking her employment in a school board, and decided to come out after receiving her permanent contract. Another participant shared that they went back into the closet for their entire first year of teaching as did their partner in hopes of integrating more into the community. The queer educators all shared stories of how their membership to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has changed and evolved as they were living and not living with their authentic selves aloud to the world.

Finally, the last part of decision-making within microaggressions of hegemonic influence came down to job security. All four of the queer educators shared the impact of their membership in the queer community about having job security. Throughout the interviews, the queer educators were concerned with the words that they spoke as they illuminated pieces of the microaggressions that they had experienced throughout their careers. Their self-censorship was notable as they did not have enough support to share their experiences authentically. The queer educators were navigating how to exist within the system to maintain job security and the lack of institutional support for the queer community within the system. One participant specifically shared that because they are not yet permanent, this was holding them back from speaking up against the oppressions they witnessed in their school. Three of the four participants shared pieces of their experiences with job security and how this concept of employment stability was enough for them to decide not to speak up against the microaggressions that they were experiencing. Another explained that they have always spoken up against the microaggressions of hegemonic influence. When I asked them if they ever did not speak up against the microaggressions of hegemonic influence, they shared, "Yeah, with the caveat of sometimes staying closeted with students for various reasons, but no, on the big stuff, the policy stuff, or with admin., or that kind of stuff. No, I'd say I can't think of a time when I shied away from it…" (Cole, 2022, p. 123).

In their work, the queer educators were making conscious decisions about what pieces to share and what not to; they were deciding when to call in and when to call out. They were wearing all the metaphorical hats of what advocacy work they were choosing and being positioned to do, all while teaching the curriculum, marking, and lesson planning.

Impact

Three out of the four queer educators shared that they were tired; they were exhausted from being a queer educator right now. The impact of the microaggressions of hegemonic influence weighed heavily on the queer educators. They shared the impact of the microaggressions and being a minority gave them a gift and added challenge of assessing people to see if they are safe. One participant stated, "I feel like as a marginalized person, you learn to read people quickly about where they lie on the scale in terms of like, racism, homophobia, transphobia... I feel like you become a quick read of those things."

The other participants shared that they, too, were observing the people in their buildings to see who they could rely on and who they could not. When I asked one participant what it was like to see things trickle down to know you are the one at the end holding it, what is it like to be the person that holds the responsibility of choosing to educate, correct mistakes and harm, and provide support for her community as a member of the community that is being impacted. She poignantly stated, "Yeah, it's tiring, tiring and frustrating, like even just talking about it for the past hour. I feel it, and I get so upset that this is still where ... you know, we are. When things can they can be so much better, so much…" (Cole, 2022, 124).

The queer educators offered up pieces of their stories that they were willing to segment in our interviews as they movingly explained their narratives. Their stories were uniquely collective as their queer voices shared that not enough is being done to support queer educators and queer youth. However, despite the lack of resources and support, and the emotional and relational burden of the work, queer educators continued to fight for social justice in educational spaces in Nova Scotia's education system.

Discussion & Implications

The queer educators in this study unanimously described the extra stress that goes along with being a 2SLGBTQIA+ member in the education system; this aligns with minority stress theory and the ramifications of queer bodies going through systems that were never built to sustain them (Meyer, 2003). Queer educators are disadvantaged at an inequitable rate of harm through the microaggressions they have experienced; consequently, presumably, a continuation of microaggressive harm while institutions are upheld. One participant shared that they feared the progressive people doing the work haphazardly, as they were not where they needed to be in their understanding of delivering sensitive material about what minorities were going through. When people share that they are progressive or are not in a stance of continual learning, they perpetuate microaggressions and cause harm (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). People who want to skip to the end point of us all being humans and be treated accordingly are those who are not affected by the

intersectionous microaggressions that occur or invested in the work necessary to interrupt these systems (Eddo-Lodge, 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016).

The queer educators in this study were steadfastly strong advocates for the 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in Nova Scotia. They were often redirected in their interviews to focus on their own experience rather than their concern for and commitment to supporting the queer youth in their schools. More research is needed to dig into this phenomenon of queer educators' identity and how they support queer youth while being past queer youth themselves and now an adult in an education system that perpetuates ongoing oppression of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Like many other researchers in this field of study, we noted that there is a need for further study surrounding queer educators in Canada as the Canadian literature is inadequate (Fantus & Newman, 2021; Mulé, 2020; Sue, 2010a; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019; Waite & Denier, 2019; Wells, 2017). In the Nova Scotian education system, there are microaggressions in writing, spoken words, actions and the lack thereof of the entirety of the very real lived queer experience amidst the more dominant discourse of heteronormativity.

Limitations

This is foundational work, and more studies are needed to gather further the data that exists within the many queer educators that are occupying educational spaces outside of the four interviewed. The four queer educators in this study did not share all aspects of their experiences as queer educators and redacted experiences they have had. There were points in different interviews that the queer educators took pause as they carefully shared their narratives, and some participants shared that they did not share all the stories that go into being a queer educator. Some reasons that were shared were because they did not want to get in trouble with their employer. They would rather not say how they were being harmed, as it may look bad on their employer, and they anticipate their employment will be impacted. Another limitation is that this study had a small sample size and was not representative of the entire 2SLGBTQIA+ educator community. This study was not representative of Black, Indigenous, and people of colour's experiences in the role of queer educators and lacked many intersectionalities that were hoped for during the recruitment. The goal in recruitment was to uplift the voices of historically oppressed groups, and the sample had some intersectionalities, but not the amount that makes our world richly diverse.

Finally, membership to the queer community by the first author is ambivalently a limitation and a benefit. It is a benefit as they had an understanding of what lived experiences are as a person who is a queer educator in Nova Scotia and was told explicitly that they provided a safe space for interviews by some of the participants. A limitation is that they are very close to the study, and there is great potential for bias, as they are advocating and studying a concept that they have experienced countless times.

Conclusion

Intersectionous existences are both privileged and oppressed, and thus they can uplift and illuminate voices that may not have had the opportunity to be heard. This study aimed to take this opportunity to be intersectionous in our approach and truly provide a learning opportunity from suppressed voices of queer educators in Nova Scotia. The movement of liberation for the queer community will not necessarily need a peer review, but this is one way to document the revolution that is happening around us (Pillay, 2020). The purpose of this study is to acknowledge that the goal is social justice for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, as more work still needs to happen to dismantle systems of oppression, including within the education system. Due to the microaggressions, lack of support, and the additional burden of the work that the queer educators are experiencing they, like many educators, are choosing to leave the profession. Educators are burning out, in general (Koenig et al., 2018; Pérez-Luño et al., 2022; Szigeti et al., 2017). The queer educators would additionally have an intersectional layer of burning out as part of a minority stress theory framework (Meyer, 2010; Velez et al., 2013; Weiser et al., 2018). Many of the queer educators in this study questioned the longevity of the education system as a whole and their part in it.

We hope that this work's impact, which highlights a gap in the research, allows for more research and a new awareness of inequities. This article highlights the necessity of listening, disrupting, altering, and learning and repeating that cycle until we can have what is needed: humility and humanity. The work is both

doing the work and *wanting* to do the work while positioning yourself in knowing that it is, as the queer educators in this study highlighted, not going to be easy, but it is so necessary for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, adults and children, in Nova Scotia's education system.

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