

EGU2020-17929

<https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-egu2020-17929>

EGU General Assembly 2020

© Author(s) 2020. This work is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.



Conceiving a space for compassionate engagement with LGBT+ university lecturers around professional identity

Michael Horswell

University of the West of England, Geography & Environmental Management, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (michael.horswell@uwe.ac.uk)

Fear of harassment and physical violence (Patridge, Barthelemy and Rankin, 2014), experiences of discrimination, perceptions of a lack of support, lower job satisfaction (Cech and Pham 2017), feelings of isolation, and a need to work harder than colleagues to convince others of their competence (Yoder and Mattheis 2016) – these characterise the reported workplace experience of LGBT+ people in STEM disciplines in both academic and professional contexts.

Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger (2009) coin the term ‘the gay-friendly closet’ to reflect the experience of people who, despite being out in gay-friendly workplaces, report that they still downplay their homosexuality, or conform to stereotypes of how LGBT+ people are “expected to look, act and work” (p. 29). Many of their respondents claimed their acceptance as ‘normal’ ran alongside their own invisibility (know-one-knows-I-am-gay narratives). Other respondents, felt their acceptance was contingent on their choice not to ‘overplay’ their homosexuality. Tensions exist between negotiating a professional identity while managing perceptions so they are situated within the bounds of acceptability (Rumens and Kerfoot 2009; Benozzo et al. 2015). Gay/lesbian respondents have suggested that acceptability in the workplace is contingent on self-censorship, selective revelation, and/or assimilative compromises, all of which legitimize heteronormative discourses around sexuality and professional identity. These issues are recognised as more significant within STEM disciplines – which is considered a stridently masculinist and heteronormative field (Bilimoria and Stewart 2009; Cech and Pham 2017).

In an educational context where LGBT+ students have the right to remain invisible, Toynton (2006) 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 (2006) frames this as an element of the debate around ‘safe places’ for queer students, and suggests it sets up a dilemma for queer educators - trapping them between empathy and potential hostility – requiring a choice between an ‘enabling visibility’ and the risk of alienation.

The presentation will explore the links between critical educational praxis (focussed on Freire (1996), hooks (1994) and Britzman (1995)), queer theory (primarily Butler (1999) and Foucault (1990)), and anarchist methodologies and ethics (Deleuze and Guattari (1994) and Heckert (2016)). It will consider how this integration produces a space based on post-structural / post-human readings of sexuality and identity that enables transformative engagement, and commits to radical

compassion as the primary ethos for research engagement.