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## **We're Queer, but is our Safety Here?: Examining the Conditions Necessary to Preserve the Safety of Queer Educators**

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## Abstract

Substantial literature exists supporting LGBTQ+ individuals in education, yet most focus on students and not educators. School diversity initiatives often leave out gender and sexuality minorities. The Supreme Court extended protections against sex-based discrimination in Title VII towards gay and transgender individuals in the recent decisions of *Bostock v. Clayton Country* (2020), *Altitude Express Inc v. Zarda* (2019), and *R.G. and G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* (2019). These protections, however, prove insufficient. Under the framework of Queer Theory, this qualitative research study examines the experiences of 14 LGBTQ+ teachers through participatory surveys and semi-structured interviews. To understand the nuances of LGBTQ+ safety, we refer to our theoretical model, where teacher experiences were shaped by policy, school campus climate, and/or individual experience. Though no two teachers' stories are exactly alike, commonalities emerged. Safety can be defined as the ability to exist without retribution; this experience is related to that of other minority groups. Upholding queer-affirming safety for teachers requires addressing common workplace threats AND affirming identity and authenticity. LGBTQ+ teacher safety can be undermined by administrative action and inaction, as well as leaders who advise teachers against disclosing queer identities to students. Current conditions still cause many LGBTQ+ teachers to consider leaving teaching. Many of these educators find themselves creating and fending for their own safety, even when their schools claim to affirm queer identity. Schools and policymakers must heed the narratives and recommendations that emerge from the experiences of queer educators to enact stronger policies that protect and enhance LGBTQ+ teacher safety. Without safety for queer educators, safety for LGBTQ+ students cannot exist.

Keywords: Institutional Heteronormativity, LGBTQ+, Safe Schools, Queer Theory