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# Finding the "T" in LGBTQ: ESL Educator Perceptions of Transgender and Non-Binary Gender Topics in the Language Classroom

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FINDING THE “T” IN LGBTQ: ESL EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF  
TRANSGENDER AND NON-BINARY GENDER TOPICS IN THE LANGUAGE  
CLASSROOM

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of English  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirement for the Degree  
Master of Arts

By  
Teresa Witcher

December 2014

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TRANSGENDER AND NON-BINARY GENDER TOPICS IN THE LANGUAGE  
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This thesis is dedicated to my mother and grandmother, for their strength, tenacity,  
support, and love.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I. Introduction and Definitions of Concepts.....	1
Chapter II. Review of Literature.....	13
Chapter III. Theoretical Framework and Methodologies.....	37
Chapter IV: Research and Analysis.....	52
Chapter V: Weaknesses of the Study, Areas for Future Research, and Conclusions.....	64
Appendices.....	72
Appendix A. Glossary of Relevant Terms.....	72
Appendix B. Dumas’s Original Survey Tool.....	74
Appendix C. Survey Tool.....	77
Appendix D. Raw Data from Survey.....	80
References.....	92

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Dumas’s (2010) Original Check Box Question.....	48
Table 2. Modified Check Box Question from Thesis Survey.....	48
Table 3. Pre-Service Question.....	49
Table 4. In-Service Question.....	50
Table 5. End of Survey Open Answer Questions.....	50
Table 6. Pre-Service Responses to Controversial Topics in the ESL Classroom (Questions 9-11).....	53
Table 7. In-Service Responses to Controversial Topics in the ESL Classroom (Questions 9-11).....	55

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While there is a “T” in the acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ), the focus in both academia and the real world often shifts solely to sexuality. Even though the real world discussion of sexuality (and perhaps academia’s as well) is also much lacking in both attention to all sexualities (not simply heterosexual and homosexual), there is also a distinct lack of awareness about subtleties all along both the sexuality and gender spectrums. Although sexuality can depend on gender to some extent, particularly where limiting prefixes related to the preference for a specific binary gender (such as ‘hetero,’ ‘homo,’ or ‘bi’) occur, gender is separate from sexuality and the two cannot be simply conflated. Once gender is separated from sexuality, the issue of teaching LGBTQ topics in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom becomes even more complex. Previous research in the field has focused exclusively on sexuality while using the LGBTQ acronym, which serves as a subtle erasure of gender identities that are not explicitly bound within sexual identity.

In the ESL classroom, gender should be problematized so that gender identity is moved from the passive acceptance of an assigned set of performative behaviors to a conscientious decision made by an empowered agent. This battles both cisnormativity (the functioning assumption and cultural framework that all people identify with their assigned sex at birth, which in turn leads to ostracism of those who do not operate in



gender normative ways) but also allows all ESL students, regardless of gender identity, to look critically at what defines their gender and what factors go into the construction of any particular gender. Considering that many ESL students are coming from gender constructions present in their own cultures, even if those constructions resemble the Western binary, this is an incredibly feasible option given that scholars, such as Ged (2013), have found that gender identity, like all other aspects of identity, must be renegotiated in the language learning process, with results from the first cultural gender identity that are necessarily different by virtue of being constructed in an entirely different culture.

This thesis examines the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) corpus as it relates to non-binary gender identity and sexuality, as well as transgender and non-conforming topics in other disciplines, and suggests several means of opening up and reframing the conversation of gender in the ESL classroom. In addition, a modified replication of Dumas's (2010) study tool towards measuring educator perceptions in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classroom was used to poll the opinions of four pre-service and thirteen in-service with regards to transgender and non-binary topics in the American ESL classroom. This thesis concludes that there needs to be more research completed in the area, that teacher perceptions and their role in the classroom should be studied further to recognize what understandings or misunderstandings regarding gender in America are making their way into the ESL classroom.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS

Issues of social justice are complex and ever-changing. Within the span of decades, years, or even a few short months, social opinion, political correctness, and public policy can all change to reflect exclusive or inclusive stances on race, class, age, sexuality, and gender. At the same time, the role of academia to either impede or promote these social changes should not be underestimated. According to Shaull (2005),

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (p. 34).

Indeed, the classroom is, deliberately or not, a microcosm of the outside world in which students are allowed to essentially “play” with prevalent social systems and determine their roles and compliance within or without them. In this role, it becomes the primary place for social change to be practiced, evaluated, and eventually implemented into the larger outside world. When correctly allowed to flourish, these educational microcosms allow positive social change to occur quickly and to spread more rapidly outward. Used incorrectly, however, the classroom stagnates and instead continues with the same antiquated ideas that simply cannot explain or benefit all members of the society.

For the United States, the 1960s represented a time of social upheaval and restructuring on many fronts. It would be folly to state that this decade in any way “ended” discrimination, but the effect it did have on the rapid expansion of social justice in the U.S. should also not be undervalued. In 1969, transgender activists Marsha P.

Johnson and Sylvia Riviera helped lead the march against a wrongful police raid of a popular hotel that catered to gay, lesbian, and transgender tenants (among many others). The aftereffects of these Stonewall Riots would cement the foundations of many laws, organizations, and academic overhauls aimed at bettering the lives of gay, lesbian, and transgender people living in America. But this is by no means a finished process, and the focus in past and current academia on issues of sexuality and sexual identity is still incredibly important in furthering the fight for social justice. In the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), the discussions of sexuality and sexual identity are particularly compelling, with scholars such as Nelson (2002; 2006) and Dumas (2008) using queer theory to strategically redefine and “problematize” how we teach sexuality and sexual identity in the English as a Second Language/English as a Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classroom. However, these socially progressive discourses are not without problems of their own, including a complete lack of discussion of issues directly related to the gender identities of transgender, non-binary, and other gender-diverse students. Please note that a glossary of relevant terms can be found in Appendix A of this thesis.

Our social and academic understanding of sexuality and sexual identity in the decades since Stonewall has changed drastically, as has our understanding of gender. The advent of the internet has helped spread the discussion of issues related to sexual and gender identity to widespread audiences, and even today we have barely scratched the surface of possible sexualities and gender identities. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that both these types of identities are often incredibly fluid and multilayered, changing over a person’s lifetime in ways upon which we still can only begin to speculate. As Ged (2013) and Norton (2010) stress, gender is only one of the

numerous ways in which English language learners' (ELLs) identities change as they acquire the new language. Yet the recent movements from queer theory and other socially progressive pedagogies and methodologies in TESL simply do not accommodate gender identity in a way that is both productive but also empowering for ELLs in this continual process of identity construction and re-negotiation. A single approach has been used thus far in research to address issues relevant to both sexuality and gender identity, but even this approach favors sexuality in the seeming belief that gender identity will automatically correlate and benefit from such discussion. Though this assumption indeed may be true for some ELLs, this is a problematic approach at best and one that simply does not spread social progress in the microcosmic ESL/EFL classroom as thoroughly as it should. While many sexual identities rely upon some system of gender categorization of oneself and/or one's partner(s), gender identity does not conversely rely upon sexual identity in American culture. Approaches that favor one concept (i.e. sexuality) with the assumption that the other (i.e. gender identity) will follow thereby create false connotations in the minds of both the teacher and the student, thereby creating participants in American society who are not aware of the core differences between the two concepts, only their intersecting portions.

This thesis attempts to use existing research on sexuality in TESL and gender diversity in other educational disciplines to open up a new avenue of research and classroom application. Through an exploratory study of pre-service and in-service ESL/EFL teachers across the U.S., we can see how attitudes towards gender diversity in TESL are similarly lacking in concrete gender problematization. Additionally, this thesis will attempt to begin the process of rectifying such a silence in the TESL corpus by

bringing in pedagogies and methodologies used in other educational disciplines to address such issues of gender identity. By combining these proven techniques with the strong history of feminist and queer theory approaches in TESL to create an intersectional, interdisciplinary, and heuristic approach to gender diversity in the ESL/EFL classroom, all ELLs and educators will be benefitted, but particularly those of trans and/or non-binary genders will find themselves empowered and given a stronger voice in their own identity creation and assertion through methodical upheaval of the problematic and prescriptive gender binary, and thus the cisnormativity (or systematic assumption of default cisgender identity) it brings.

### **Definition of Concepts**

It is of the utmost importance that the concepts most critical to this thesis be defined before they are applied directly to the review of literature, theoretical and methodological frameworks, and research findings. Without clarification on the nuances of gender, sex, sexuality, and critical theory as they apply to this thesis, the work itself would be unmoored to any claim I desire to make towards classroom utility or social progress. Moreover, as these are protean concepts, it is essential that the concepts as they are currently being discussed now and in the recent past be outlined in detail so that future generations may see any changes in meaning or complexity more transparently. To assume that we as academics have reached any final understanding of any of these concepts is imprudent, and therefore we must always assume all concepts will remain in a state of flux, even if for our purposes they seem obviously static.

**Intersectionality.** Although Crenshaw coined the term in 1989, Black feminists have long advocated for the intersectional model of social justice, which posits that axes,

or categories, of identity are inherently overlapping and deeply intertwined (Yuvel-Davis, 2011). Butler (1990) put it aptly when she wrote,

If one is a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities (p. 3).

It is impossible to tease out a single strand of oppression or privilege without bringing along oppressions or privileges in other planes of existence. Moreover, all human experience is shaped by these intersecting planes, and ignorance of such complexity can lead to further oppression, even by those trying to “help.” As Davis (2008) writes, “intersectionality initiates a process of discovery, alerting us to the fact that the world around us is always more complicated and contradictory than we could ever have anticipated” (p. 79). In this role as an abstract but powerful framework in academic research, intersectionality rightly requires academics to “engage critically with [their] own assumptions in the interests of reflexive, critical, and accountable feminist inquiry” (Davis, 2008, p. 79).

Intersectionality in TESL research is particularly prudent, given the multitude of oppressed planes ELLs often inhabit. de Vries (2014) suggests an intersectional model with twelve planes of categorization (gender, sexuality, class, nationality, ability, language, religion, culture, ethnicity, body size, and age) which diversify even further into specific areas related to that plane (such as legal gender, identity, expression, normative/variant, and perceived descriptors under the ‘gender’ plane). Moreover, de

Vries's (2014) model is centered on the experiences of transgender persons of color, which makes it a strong model for use for this thesis. All discussions in this work will attempt to be as intersectional as possible, and there is always space available within all topics of discussion for intersections of other planes that simply cannot be discussed in the length of this particular work. For this to not be an intersectional thesis would be hypocritical of its own focus on the erasures that occur in intense focus on particular areas of TESL research.

**Gender.** Critical to this thesis is an overt explanation of how the concept of gender is being discussed, applied, and analyzed. Conflation of gender and biological sex is both commonplace and potentially extremely harmful, particularly not only in the lives of transgender and other gender-nonconforming persons but also in the lives of those conforming to the gender binary. Yet American society, despite acknowledging the presence of transgender and non-binary conforming individuals through legislation such as Title IX, still conflates biological sex, gender, and sexuality in ways that then surface not only in our mainstream media but also our academic discourses. Therefore, it is critical that the distinction between the two be established.

*Biological sex, sex category, and gender.* Biological sex refers to specific, socially-asserted sets of biological criteria used in sex classification, including, but not limited to, genitalia and sex chromosomes (West & Zimmerman, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) assert that qualifiers of biological sex are used to group people into sex categories, which are then used to prescribe their gender in Western culture because the actual markers of biological sex are either masked by clothing (such as genitalia) or impossible to determine through socially-acceptable sensory observations (such as sex

chromosomes and hormones). Therefore, for the two researchers, the distinction between biological sex and gender is crucial because one can claim a gender identity without having the socially-prescribed biological sex determinants required for that identity through the public performance of activities prescribed to one of the two binary genders. Gender then is a means to *perform* sex categorization both publically and privately, and represents “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127). Butler (1990) notes that, “assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex...gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice” in which masculinity and the male identity can be found within a female body and vice-versa (p. 6). Furthermore, even the biological sex binary in many cultures is still gendered upon the presumption of a strictly dichotomous relationship between what becomes the male and female sexes. In fact, Butler argues that “gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established (p. 7). Consequently, the relationship between biological sex and gender is not one of chicken-then-egg as American society often presumes, but rather a circular, recursive bond based upon the cultural structures in place.

*Gender binary.* One such cultural structure is the gender binary. In Western culture, gender follows other dichotomous thinking and has thus been codified into two oppositions: male/masculine and female/feminine. What is one cannot be the other, or so we are culturally and socially instructed from the moment we leave the womb. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that the binary is “not natural, essential, or biological” but also discuss how once the differences of the binary are decided and codified, they can be used to “reinforce the ‘essentialness’ of gender” (p. 137) and create “profound psychological,



behavioral, and social consequences” (p. 128). Risman (2009) notes the problematic nature of this, stating that, “to label whatever a group of boys or men do as a kind of masculinity, or whatever new norms develop among girls or women as new kinds of femininities, leads us to a blind intellectual alley” (p. 83). However, although Risman discusses that the goal must be to eventually move beyond the binary, to a “postgender society” (p. 84), West and Zimmerman (1987) observe that, for our current society, where gender is both “relevant” and “enforced,” “doing gender is unavoidable” (p. 137). Therefore, the gender binary simply cannot be ignored in any thorough gender-related discourse.

*Performativity.* As mentioned previously, gender is an “activity” that must be performed according to binaristic societal expectations. This performance is by no means a simple, universally understood set of behaviors and traits that, once accomplished, bequeath gender upon the actor. Instead, like culture itself, gender performance is a continuous and recursive process that must be “done” throughout one’s life to function within societal expectations (Deutsch, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Butler (1990) unveils the cyclical nature of gender identity and gender performance best when she writes, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be results” (p. 25). Therefore, the performance of gender becomes all the more important, particularly to those transgender and gender-nonconforming persons who exemplify the ways in which gender can be reinforced or broken down through performative acts.

*Normativity.* Another important concept from queer theory and transgender studies is the issue of normativity. Normative gender includes the expressions, or

performances, of gender that fit within arbitrary societal norms (Elliot, 2010). Non-normative, or “transgressive” norms, can seek to openly defy and deconstruct the normative hierarchy (Elliot, 2010, p. 1). Norms and normative hierarchies in turn create normativity, in which all members of a society are assumed de facto to function within these norms (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Westbrook & Schilt, 2013). In the same way that heteronormativity assumes all members of a society are heterosexual, cisnormativity can be seen as the prevalent social framework that assumes all members of a society are cisgendered and, thus, operate within the sex/sex category/gender binary opposition to which they were assigned.

**Identity.** Given that the focus of this thesis is discussion of and attitudes towards gender identity in the ESL classroom, it is crucial that the concept of identity be framed for this project. Norton (2010), drawing on intersectional thinking, notes that identity is a constantly recursive process in which all factors matter in various increments at various times. Furthermore, identity can be broken down into what Norton calls “subject of a set of relationships (i.e. in a position of power) or subject to a set of relationships (i.e. in a position of reduced power)” when noting the relational aspect of identity (p. 350). The subject and subjectivity are essential for a nuanced understanding of identity, as identity is quintessentially centered on not only the individual, but also the factors which affect identity construction differently in different situations (Norton, 1997). Identities, particularly those in danger of suppressing and eradication, are sometimes experimented with through language, and can be seen as linguistic failures by educators using normative framework (Liddicoat, 2009). A simple example relevant to this thesis is the correction of gendered pronouns. When an ESL educator automatically corrects a

learner's gendered pronoun production, they may be inadvertently stifling a conscious choice to use that gendered pronoun, and thereby need to inquire further as to the student's intended meaning before a correction is merited. Without this inquiry, the learner, if actually expressing a desire to use or respecting another person's pronouns, will perceive this gender transgression as inaccurate and inappropriate in the American ESL classroom. Thus, given the focus on this thesis, understanding the importance of identity (and the production and respect for identities) within language learning is paramount.

*Gender identity.* Also paramount to this thesis is a discussion of gender identity. Following the conceptualization of gender given earlier within this chapter, gender identity can be seen as the gender chosen, assumed, or otherwise assigned onto an individual's identity. As Norton and Pavlenko (2004) discuss, gender identity is not the only player in an ELL's language acquisition. However, they note, "gender emerges as one of many important facets of social identity that interact with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, and social status" (p. 3). Connell (2010) found that identity for gender diverse persons could even change entirely between communities of practice, particularly in situations where risk for discrimination existed or was perceived to exist. For all individuals, regardless of adherence to birth assignment or binary restriction, performative gender means that there are multiple opportunities for gender identity renegotiation, based particularly on the communities of practice one is acting within or wishing to join.

**Communities of Practice.** In the study of gender identity, communities of practice (CofPs) are vital to a meaningful discourse. Connell (2010) points out that

gender identity can shift in performance, and that transgender persons often use “stealth” in certain CofPs, such as the workplace, in response to perceived risk of discrimination or misunderstanding (p. 39-40). Sunderland and Litosseliti (2008) write,

The CofP notion allows us to ‘distinguish between speakers’ assumed gendered behavior and the range of identities available in the gendered communities that speakers inhabit’ (Litosseliti, 2006a: 66) (p. 5).

Communities of practice can be both real or imaginary, as Kanno and Norton (2003) note with their discussion of imagined communities, perceived and desired communities which hold equal standing (or, as they note, even stronger status) with the real communities in which a speaker inhabits. For those who function outside the socially accepted norms of gender and sexuality and who may use “stealth” in most, if not all, of their communities of practice, the power of the imagined community should not be underestimated. Indeed, the problematizing of gender (as outlined in the next section) should occur even if no students or educators are openly involved in transgender and non-binary communities of practice, as this would allow all students access to the imagined community of gender diversity even if the real-life community is unreachable from their position. All members of American society (including ELLs) perform and are assigned/assessed through gender, and therefore need an inquiry-based model of problematization that gives them agency in the definition, assertion, and acceptance (or rejection) of their gender and gendered roles in American society.

**Problematization.** One of the most insightful concepts from queer theory in the context of this thesis is the model of problematization. When confronting exclusive social hierarchies and institutions, queer theory critics such as Nelson (2002) rightfully

point out that even inclusive practices can and will end up exclusive as certain minority groups find themselves either being legitimized, and thereby, at least somewhat, accepted by the dominant group while the multitude of other minority groups continue to struggle against constant silencing and erasure. Therefore, problematization serves as a means to level the playing field, so to speak, against institutional heteronormativity by deconstructing gender entirely rather than attempting to somehow equal an inherently unequal system. Nelson argues that,

In terms of teaching and learning, problematizing sexual identities does not mean presenting them in negative ways. On the contrary, it makes it possible to explore how acts of identity are not necessarily straightforward or transparent but can be complex, changing, and contested. It also acknowledges that, for a myriad of reasons, not everyone relates to a clear-cut identity category (p. 48).

Nelson also mentions that problematizing sexual identity around an inquiry-based methodology is an incredibly practical approach to pedagogy, “since teachers or trainers are not expected to transmit knowledge (which they may or may not have) but to frame tasks that encourage investigation and inquiry” (p. 48).

Although problematization is a concept that occurs within queer theory-based discourses of sexuality and sexual identity, it also should be used in those related to gender identity given the fluid, constructed, and performative natures of gender. Thus, in the body of this thesis, and as will be discussed later, problematization is a means to more thoroughly describing, dissecting, and discussing gender beyond the cisnormative and binary discourses that currently dominate the TESL corpus.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **LGBTQ Issues Related to Gender Identity**

In order for this thesis to accurately address the issues facing gender diversity in the realm of TESL education and given the rich LGBTQ history of the United States, it is imperative first that the recent issues related to gender diversity (starting with the Stonewall Riots of 1969) be explored. Because non-binary gender diversity is most often grouped in with non-hetero sexualities, this section too will examine the wider history of LGBTQ issues as they relate to gender diversity in order to point to specific points in which the lack of research in TESL regarding transgender and gender diversity issues is emblematic of a larger, institutional problem in the fight for social justice.

**Complications and Issues.** The LGBTQ movement of the 1960s and 1970s was by no means a perfect congregation of progressive effort, although it did make major, life-altering changes in American culture for many LGBTQ Americans. Nevertheless, the same issues that plagued the LGBTQ advocates of the 60s and 70s still plague our modern LGBTQ discourses. What Eaklor (2008) calls “blind spots” are places in which varieties of privilege are overlooked, exerted, and ignored (p. 151). As Eaklor notes, lesbians were the first to vocalize dissatisfaction with the preferential qualities of the early LGBTQ movement, and lesbians of color later leveled the same critique at their white counterparts. In response to the sexuality “liberation” of the gay and lesbian movement, trans activists began creating their own organizations, designated for the goal of “liberating” their own diverse identities (Eaklor, 2008, p. 151-152). Transgender activists Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were visible figures in the Stonewall Riots of 1969, and together founded STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries),

one of the first organizations dedicated to advocacy of gender diversity, in 1979 (Eaklor, 2008). Their involvement in the movement helped pave the way for the mainstream presence of current transgender advocates such as Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, and Carmen Carrera. However, it would be a grievous error to put forth the notion that trans and other gender diversity representation is where it needs to be in both the specific LGBTQ movement and the wider American society of 2014.

*The Struggle of the Transgender POC.* Ward's (2008) research points to the struggle within LGBTQ organizations at large in dealing with issues related to race and gender, but it also holds interesting implications within the context of this thesis. From this research, the axes of oppression that function between various members of the LGBTQ community become clear. For members who functioned on the more privileged axes of existence (such as white, male, cisgender, etc.), "diversity" became a talking point used to commodify and explain people of color's (POC) existence to a white normative audience. Given that many ELLs are also POC, it is crucial that the ways in which diversity attempts can fail be noted and framed as a model which should not be implemented within the ESL classroom.

In a qualitative study aimed at analyzing the function of whiteness within LGBTQ organizations, Ward (2008) found that white normative mindsets and behaviors dominated the Center, an LGBTQ organization based in Los Angeles. In particular, Ward found that the Center was a functionally white normative organization despite having a large population of POC as its target population and a similarly diverse employee base. The Center's focus on a "Diversity Day" became a point of contention for the participants during Ward's study, revealing the normative attitudes within the

organization that signaled to outside populations that it was a white-normative organization. As Ward writes,

Rarely intended as a reference to the diversity that queerness represents vis-à-vis heterosexuality, “diversity” was code for racial and gender differences among LGBT people and had become a centerpiece of the Center’s organizational discourse and identity (p. 570).

This problematic visage of diversity created internal conflict within the Center, and often led employees of color to, as one participant said, “leave [their] blackness at home” (Ward, 2008, p. 570). Those employees of color, at the same time, offered the most poignant criticisms of the organization and of diversity tactics for Ward’s research, noting that “diversity trainings commonly naturalize whiteness by teaching whites how to better understand the behaviors of people of color” (p. 575). Their revisionist suggestions that true diversity “just needs to happen” and that those wishing to implement it should “just do it” instead of turning the process into a white corporate talking point hold interesting implications for the ESL classroom’s reframing of issues related to gender diversity (Ward, 2008, p. 578; p. 581).

The institutional white normativity found within the Center is endemic of the American culture at large. However, it is not simply an issue of “diversity” or lack of representation that threatens transgender POC, but also of the systematic, repeated, and very real threat of discrimination and abuse that many transgender POC face. Gehi (2009), a staff attorney at the Sylvia Riviera Law Project (SRLP), argues that the serious issues faced by transgender POC are increased when the individual is an immigrant.



Many ELLs are themselves immigrants or are the children of immigrants, thereby making Gehi's work incredibly valuable to the topic at hand.

Gehi (2009) found that anti-immigrant legislation, aimed at removing "undesirables" from the United States, had the additional and unjust effect of increasing pressure on transgender immigrants of color to comply with the system or face severe consequences. Given that many transgender immigrants have come to the U.S. seeking asylum from persecution in their home country, and that "transgender people are more likely than non-trans people to be poor," the necessary intersectional focus of any issues related to TESL and gender identity becomes glaringly apparent (Gehi, 2009, p. 324). Transgender immigrants of color face additional stress from being profiled as they enter bathrooms, use IDs, or fill out applications that may not match either their gender identity or gender expression, not to mention violence in deportation centers and at the hands of authorities (Gehi, 2009). The burden of proof in proving one's gender identity, a crucial point in many pieces of American legislation, "is often particularly challenging for transgender asylum applicants whose persecution is masked by legitimized practices" (p. 332). Gehi points out,

In New York City and some other large urban areas in the United States, there are certainly more resources for transgender people than in many other parts of the world. Transgender people come here, in part, because of these resources, but also because they believe (or want to believe) that, in the United States, people are free to express their gender identity as they wish. This myth is quickly shattered, however, for many transgender immigrants who arrive and, again, face discrimination, violence, and criminalization (p. 342).

This quote draws upon the importance of progress within the American classroom. Without the education of both English and non-English speakers, social progress, the very progress sought by many refugees coming to this nation, can never truly be achieved.

In response to the unique and intense issues often faced by transgender and non-binary POC (and thereby even more so by transgender and non-binary immigrants of color), de Vries (2014) postulates a model for intersectionality, previously mentioned in Chapter I, which centers transgender people of color rather than their white counterparts. de Vries's model, as the author describes it, "could begin to account for and analyze their intersecting experiences" (p. 8). This addresses a serious concern within the intersectional debate, as noted by Gan (2007) that "the elision of intersectionality in the name of the coalition myth-making serve[s] to reinscribe other myths. The myth of equal transgender oppression [leaves] capitalism and white supremacy unchallenged, often foreclosing coalitional alignments unmoored from gender analysis" (p. 128). By leaving behind binary assumptions and embracing a complex stance that examines the structural power in place with regards to social positioning, de Vries's (2014) model of intersectionality can possibly be a strong first step in dismantling the white normative, cis normative, and discriminatory practices in place that disadvantage transgender people of color over other LGBTQ members.

*Gender or Sexuality Discourse?* de Vries's (2014) research also points to another problem within many LGBTQ discourses: homogenization under the axis of sexuality. As mentioned in Chapter I, equating sex, gender, and sexuality in any and all combinations is a dangerous game, and one that both removes the agency from identity expression as well as erases the voices of those who may not fit neatly into any one

category. While Eaklor (2008) points out that many of the gender diversity movements were inspired by or encouraged by the liberating movements of gays and lesbians, Gan (2007) points to the erasing nature of simply focusing on gay and lesbian actions, histories, and experiences as somehow representative of the entire LGBTQ movement. “[S]tonewall narratives, in depicting the agents of the riots as ‘gay,’” Gan writes, “elided the central role of poor gender-variant people of color in that night’s acts of resistance against New York City police” (p. 127). Sylvia Riviera herself protested the automatic labeling of being a gay male that she faced as a trans woman and her frustrations in turn point to a system in which sexuality is assumed or overtly asserted upon transgender, non-binary, and other gender diverse persons (Gan, 2007). Although, as discussed in Chapter I, gender identity and sexual identity can be linked for many individuals, they must be separated for the purposes of both this thesis and for TESL implementation as a whole. Without doing so, educators and academics alike run the very real risk of stereotyping and erasing the multitude of gender identities which cannot be simply explained through sexuality discourses and which should not be ignored or erased any further.

*Breaking Away From the Binary.* As discussed by Wiseman and Davidson (2011), another risk of the current nature of the LGBTQ discourse as it relates to gender diversity is the insistence, both overt and subvert, on the maintenance of a gender binary. When the binary is used as the main framework for discourses of gender, they found that three difficulties arise:

1. Firstly, the binary discourse artificially divides acceptable expression of gender to masculine or feminine...deviations from these expectations may lead to abuse or social isolation as well as attempts from others to encourage conformity.
2. Secondly...is the need to be certain about one's gender identification and its permanence, while silencing grief and uncertainty both to oneself and to others.
3. Thirdly, deviation from the typical expression of gender for one's biological sex necessitates disclosures and explanations, or what Foucault described as 'confessing,' to one's self, family, friends, strangers, professionals, and the Law, in order to make gender identification and distress related to it 'true'...it poses challenges to those who choose not to disclose their feelings to others, yet still wish to identify with roles and expectations inconsistent with their biological sex (p. 530).

From these points, it is clear that any discussion of gender diversity must inherently reject the binary model, which only contributes to further oppression and erasure. Moreover, if we reject the binary model and instead work towards problematizing all genders, not just the non-cis options, we as educators and academics can more acutely address gender within reducing the discourse to binary oppositions and the American, white, middle-class notion of "coming out," which in of itself is a problematic structure that fails to take into consideration the multitude of intersecting factors at play in any given individual's life (Ward, 2008).

### **TESL Gender and LGBTQ Research**

In order to understand where TESL research regarding gender identity needs to go, we must examine where it has been. TESL naturally lends itself towards issues of social

justice, given the intersecting issues many ELLs face upon learning English, and therefore, the two most salient portions of the TESL corpus are research related to gender and LGBTQ issues in the ESL classroom.

**Gender, Sexuality, and Queer Theory.** It is important to note that for the purposes of this thesis, studies looking at the gender roles within the ESL classroom in binary-based, differential terms (for example, studies which discuss how Asian female students handle writing activities versus Arabic male students, etc.) will not be examined. As Chapter I has already established gender and gender roles as arbitrarily constructed from societal expectations, differential binary gender roles are not as important to this research as is the construction and deconstruction of gender within the ESL classroom and the creation of gendered identities by ELLs. Most often, this occurs within queer theory contexts, such as the ones advocated by Nelson (2002; 2004; 2006) and Dumas (2008; 2010). As with the general LGBTQ discourse, gender identity is often clumped together with sexuality, with the former receiving a notably larger amount of academic attention. Nevertheless, this body of research still contains relevant and valid material to the gender diverse conversation, even if it must be parsed away from the sexuality discourse.

Two of the strongest proponents of progressive queer theory language education are Nelson (2002; 2004; 2006) and Dumas (2008; 2010). As mentioned in Chapter I, Nelson's (2002) explanation of problematization of sexuality is a crucial idea to this thesis and informs all discussions of approaching gender in the ESL classroom. As Nelson writes,

The application of queer theory to teaching or training contexts allows for acknowledgement that issues pertaining to sexual identities might be relevant to anyone, not just gay people, and for a range of reasons. This wider focus allows everyone, whatever their own positioning with regard to sexual identity, to participate in and contribute to the discussion. This may also help to counter any tendency to reductively construct people as either *tolerated* or *tolerant* (p. 49).

This approach to ESL pedagogy and professional development fits in perfectly with the already-occurring transgender conversations happening in classrooms across America (as will be discussed in the next section of this chapter). Moreover, if we are to simply replace “sexual identities” with “gender identities,” we can see how easily informed methodologies from one focus can be used to focus on another topic, so long as we are willing as educators to separate the topics enough that we avoid incorrectly grouping and stereotyping identity categories that are “queered” by the existence of normative societal structures, not by any inherent and mandatory relationship to one another.

Nelson (2004) also notes that globalization and postcolonialism have influenced both teacher perceptions of student beliefs as well as students’ attitudes towards topics related to sexuality. In the study, Nelson noted that the queer narratives of three ESL teachers were often informed based on their personal assumptions about the willingness or resistance of their students towards ideas of homosexuality. Tony, a gay man, did not present his sexuality to his students, believing that their status as “fresh off the boat” made them uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the topic (p. 30). Tony’s students, however, had picked up on the fact that their teacher was possibly gay and had begun classroom discussions of it, including one with Nelson. Gina, on the other hand, informed her

students of her sexuality very early on, believing that her students needed to be able to interact with queer people regardless of if they had done so in their home country or not. However, because Gina's framing of her sexuality was never explicit and instead was subtly integrated into conversations, some of her students did not realize Gina was queer and therefore did not learn in the way Gina had intended. While Tony and Gina were out, even though they approached the topic differently in the classroom, Roxanne, who felt uncomfortable being labeled with any sexual identity, feared conversations about her sexual identity, and yet one of her students, a gay man named Pablo, felt as though she was a safe space for discussions of his own sexual identity. All three of these teacher-student dynamics point to the need for overt, explicit, and continuous discussion of queer issues in the ESL classroom, as well as a need to make sure all students, regardless of cultural background, understand what is being asked of them and are not at a cultural disadvantage (or being *assumed* to have that cultural disadvantage).

For the purposes of gender identity, Nelson's (2004) findings still apply. Gender identity discussions should be explicit and should not leave too much room for ambiguity. Furthermore, students should never be assumed to be too culturally unaware of gender diversity, but care should also be taken to not leave students who may not have that awareness behind by assuming everyone is on the same page. Just like levels of competency with the language itself, topics like gender identity need careful implementation and a strong understanding of how to get a group of diverse learners towards a single goal. As Nelson (2004) puts it,

...mismatched understandings [such as the ones with Tony, Gina, and Roxanne and their students] are not problems that need preventing or failures that need

fixing, but ordinary occurrences that constitute not only an expected part of classroom interactions, but useful opportunities for teaching and learning, if they can be framed as such (p. 43).

Dumas's (2008; 2010) research regarding queer theory in the ESL classroom informs this thesis significantly and was used in the designing of the research tool for this exploratory study (as will be discussed in Chapters III and IV). As Dumas (2008) notes, "English, for its part, is performed and (re)fashioned by learners as they invent new selves" (p. 2). This idea encapsulates a major goal in teaching gender identity in the ESL classroom: it is not simply a matter of teaching students to move away from potentially restrictive binary roles within their own cultures into (still restrictive) roles in the United States), but rather, it is critical that all students, regardless of age, socioeconomic background, nationality, biological sex, race, etc. be given the opportunity to have agency in their own gender identity, to know that cisnormative structures can be challenged successfully, and to provide support and access to support that can be crucial to ELL health, happiness, and success. Dumas (2008) yields an extremely interesting point, one that originally inspired this thesis, when writing that "by problematizing...queer theory posits a critical rethinking of the ideology that shapes sexual identity, thereby rejecting homosexuality as a clinical, scientific category, gender as a biological category, sexual preference as a choice, and sexual orientation as an innate quality" (p. 4). As we have discussed, problematizing sexual identity goes all the way down to delineating the clear differences between sex, sexuality, and gender, and thereby creating separate, yet interlinked, networks of identity construction that can be studied, theorized, and implemented in the classroom.



Drawing from the same queer theory principles as Nelson (2002; 2004; 2006) and Dumas (2008; 2010), Ó'Móchain (2006) examined ways to implement context-appropriate discussions of gender and sexuality within the Japanese EFL context. Ó'Móchain's focus specifically landed on the use of the queer narrative to provide authentic teaching materials which would introduce potentially controversial topics while still centering the educational goals of the lesson. Using the queer narratives of three Japanese ELLs: Naomi, a lesbian university student, Kaito, a gay high school teacher, and a transgender schoolmate of Reiko, one of Ó'Móchain's students, Ó'Móchain was able to stimulate classroom discussion of these gender and sexual identities. Although the specific Japanese college setting was heteronormative to the point of seeming openly hostile to suggestions of teaching homosexual content, Ó'Móchain felt an obligation to give the ELLs an opportunity to experience and discuss these issues within the safe space of their specific classroom, if only to help students struggling with their sexuality to feel they had an understanding resource at their disposal. The transgender narrative, from a student named Reiko who related her memory of a transgender schoolmate, was significant in that it differed from the gender narrative of Kaito, whose sexuality seemed to play a larger role in his identification rather than his gendered behavior (as Kaito identified as a gay male). However, even this transgender narrative is steeped within the sexuality discourse going on around it, causing it to be completely framed within the context of queered sexualities and discussed in relationship to heteronormativity, instead of cisnormativity.

Dumas (2010) and Guijarro-Ojeda and Ruiz-Cecilia (2013) both study how pre-service and in-service ESL/EFL teachers are prepared to approach or are approaching

queer issues in the classroom. In both studies, “queer” appeared for all intents and purposes to specifically refer to issues of sexuality, and both found a wide array of attitudes, ranging from conservative to liberal, but very little implementation within the classroom. Both studies also recommend more explicit training and implementation of queer issues within the ESL classroom for the benefit of both the educators and the students. This thesis’s exploratory study draws its roots from Dumas’s 2010 research, and therefore more of this study will occur within Chapters III, IV, and V.

**Issues.** At the time of this thesis’s publication, this author is currently unaware of any published TESL research that explicitly focuses on transgender or non-binary issues or that moves away from simply challenging gender roles and instead problematizes the American societal constructions of gender as a whole and encourages ELLs to do the same. However, it is not only transgender students who are disserved by this lack of research. All non-cis students, including but by no means limited to agender, bigender, demiboy/girl, genderfluid, genderfuck, genderqueer, and intergender, are inherently erased by research and pedagogies that are not being specifically developed to assist them and to question the oppressive systems in place which make their inclusion so rare. Although sexuality discourses in TESL are, of course, incredibly important and need to continue onward (perhaps including bisexual, asexual, demisexual, pansexual, and other sexualities more equally and explicitly), it is essential that we as ESL educators complicate our understandings of sex and gender and work towards progressive pedagogical methodologies that will resist the status quo and call into question the misguided notion that ELLs are inherently resistant to ideas of gender diversity or that the

classroom is not the place for such conversations. Further suggestions for future research will be addressed in Chapter V.

### **Gender Identity Research in Education and Educational Support**

There is a plethora of quantitative, qualitative, and anecdotal evidence advocating for the implementation of gender diversity into the classroom beyond the rare mention LGBTQ issues might receive at any given time. From this corpus, the gaps in TESL research are glaringly apparent, but in turn this body of research is the key to moving forward and filling said gaps. The successes—and failures—of one discipline are those of the entire educational system, so long as all disciplines are consciously and constantly aimed towards the same goal.

**Teaching Gender Identity.** One of the first hurdles to creating gender diverse classrooms that do not force transgender and non-binary students into the spotlight but also do not erase their existence is the issue of exactly *how* to do it. While there are certainly methodologies that are always incorrect choices for any given situation, one of the key facets of TESL research is an understanding that the needs of any given student in any given setting are ever-changing, and can be addressed with a wide variety of methods. However, this does not imply, then, that there are no universals that we cannot learn from. Instead, there is much we do know about the topic, and how to approach it.

Discussing the creation of trans-welcoming classrooms and the treatment of gendered bodies within higher education, Spade (2011) outlines several important facets, including several student-centered, student-as-agent guidelines. For Spade, the importance of allowing students to give their own name and pronouns as opposed to being assigned them based on a class roster or visual observations is paramount.

Moreover, teachers should avoid “outing” the student, while maintaining respect for their deliberate choices, even if they are ones that would be seen as “closeted” (given our previous discussion of the problematic nature of “the closet” as an assumed LGBTQ universal) (Spade, 2011). Tones of respect and correction of both students’ and one’s own mistakes are also crucial to creating a safe classroom for gender diversity, and inappropriate and/or irrelevant questions should never be asked to trans and non-binary students (Spade, 2011). Educators must take it upon themselves to stay educated on both the history and the current issues and events facing gender diverse populations, and should include gender diverse material that does not simply discuss the white, middle-to-upper class experience whenever possible (Spade, 2011). It is always the educators’ responsibility to make sure they are creating a classroom conducive to the expression and exploration of identity, not the students’. Moreover, discussions of gender and respect for gender diversity should not be relegated to only the trans topics and students, because as Spade writes, “exploring these questions can deepen our commitment to gender self-determination for all people and to eliminating coercive systems that punish gender variance” (p. 59). Moreover, Spade points out that any discussion of biological features (sex organs or other sex-determining features, in particular) must not be couched in associations with gender (i.e. “female organs,” “male organs,” etc.). The importance of “assigned” versus “biological” terminologies are also very important, and common expressions used when discussing transgender issues, such as “biologically male/female” should be instead revised to “assigned male/female” to recognize and reject the conflation of biological sex and gender and the idea that gender has any biological or natural existence within sex dichotomies (Spade, 2011). Given the multitude of gender identities

that are just recently being vocalized by marginalized populations who have previously had little to no access to support groups or even to the right to think about their gender, loosening the handcuffs of gender in any possible way is crucial.

We also know that properly-trained support systems are critical to the safety and happiness of trans and non-binary people. Budge, Rossman, and Howard (2013) found a direct correlation between social support and anxiety and depression, with genderqueer individuals in their study who were able to access support either on their own or with the assistance of others being less likely to experience anxiety and depression over their counterparts who were either unable or unwilling to seek the support of others. Case and Meier (2014), recognizing the importance of support systems, argue for better training for both educators and counselors that would improve the experiences of gender nonconforming students in K-12 settings. They note that teachers are often purposefully and inadvertently agents for further gender oppression in the classroom, and that such behavior must be explicitly taught against in professional development. Professional development is crucial in the matter, and all levels of school employees should be informed of issues related to the safety (both physical and emotional) of the school and the classroom. Case and Meier also note the importance of cultural factors such as location and socioeconomic status in the need for properly trained support staff who can fulfill the needs of gender nonconforming students and curb the potentially abusive and offensive behaviors of other students, faculty, and staff. Furthermore, they create a list of frequently asked questions and sample scenarios to show what supportive, empowering pedagogies look like with regards to gender diversity, an invaluable resource to educators attempting to collate information for peers or students or for educating themselves on the

issues facing gender nonconforming students. Wernick, Kulick, and Inglehart (2014) suggest peer-to-peer intervention alongside teacher support to prevent or stop transphobic discrimination and persecution in the school setting, and note that trans speakers who can come in to speak to the entire school or to specific populations are an invaluable asset in creating situations in which bystanders feel empowered to speak up when witnessing overt or subvert violence and discrimination against trans and non-binary persons.

Overall, educators must seek what Rands (2009) calls a “gender-complex education” that combats previous existing models for handling gender in the classroom (“gender-stereotyped education,” “gender-free/gender-blind education,” and “gender-sensitive education,” respectively) (p. 426; 424; 425; 426). According to Rands, a “gender-complex education challenges not only gender category oppression but also gender transgression oppression,” and can offer many opportunities to question and thereby problematize the entire social construction of gender (p. 426). Gender-complex educators are able to engage on a micro and macro level with their classroom, always asserting the importance of intersecting privileges or lack thereof in the gender identities of their students and of themselves (Rands, 2009). Additionally, Rands, like other researchers, asserts the importance of professional development and self-reflection regarding issues related to gender identity, gender oppression, and gender transgression. By actively engaging with the same gender liberating materials as their students, educators, Rands argues, will be able to come closer to Kumashiro’s (2002) model of troubled, or “crisis” education, in which the individual experiences personal growth when faced with and working through new and potentially uncomfortable material. Rands emphasizes the importance of moving towards this gender-complex model of education,

noting that “the current educational system in the United States is shortchanging transgender students on a daily basis. In addition, by not challenging gender oppression, the educational system is doing all students a disservice because all students are in danger of incurring punishments for crossing gender lines” (p. 429).

**Across Disciplines and Ages.** English language education occurs across many disciplines, and it is essential that an interdisciplinary approach always be taken in educational scaffolding to make sure students are having progressive and empowering ideas repeated throughout their various classrooms. Educational researchers in other disciplines have already begun the process of integrating transgender and non-binary topics into the classroom. From these studies, the successful implementation of gender issues beyond the binary can be directly seen, and hopefully duplicated in the future in TESL research.

In a Spanish study conducted with vocational students, Platero (2013) conducted two rounds of experiential activities, a third round of explicit social justice-based training, and an interview/discussion with a transgender woman, all based around active and passive forms of transphobia and the means to combat both forms. The experiential activities, while emotionally-charged, allowed students to “experience,” in some small, privileged way, the ways in which transphobia inoculates itself into basic classroom and social interactions. The subsequent training then allowed students to explicitly understand transgender issues without being censored by conservative or fearful school policies. As Platero writes,

It is often the case that when we set out to address gender and sexual identities within the classroom, we come across barriers and difficulties, many of them

linked to a fear of dealing with a topic still seen as dangerous or taboo. We believe that we are going to face parents' resistance, that the school is not going to back us, or that it is a difficult or inappropriate topic for students, whom we consider to be too young, impressionable, or unknowledgeable... However, we know that sexuality and gender, far from being minor issues, are an important part of personal identity over the course of our lives and therefore are an important object for education (p. 134-135).

Platero's research points to the need for multiple, repeated techniques within the classroom that repeatedly not only call into question transphobic behaviors, but also provide concrete, useful techniques for actively combatting it. These techniques, in turn, could be easily suited for ESL classrooms which use guest speakers, roleplays, and/or in-class discussions to practice language usage.

Using the previously discussed model of gender-complex education, Rands (2013) examines the presence, or lack thereof, of transgender and gender non-conforming issues within the field of mathematics and suggests a model of 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics education in which issues of social justice are integrated into statistical and proportional reasoning. Rands reasons that "mathematics has traditionally been viewed as a purely cognitive domain which lies outside of the social realm," but that a critical approach to mathematics will combat the oppressive "status quo" assumptions behind the discipline (p. 107). Rands's model engages the students critically, asking them to look at national statistics regarding the hostile school climate many transgender and gender non-conforming students face to become familiar with statistical concepts and proportional reasoning. Once this goal has been accomplished, students are encouraged to assert their



own agency and given the opportunity to design their own school survey and to suggest methods to increasing interventions during incidents of transphobia (Rands, 2013). The idea of using authentic materials in the classroom is not a foreign concept to TESL, and there are many lessons that might be gleaned from Rands's proposal. Additionally, Rands addresses two common complaints with the introduction of gender-complex materials into the classroom: the purported "apolitical" nature of education and the "inappropriateness" of the material (p. 120). To the former, Rands stresses that "this argument fails to recognize that schools are always political and that maintaining an oppressive status quo is just as much of a political stance as is challenging it" (p. 120). To the latter, Rands argues that "by suggesting that teachers and students should not examine genderism, this argument implicitly condones gender-based harassment in schools...the school community has a responsibility to protect all students from harassment, irrespective of individual beliefs about gender and sexuality" (p. 120). Both of these arguments may be used against the introduction of gender diverse discourses into the ESL classroom, but Rands's insight can better prepare us as educators to handle these conversations as they arise.

ESL education occurs not only across disciplines, but also across age groups. While Platero (2013) dealt with adult learners and Rands (2013) proposed strategies for addressing older child learners, it may appear as though this topic has no place within the early elementary classroom. Many people may advocate for the bleaching of early elementary materials to avoid controversial topics that are deemed "too mature" for young minds. However, this approach fails to take into account the sheer volume of cultural absorptions and social calcifications that occur within the first few years of

school. If negative experiences or negative behaviors occur without being directly challenged, they contribute to the culture of oppression that exists within the school as a microcosm of the outside and equally oppressive world. It is within this understanding of the importance of critical education that Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar (2013) conducted their study. As they write, “of course, it is not just the gender-nonconforming children who receive these messages about “appropriate” gender identity and gender expression but *all* children” (p. 85).

Following the experiences of an elementary school teacher, Maree, Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar (2013) examine a critical model of transgender education within the elementary classroom that has already been implemented. Throughout the span of a year, Maree created what the researchers termed “four episodes” of transgender education with which to build student learning through. The first episode began with the subtle questioning of unwritten gender norms while discussing a book explicitly aimed at the discussion of racial issues. When students naturally turned towards the issue of gender (noting that the protagonist did not “look” like a girl), Maree engaged the conversation further, asking students to think critically about the appearances and roles each of the binary genders was expected to play. Students naturally moved from binary gender norms to discussion of gender nonconformity, and were allowed to work through the misconceptions they were already carrying at their young age. The next episode occurred during a discussion of bullying, in which Maree recognized the intersectional issues at hand and encouraged students to postulate about the various injustices associated with bullying. After watching an animated video about a young girl who has interests that do not fit others’ expectations of her gender, Maree helped the students discuss gender

discrimination and also gave them concrete forms to use when intervening in bullying. From this activity, which not only engaged students on issues of gender, but also race, nationality socioeconomic status, and sexuality, the students were able to build strong scaffolds that allowed them to spot and discuss injustices and to find hypothetical solutions for ending these injustices. In the third episode, Maree introduced issues of sexuality, leading students in a conversation about the overlapping and independent portions of gender and sexuality.

Maree's conversation with the students as they moved into the seemingly more controversial issue of sexuality was always transparently framed for her students. As Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar (2013) write, "she told them 'we have these discussions because...there are all kinds of people in our lives' and because 'I think you are mature enough to have these discussions and share with each other'" (p. 96). By explicitly stating to students that she trusted them with the material and saw their contributions as important, Maree created a sense of agency that allowed students to feel more open to discussing the issues at hand. "She did not treat the topic as one that was unknown, distant, or scary for children but instead as one that related to their lives—although one that people might have different opinions on, and certainly one that, at times, would require some additional clarification," the researchers note (p. 96). The fourth episode went more in-depth than the previous two, asking students to consider the difference between not conforming to gender and being transgender. By contrasting two different authentic narratives, Maree was able to engage her students in a detailed discussion of self-identification and the importance of respecting the ways others chose to identify, even if it did not match societal expectations. In a perfect example of Spade's (2011)

suggestions, Maree's students were encouraged to use the pronouns chosen by the individual, not by society, and even corrected Maree herself when she incorrectly used the wrong pronoun during the conversation. The students were not only engaged with the material and learning; they were also demonstrating a strong sense of agency and of resistance against cisnormative structures which had otherwise dominated their young lives.

Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar's (2013) research with Maree's classroom showcased a stellar example of active classroom engagement with issues of gender diversity that did not rely solely on avoidance, stereotyping, or upon the teacher dryly lecturing the topic at hand. For Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar, the real success in Maree's teaching was her ability to scaffold related materials over time, giving students multiple accesses into the material, while also increasing their critical thinking and reasoning on the subject. The researchers note that Maree is highly knowledgeable on the topic, which helped to inform her educational decisions, but also point out that most teachers will not naturally possess such an awareness of gender diversity. They therefore, like the previously discussed researchers, advocate for professional development and a conducive work environment aimed towards inclusion of gender issues. For ESL educators, this is a great model to potentially implement the classroom. Not only does it center the student and allow them to thoughtfully and authentically discuss real life issues related to gender identity, it also introduces autonomy and agency that may have been previously inaccessible in the ELLs' personal, historical, and educational backgrounds.

The discussed texts are by no means the full breadth of the educational corpus as it deals with transgender, non-binary, gender nonconforming, and other gender identities.

However, these chosen examples showcase exemplary efforts in the educational field to move forward, to empower students, and to challenge oppressive notions of gender, educator responsibility, and school culture which have in part (as a microcosm reflecting the outside American culture) allowed cisnormative and transphobic attitudes to remain unquestioned.

### CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGIES

Included in the designing process of the exploratory study used in this thesis were several core theoretical frameworks and research methodologies. As mentioned in the previous two chapters, the issue of gender diversity beyond the binary dichotomy is not one that can be covered sufficiently by any one approach. This is fitting given that Sunderland and Litosseliti (2008) note that “historically, there has always has been diversity of approach within language and gender study, even before today’s theoretical complexities” (p. 2). As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, each of the three major critical fields used in this thesis (feminist, queer, and transgender) cover areas that the others do not, even as they overlap in many aspects. In order for the results of this study to have any weight in hopefully beginning a movement towards more transgender-inclusive and gender-problematizing TESL practices and research, it is essential that the scaffolding behind the study design and implementation be intellectually sound and just. As Norton and McKinney (2011) point out, “given the focus of an identity approach to SLA [Second Language Acquisition], the key methodological question to be answered is what kind of research enables scholars to investigate the relationship between language learners as social beings and the frequently inequitable worlds in which learning takes place?” (p. 82). They note the importance of recognizing critical theory within qualitative research, in order to recognize and reflect upon power-based inequities which underlie most basic assumptions within our culture. This chapter is devoted to framing the critical ideas behind this thesis and the construction of its survey tool. By centering this exploratory study on potential perpetrators or protestors of inequitable American social order (educators), it is my sincere desire to see how teacher perceptions and

training may be affecting the language (and thereby, naturally, cultural) education occurring within ESL classrooms in America. In Chapter II, the importance of not relying upon the “coming out” narrative was emphasized, as was the idea of not forcing students “out” in a misguided attempt to be progressive. Rather, it is important to examine our teaching climate before moving into student ethnographic studies, as the former directly affects the production of the latter. As Nelson (2006) notes, heteronormative classrooms enforce heterosexuality upon all students, thereby excluding opportunities for queer narratives. The same principle applies to cisnormativity: a cisnormative educational climate will stifle opportunities for gender diverse narratives.

### **Socially Just Methodologies and Theoretical Frameworks**

Because it is important to discover how the teaching climate and teachers’ attitudes regarding gender identity can affect student output, it is also important to recognize the ways in which inequitable and unjust systems already occurring within American society can also transfer into research topics. In particular, it is crucial that this thesis and its survey tool recognize both their own inherent inability to include every single gender identity, but also their functioning within an educational system which, indicative of the whole American culture, still devalues and discriminates against gender diversity. Therefore, the survey is inherently problematic, and must be constructed from progressive and socially just movements to prevent any more problematic insertions such as assertions of the binary or of the supposed “natural” link between biological sex and particular gendered roles. As will be discussed later, gender diversity is not an issue which neatly fits underneath a single critical category, but rather one that is fleshed out in several theories, usually in response to one another. In order to make this research as

heuristic as possible, it is crucial to examine all the theoretical methodologies and frameworks which inform this topic and research of it.

**Feminist Research.** Language and SLA research has included for many decades now a decidedly feminist influence. This influence informs researchers and their research to inequalities which exist on the basis of biological sex and gender. As Sunderland and Litosseliti (2008) note, gender was recognized after many decades of sociolinguistic research as an independent variable within language production. While ‘differential tendencies’ dominated early gender and language research, recent movements have taken the field towards a model of social constructionism, which Sunderland and Litosseliti (2008) discuss as the following set of definitions for gender:

1. The active/interactive/negotiated construction of gender, including self-positioning.
2. Linguistic dealings *with* (individual/groups of) women, men, boys and gender, e.g., how they are addressed, what is said *to* them.
3. What is said and written *about* gender differential tendencies, similarities and diversity, including what is said and written *about* (individual/groups of) women, men, boys and girls (p. 4).

Social constructionism as a methodology thereby informs a feminist SLA researcher of two important points: firstly, that gender constructions are variable and subject to change depending on a wide variety of factors, including location, age, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, etc. Secondly, that, as Ged’s (2013) research shows, gender identity is variable and multifaceted, and changes within the individual’s lifetime in response to various internal and external factors, such as the learning of a new language, Ged’s



particular focus. This thesis therefore relies on a model of social constructionism when considering the survey tool, recognizing that attitudes towards gender diversity may change across demographics, but also that the social constructions presented to ELLs by their educators may result in the solidification of oppressive gendering upon their arrival into the American educational system.

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter I, feminist theory has given academia intersectionality, a highly desirable approach to both research and classroom application that mandates researchers and educators alike be constantly cognizant of social factors that influence, mandate, or potentially even override gender (Grant & Zwier, 2011; de Vries, 2014). As Wodak (2008) notes,

Feminist critical linguistics should be aware of the multiple contextual factors and their interdependency, multiple positionings and the multiple identities women and men perform and live. Moreover, linguists should work to integrate relevant interdisciplinary insights and multidisciplinary research (p. 195).

In designing the study, in analyzing the results, in creating the comprehensive thesis, *and* in suggesting future research opportunities (Chapter V), it is always at the forefront of this researcher's mind that intersectional and interdisciplinary issues are of utmost importance, particularly in feminist research.

**Queer Theory.** Given that the social constructionism of gender can cause significant changes in gender identity across the experiences of a single individual, it is apparent that identity itself is fluid. Queer theorists examine “queer” existence, which is marked by the non-heterosexual and/or the resistance of identity categorizations (expressed, for instance, in the gender identity “genderqueer,” which in turn points to the

problematic nature of the queer identity) (Sauntson, 2008). While related to and heavily influenced by feminist theory, queer theory and methodologies “differentiate themselves from gay liberationist and (lesbian) feminist models by resisting their commitment to notions of a coherent lesbian or gay subject and community” (Sauntson, 2008, p. 273). Sexuality and the construction, maintenance, and deconstruction of sexual identities are the focus of queer theorists, such as Nelson (2002; 2004; 2006) and Dumas (2008; 2010), who advocate for problematizing the construction of all sexual identities, including heterosexuality and whose research indicates that inquiry, the questioning of all structures, serves as the single-best means of problematizing identity construction.

As Sauntson (2008) argues, the ‘knots’ of gender and sexual identities, or as discussed in Chapter I, the intersectional places, are those in the construction of identities where sexuality and gender are often interwoven and nearly inseparable. For instance, having the sexual identity of lesbian typically relies upon the presence of female genders, and “people frequently draw on ideologies of gender essentialism to understand and construct sexual identities for themselves and others” (Sauntson, 2008, p. 275). However, as discussed in Chapter I, there are places in which the interwoven paths of sexuality and gender are incorrectly assumed to be inherent, and the two terms can be mistakenly conflated with one another in the same way gender and biological sex often are (Sauntson, 2008).

In designing this study and in researching for the construction of this thesis, the importance of incorporating queer understandings of identity was paramount, as was ensuring that the lines of biological sex, gender, and sexual identity were separated clearly enough for participants in the study to give answers that would reflect their

awareness of, or potential lack thereof, of transgender issues as they related to queer issues, and to the construction of sexual identities. Because the survey used for a model (Dumas, 2010) in the creation of this thesis's survey tool is from a queer theory TESL study, it is crucial that the tenets of queer theory not be ignored, but rather, like the survey, modified and embraced for the topic at hand.

**Transgender Studies.** Transgender theories, younger than feminist and queer theories, attempt to rectify the holes in both methodologies into which many transgender and gender non-conforming persons fall and to better support, advocate for, and critically analyze the existence of gender as it relates to non-conformity in society. Elliot (2010), examining the convergences and disparities between feminist, queer, and transgender theories, outlines the biggest intellectual 'rifts' as

Divergences in theoretical and political convers, in disciplinary allegiances...in discourses of gender and sexuality" as well as "different relationships to the question of human rights reform, the role of the state, the value of inclusion in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) struggles, and...the purported inclusivity of the concept of transgender (p. 3).

All of these 'rifts' can be seen in the research regarding gender diversity, particularly in the TESL research outlined in Chapter II. Whereas feminist and queer TESL research have in many, assuredly well-meaning ways attempted to speak for transgender populations (through use of the LGBTQ acronym), the lack of direct research towards transgender issues in TESL speaks louder. The assumption that binary gender research or the research of sexual identities will inherently cover all sides of the trans experience is one that transgender theorists seek to demolish, presenting instead a cross-theory model

in which gender diversity is centered first and foremost, while recognizing that this model must interact with feminism and queer theory (among other theories, such as critical race theory) in order to present the most intersectional, interdisciplinary view of an individual's identity, experience, and existence. Moreover, Elliot (2010) argues that it is the scholarly, political, and ethical responsibility of academics and researchers alike to address transgender issues because,

1. First, anyone who teaches a course on gender (as I do) has an obligation to address what is happening at and what is being pushed into the margins of the socially prescribed, heteronormative gender order.
2. Second, because non-trans feminist and queer theorists are concerned with how power circulates in the meaning, experience, and performance of gendered bodies, we are obliged to pay attention to contemporary challenges to configurations of gender.
3. Third, transpersons deserve to be taken seriously, especially by those whose work may have some bearing (directly or indirectly) on their lives (p. 8).

The third tenet, in particular, is of extreme importance to this study and this thesis, because it directly indicates the responsibility of TESL educators and researchers in examining and undermining hetero- and cisnormative structures that can contribute to further oppression of ELLs. Therefore, the study was chosen to examine how “those show work may have some bearing (directly or indirectly) on [trans] lives,” i.e. TESL educators, currently perceive transgender and gender non-conforming issues within their classrooms (Elliot, 2010, p. 8).

### **Research Questions**

When designing this exploratory study, it was crucial to establish a research question that would center both the search for and redesign of a survey tool. Once it was established that the topic would involve discussions of gender in the ESL classroom that were not strictly limited to the binary and encompassed room for transgender and gender non-conforming identities, a thorough combing through the TESL corpus revealed no transgender-exclusive research (nor any other non-binary gender identity), and those studies and papers which included transgender as part of the LGBTQ acronym in using a queer or feminist focus remained in an almost exclusive discussion of sexuality and sexual identities, rather than gender identities, if the transgender portion of the acronym was addressed at all (see Chapter II for a discussion of such TESL research). Therefore, it became clear that the research question needed to address the gap in the research. As there was no available qualitative data about the educator attitudes towards addressing gender nonconformity in the classroom without the context of sexual orientations, and recognizing the role of the teacher within a student-centered classroom as an encourager of agency, expression, experimentation, and critical thinking, the attitude of educators towards issues of gender diversity became the focus of this thesis and its exploratory study. The research questions, then, drawing from Dumas's (2010) model and Elliot's (2010) third tenet of the importance of transgender awareness, research, and activism, are as follows:

1. What reported perceptions do American ESL educators hold about transgender and gender diversity topics in the ESL classroom?
2. How do these perceptions relate to their reported perceptions of sexuality and gender?

3. Does demographic information relate to reported perceptions in any discernible way?
4. What other interesting information might this study reveal?

As mentioned later in this chapter, the exploratory nature of this study allows it to function without hypotheses: the sheer lack of research in this area leaves little for supporting evidence. The primary researcher's desire from this study, as will be discussed in Chapter V, is that future research may use this thesis to create hypotheses that can then be tested regarding similar topics of gender identity and TESL. Every piece of research in this topic brings us closer as a discipline to a better understanding of what is happening in American ESL classrooms with regard to gender identity and gender diversity.

### **Survey Population**

As this is an exploratory study meant to inspire further research, the survey population was broad, with the hopes of discovering interesting areas that can be specified for further research. Pre-service and in-service ESL teachers were both pulled, to see if any differences between attitudes in the two groups would reveal itself. Three institutions, Western Kentucky University's Teaching English as a Second Language program, the University of Arizona's Center for English as a Second Language, and Indiana University's Intensive English Program worked in cooperation for this study. Additionally, the survey was sent through personal communication to in-service ESL teachers who were not obligated through any relationship of power to complete the survey. Two versions of the survey were created, designated for either in-service or pre-service teachers. The survey was administered through the online site, *Survey Monkey*,

which allowed for greater control of appearance and ease of delivery to participants. Demographic information was taken at the end of the survey, resulting in a spread of participants discussed in Chapter IV.

### **Creation and Explanation of the Survey Tool**

Because this thesis simply cannot fix the large gap in the TESL corpus that has made itself apparent, it must serve instead as a step forward towards a proliferation of research regarding transgender, non-binary, and other non-cisgender issues within the TESL classroom. However, *because* there is no research on the topic, this thesis must serve an exploratory purpose by accumulating qualitative (and some quantitative) data. Therefore, conclusions will be drawn from the data without the presence of hypotheses. Additionally, given the exploratory nature of the thesis, it was determined that a pre-existing survey tool which had already been tested in the field and used in peer-reviewed scholarship would be best for achieving this goal.

In the spirit of that decision, Dumas's (2010) survey tool was selected for a modified replication study. This survey presented an opportunity for measurable qualitative and quantitative data and was also related to this thesis in focusing on social justice within the ESL classroom. In the original study, Dumas (2010) polled Canadian Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) educators on attitudes related towards sexuality and sexual identity within the classroom. While Dumas was interested in seeing how Canadian cultural values related to gay rights transferred into the LINC classroom, and how teachers felt covering those values with their students. Dumas's survey occurred in two parts, including the survey questionnaire and then a semi-structured interview. The interview allowed participants to elaborate on answers given

during the questionnaire, which in turn allowed Dumas to obtain a better understanding of the participants' awareness and comfort with the topic of sexual identity in the classroom. Most participants showed little to no awareness of the issue, or expressed discomfort with discussing the matter with their students. Those few who felt comfort with the issue or wanted to pursue it in the LINC class were unsure of how to do so, and therefore reported that they did not include such cultural content into their curriculum. After reporting on the findings of the study, Dumas discusses several key aspects of queer pedagogy and how the findings of the study serve as a powerful reminder that there is still much to be done in TESL with regards to socially progressive pedagogical training. Given the similarities between this thesis's and Dumas's (2010) topics, goals, and approaches, using a modified version of the survey found within Dumas's research for this thesis is not only natural, but highly logical.

**Modifications from Dumas's Original.** The original survey, as previously mentioned, sought teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards sexual identity in the Canadian LINC classroom (Dumas, 2010). As the exploratory study planned for this thesis wanted instead to seek teacher perceptions related to gender identity within American ESL classrooms, modifications to the original survey were necessary. The demographic information pulled from participants was modified slightly in format to minimize a participant's time in taking the survey and also to create a standardized, quantitative system of measurement for level of ESL being taught, years of experience, and educational background. Moreover, in order to simplify the survey and to minimize the various Likert Scales participants were expected to use, some questions (such as 12 and 13 in Dumas's original) were removed. Because the Dumas survey was chosen in



order to mimic tested and published materials, the modifications were necessarily only related to content, not to structure. Table 1 below illustrates a sample question from Dumas's original (using a check box system), while Table 2 below illustrates the modified version used in this survey (also using a check box system). A copy of Dumas's original questionnaire can be found in Appendix B of this thesis, while the modified version used in this study can be found in Appendix C, for further comparison.

Table 1

*Dumas's (2010) Original Check Box Question*

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13. The idea of class discussions on gay and lesbian topics makes me nervous because of the following concerns: (Check any and all that apply.)

- Students do not always have the necessary linguistic skills to discuss the topic.
  - The topic might arouse antagonistic comments from some students.
  - The topic might offend some students' cultural sensibilities.
  - The topic might offend some students' religious sensibilities.
  - I have personal moral concerns
  - I feel ill-equipped to discuss sexual diversity in the classroom.
- 

Table 2

*Modified Check Box Question from Thesis Survey*

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12. The idea of class discussions on transgender or gender non-conforming topics makes me nervous because of the following concerns: (Check any and all that apply.)

- a. Students do not always have the necessary linguistic skills to discuss the topic.
- b. The topic might arouse antagonistic comments from some of the students.
- c. The topic might offend some students' cultural sensibilities.

- d. The topic might offend some students' religious sensibilities.
- e. I have personal moral concerns.
- f. I feel ill-equipped to discuss gender diversity in the classroom.
- g. I do not feel nervous discussing this topic in the ESOL classroom.

As evidenced from the tables above, modifications were made in any situation in which the content of Dumas's (2010) original survey did not match the content of this survey. Additionally, an additional check box was provided for participants who may feel comfortable discussing (and perhaps already discuss) the topic of gender diversity in the ESL classroom. In situations in which Dumas referenced Canadian culture and the Canadian LINC classroom, this survey modified the content to match American culture and the American ESL classroom. Furthermore, because this survey wanted to include both pre-service and in-service ESL educators, two versions of the survey were created, with minimal differences related only to demographic information and any wording that seemed aimed at in-service educators more so than their pre-service peers. Nevertheless, the beliefs of educators about to enter the classroom were still critical, and thus the minor modifications were made, as evidenced in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3

*Pre-Service Question*

1. The TESL pedagogies I am being taught will allow me to discuss American cultural values and diverse American experiences.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Table 4

*In-Service Question*

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1. The TESL pedagogies I use in the classroom allow me to discuss American cultural values and diverse American experiences.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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*Open Answer.* As previously mentioned, Dumas’s (2010) original survey occurred in two parts, with a guided interview as the second part after the preliminary questionnaire. Given that this thesis is exploratory, the interview portion of the original survey was replaced with an open-answer portion at the end of the *Survey Monkey* survey. The importance of Dumas’s interview portion was noted while creating this survey, and therefore, the open response portion reflects a desire to hear the beliefs, attitudes, pedagogies, and narratives of American ESL educators in their own words. Table 5 below lists the three additional open answer questions included at the end of the survey.

Table 5

*End of Survey Open Answer Questions*

- 
10. Please evaluate your awareness of transgender and gender non-conforming topics.
  11. Please discuss your personal beliefs regarding gender in the ESOL classroom.
  12. Please discuss your approach to LGBTQIA issues in the ESOL classroom.
- 

**Further Information**

At the time of entering the *Survey Monkey* link matching their designation as either a pre-service or in-service educator, all participants were required to give informed consent, including acknowledging that they were aware they could leave the survey at any time without penalty. The results of this exploratory study will be analyzed in Chapter IV, whereas Chapter V contains the limitations of the study as well as potential future modifications for the study.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

As this was an exploratory study, the survey populations at WKU, IU, and UA were given the survey tool (as outlined previously in Chapter III and found in Appendix C of this thesis) on the research website *Survey Monkey*. Through email invitations sent through the contact person for each institution, participants were invited to either select the pre-service or in-service survey depending on their self-assessment of their own standing as an ESL educator in the United States. Eight respondents completed the pre-service survey tool, and twenty-six completed the matching in-service tool, and, as mentioned in Chapter III, participants were allowed to leave the survey at any time and could leave any question blank as they saw fit. The entirety of the raw data for this survey can be found in Appendix D of this thesis.

The only differences between the two surveys are those visible in Appendix C and outlined in Chapter III, with the exception of a single typo on the in-service final question (which one participant notified the primary researcher of within the body of their response). Otherwise, the surveys appeared exactly identical on the website to each group of participants, in an attempt to control the study environment as much as possible. Demographic differences also occurred: the lower number of pre-service teachers and, presumably, their status *as* pre-service meant none of them had accrued PhDs, while two PhD-holding respondents and one PhD student existed within the in-service population. Because of the numeric and demographic differences between the two groups, they cannot be accurately compared and contrasted to one another. Therefore, this chapter will analyze the data pulled from each group individually, rather than contrastively.

### **Analysis of Numeric Data**

**Pre-Service.** The eight pre-service teachers did not report ‘Strongly Disagree’ nor ‘Very Uncomfortable’ for any of the Likert Scale questions. While they seemed mostly neutral to positive on the first portion of the Likert Scale questions (those aimed at assessing the teacher’s self-reported relationship with TESL pedagogies, teaching materials, American culture, and general controversy), the pre-service teachers did showcase a wider spread of answers in the second portion of the Likert Scale questions, which asked participants to rank their comfort with various topics of controversy. The topic of religion contained the only “very uncomfortable” answer, ranking higher even in the neutral-to-negative categories than all the topics relevant to this thesis (gender, sexuality, and gender identity).

Of particular interest to this thesis, however, is that the reported slightly higher levels of comfort with gay and lesbian topics than topics of gender or transgender/gender non-conforming (which composed two separate question portions). Table 6 below shows this intriguing data spread.

Table 6

*Pre-Service Responses to Controversial Topics in the ESL Classroom (Questions 9-11).*

	VUC	UC	NUCNC	C	VC
If the topic of gender were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	2	2	2	2
If gay and lesbian topics were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	1	3	2	2
If transgender or gender non-conforming topics come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	2	2	2	2

While by no means statistically significant, for the exploratory purpose of this thesis, it is curious to see how gay and lesbian topics, for these participants, actually appear to cause *less* discomfort than topics of both gender *and* gender transgression. Drawing from Chapter II of this thesis, this may reflect the influx of sexuality discourses versus gender discourses (both binary and non-binary, conforming and non-conforming) in both mainstream society and academia. This is also important because, logically speaking, *all* ESL students will encounter binary gender in American culture at the very least, even if they do not encounter any members of or topics related to the LGBTQ community. Further research is clearly needed in the division between gender, sexuality, and ESL educator comfort with the two topics.

The surveyed pre-service teachers also appeared to hold few assumptions regarding ESL students' sensibilities, and thus only one participant each reported a fear of offending cultural and religious sensibilities within their students with transgender and gender non-conforming topics. They did, however, report the possibility of antagonistic comments, which seems to counteract the previous information. It is entirely possible that these participants viewed antagonistic comments from students not as a sign of "conservative" culture or religion, but rather individual personality or socially-engrained (but not culturally- or religiously-mandated) transphobia.

Half of the pre-service teachers also reported believing themselves able to find resources for transgender and gender non-conforming people in their community, while the other half did not or were not sure. However, five out of the eight participants also reported having colleagues or peers who are transgender or gender non-conforming. The

implications of their lack of perceived resources will be addressed in the analysis of their written responses below.

**In-Service.** In-service teachers, with a higher number of participants, yielded more information for analysis. The twenty-six participants showed mostly positive (ranging from neutrality to Strongly Agree) results in their assessment of TESL pedagogies, American culture, and controversy, but were split on issues of experiential representation in textbooks and the role of written assignments versus oral discussions in controversial topics. They also reported ambivalence towards issues of politics in the ESL classroom. However, as with the pre-service teachers, the last three items of the second Likert Scale proved highly intriguing for the exploratory purposes of this thesis. Table 7 below shows the participant responses for these three items.

Table 7

*In-Service Responses to Controversial Topics in the ESL Classroom (Questions 9-11)*

	VUC	UC	NUCNC	C	VC
If the topic of gender were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	2	8	9	1
If gay and lesbian topics were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	3	8	8	1
If transgender or gender non-conforming topics come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	4	11	4	1

In-service teachers reported a decreasing amount of comfort as the topic shifted from gender to gay and lesbian topics, and then to transgender and gender non-conforming



topics. Whereas between gender and gay and lesbian topics, the loss is a single participant who moves from comfortable to neutral, the shift between gay and lesbian topics and transgender topics is more noticeable, with one participant entering uncomfortable while seven leave comfort for neutrality. Only one participant reports being very comfortable with these topics, but the group also does not report feeling very uncomfortable with any of the presented controversial topics, thus indicating at least some existing level of perceived comfort.

When asked to mark reasons they may feel discomfort with discussing transgender and gender non-conforming issues in the classroom, six participants indicated that they did not feel discomfort with the topic at all, and the option for all participants to choose any and all reasons that they felt would complicate discussions of gender and gender diversity in the ESL classroom resulted in a wide spread across the available options. Eight participants reported feeling ill-equipped to tackle the topic at all and three reported personal moral concerns. Ten participants felt as though the topic would arouse antagonistic comments from the students, and subsequently nine participants indicated that their students' cultural and religious sensibilities, respectively, might be offended by the topic. Eight participants also reported the concern that their students simply would not have the linguistic capacity to broach the topic at all, a concern repeated in the open answer items.

The Yes/No/I Do Not Know portion of the in-service study also yielded fruitful responses. Fifteen participants reported having transgender or gender non-conforming colleagues or peers, and seven reported having had transgender or gender non-conforming students. In response to the same question, eight participants reported being

unsure if they had had such students in the past, but five participants asserted that they had *never* had students with non-binary identities in their classrooms. Perhaps the distinction here between “out” and “closeted” non-conformity should have been made clearer for the participants, but this also serves as powerful reminder of the American, white, upper- to middle-class narrative of the “closet”: it is *highly* unlikely those three participants could know the gender identity of every single student they had encountered, and were likely judging from the gender *expression* of the students whether or not they identified with and fit into their assigned role in the binary.

### **Analysis of Written Responses**

**Pre-Service.** As mentioned previously in this chapter, half of the pre-service teachers indicated that they did not know how to access resources for transgender and gender non-conforming persons. Supporting this, three participants reported feeling uninformed about transgender and gender non-conforming topics in general. In the written portion of their responses, several participants also indicated that they felt unable to discuss issues of gender in the ESL classroom. One flaw of the study made itself apparent, however, in that some of the pre-service participants, perhaps clued into the study’s goal from the previous questions, read “gender” in the second open answer as “transgender” and replied to the question as such. This in of itself may point to the extremely polarizing nature of gender topics: when gender transgression is brought up in any capacity, it may be that the term “gender” comes to stand for something that is performed by those *not* conforming to their assigned gender. This is supported by one answer from the “gender” open answer item:

*Please discuss your personal beliefs regarding gender in the ESOL classroom:*

I don't understand this question. If you mean how I feel about students being transgender or gender non-conforming I have no issue. If you mean how I feel about the topic in the classroom refer to question 11 (Pre-Service Participant Response One; Item 18).

It is very possible that a design flaw in the study itself created this response, but it may also be an indicator of the assumed, subvert, and engrained role gender plays in most people's lives, becoming (in conversations involving transgender topics such as the one participants were aware was occurring within this study) something that others perform when they do not function within their assigned place in the binary, rather than a communal and negotiated experience shared by *all* members of American society. This may also be supported by another participant's use of the phrase "a transgender" in the same item, which functions either as an accidental omission of the nouns "person" or "individual" or perhaps of a lack of understanding of the function of the word "transgender" as an adjective to avoid othering language that summarizes a person's entire presence as relegated to their gender identity.

**In-Service.** The written responses given by in-service participants also yielded a wealth of information for this exploratory study, particularly with regards to attitudes about transgender and gender non-conforming topics. Thirteen participants replied for each of the open answer portions (although there is no way to be certain if it was the same participants for each section), yielding answers that reveal the disparity between knowledge, application, and attitude. Particularly attention-grabbing answers included:

*Please self-evaluate your awareness of transgender and gender non-conforming topics:*

Gay and lesbian issues are pretty mainstream now, but I can't say the same of transgender issues. My awareness is pretty limited to what I see in the media. My awareness was probably higher when I lived in [city one] - big city, more diversity - but now I'm in [city two], so.... (In-Service Participant Response Three; Item 18).

Tolerant but ill-informed (In-Service Participant Response Six; Item 18)

I am very aware of them, but the idea of gender non-conforming is strange. It seems like making a big deal out of people who don't want to do typically boys and girls stuff. Who cares? I thought we dealt with that in the 1970s (In-Service Participant Response Eight; Item 18).

*Please discuss your personal beliefs regarding gender in the ESOL classroom:*

irrelevant to my essential purpose of teaching English (In-Service Participant Response Eleven; Item 19).

I think it is not a topic for discussion in the ESOL classroom. I believe there is far too little linguistic skill to properly address the issue especially for students who have just arrived from traditional societies where this cannot be addressed (In-Service Participant Response Twelve; Item 19).

I think there is a place for this discussion, and I actively teach it, but I have only dealt with it in a very limited and binary way (In-Service Participant Response Thirteen; Item 19).

*Please discuss your approach to LGBTQQIA issues in the ESOL classroom:*

As I wrote before, this is reality. You (students) will meet LGBT people in your life, and they are people with feelings like you. Don't make fun of them, don't question them and don't lecture them on moral grounds. Believe it or not, i have had several male students come out to me, and it really helped them to deal with who they are (In-Service Participant Response Five; Item 20).

ignore or divert (In-Service Participant Response Six; Item 20).

The students are not ready for it in many cases. They don't have the language to understand it (In-Service Participant Response Eight; Item 20).

That's a pretty intimidating alphabet soup there in the name. For me, I work in an EAP program, so I see my first and most important job as preparing them for the English they will encounter in the course of their academic studies. I rarely use materials that openly address LGBT concerns unless they are directly relevant to some other content goal... (In-Service Participant Response Nine; Item 20, edited for length).

I have no "approach" (In-Service Participant Response Eleven; Item 20).

I have never brought this up in my classes. If I have a student who asks me, I refer them to the places on campus who are qualified to talk with them about resources available (In-Service Participant Response Twelve; Item 20).

Pretty much LGB only. I don't feel competent to do any more than this (In-Service Participant Response Thirteen; Item 20).

As evidenced by this small sampling of responses, there is no seeming uniformity between the ideals of the in-service participants. However, there are some commonalities that exist and parallels that can be drawn. For instance, several participants mention

throughout this sampling and the larger study their awareness of places to which they could send transgender and gender non-conforming students, thereby possibly indicating that their perceived role of an educator may not include counselor, social advocate, or ally, at least where the transgender topic arises. This is *not* to say that the participants who gave such responses are unwilling or obstinate towards providing assistance; indeed, many participants repeatedly express an inability on their end to adequately address the issue and therefore seem to advocate various “places” where students can go. Many participants also seem to address gender and LGTBQ topics as they arise, or view the role of these topics as “irrelevant” to the classroom. One participant even asks, “Who cares?,” while another refers to one version of the ever-expanding LGBTQ acronym as “pretty intimidating alphabet soup,” indicating perhaps the difficulty in relating issues of LGBTQ identity to relevant ESL student populations (In-Service Participant Response One; Item 18; In-Service Participant Response Two; Item 20). One participant in the “gender” open answer (Item 19) talks exclusively about LGBTQ issues in their classroom, perhaps indicating the previously-discussed potential shift in the meaning of “gender” (found in the pre-service written portion above) that occurs once the topic of gender transgression has been broached.

### **Final Comments**

At least two participants demonstrate their own understanding of the complexity of the issue of gender in the ESL classroom through the use of the terms such as “binary” and “privilege.” As one participant writes, “I think there is a place for this discussion, and I actively teach it, but I have only dealt with it in a very limited and binary way” (In-Service Participant Response Thirteen; Item 19). Recognizing not only the binary nature

of the conversation occurring within their classroom, but also a need for more discussion, this particular educator seems to want to involve the topic of gender more into their classroom but is somehow limited either through resources, personal assessment of knowledge, or other unknown factors. Other applicants also seem to struggle with “limit,” reporting that they believe their students do not possess the linguistic ability or the cultural background to be able to discuss the topic. Most of the participants in the “gender” open answer (Item 19) expressed concern about traditionally gender-segregated cultures and the impact a discussion regarding gender might have on these “traditional” students. What is most interesting here is that the survey tool itself did not suggest any sample discourses that might happen under the label of gender, only the broad topic of gender itself. Therefore, this calls into question what participants reporting concern thought of when they read the “gender” question and what underlying cultural and personal assumptions must have been at play. Did they go immediately to a feminist discussion of gender equality? Did they think of discussions of dating practices or sexual activities? As will be discussed in Chapter V, without the interview portion of Dumas’s (2010) original survey, further elaboration simply cannot be completed. However, it seems unlikely that, for instance, just discussing the differences in binary family tree names in the context of ESL vocabulary acquisition (mother and father; aunt and uncle; etc.) would elicit such concerned responses from students. Therefore, it appears that vagueness may lead to automatic negativity where gender is concerned. More than anything, this exploratory study points to the need for further research, and for a reconsidering of how we view, address, and construct the role of gender in the ESL

classroom, particularly as it relates to transgender and gender non-conforming topics and their relationship to all learners, not simply the trans and non-binary ones.



## CHAPTER V: WEAKNESSES OF THE STUDY, AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

The study conducted for this thesis is, as mentioned in previous chapters, an exploratory one, and therefore assessing the weaknesses of the study and areas for future research are of the utmost importance. Obviously, ascertaining the weaknesses of any given study allows the researcher and future researchers to recognize where future research can be improved, executed, and contributed to the corpus which in turn spurs even more research. However, recognizing the weaknesses of a study also allows the researcher to recognize where researcher bias or institutional inequities may have come into play. For the socially just researcher, this is crucial. Self-reflection as a means of disabling further systems of oppression is paramount to effective and progressive research and allows for a deeper level of connection between individuals and disciplines.

### **Weaknesses of the Study**

The creation of a perfect survey tool is very nearly impossible for all available survey populations. For instance, the wording of questions, the responses available to a participant, and manner of survey tool distribution can all lead to drastically different results between sample populations or even individual participants (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012). It is crucial that any weakness that can be found be analyzed, reflected upon, and removed from future research.

**Potential Researcher Bias.** As a white, English-speaking, American cisgender woman, I am in possession of a tremendous amount of privilege which may have surfaced in unexpected ways within this thesis and its exploratory study. This topic was chosen in part because I have witnessed firsthand, on some admittedly minuscule scale,

the fluid nature of gender and have experienced periods in my life, particularly within my formative teenage years, in which my internal feelings were not entirely female. At this point in my life, however, I do categorize myself as female, or rather, do not feel out of place being categorized as a female and therefore I am cisgender and receive the privileges inherent in not being transgender or gender non-conforming in the United States.

Because the system is set in my favor, my desire in creating this thesis and research is not to speak for the experiences of transgender or gender non-conforming ESL populations, but rather to examine TESL researchers and educators who may have been engaging knowingly and unknowingly in the transphobic educational practices that are ever-present within American culture and to suggest more research to address the problem. As an ESL educator myself, I recognize the importance of both “practicing what I preach” while also making sure that my research does not serve only the privileged academic world, but also has implications for the populations who, as Elliot (2010) notes, are discussed and affected, directly and indirectly, by this study. In particular, one instance of researcher bias in this particular study was my reliance upon an Internet tool, *Survey Monkey*, which assumes that participants had access to a computer and the Internet (a highly privileged notion). Moreover, in using universities and personal communication to access participants, ESL educators who were not or have not been involved in university education and networking, perhaps those working with refugee or migrant populations, were not given a voice within the study. Additionally, the lack of an interview portion and my reliance upon a single open-answer section reflected my desire to quickly have participants discuss highly complex issues, which in

turn reflects my own biases as the researcher towards ‘quick and dirty’ qualitative data while may leave participants feeling unable to express ideas important to them and to analyzing their responses. In the future, all these factors will be considered in the design and implementation of further research on my part, and it is my desire that future researchers also examine these potential privileges and biases in their own work.

**Likert Scale.** Likert Scales, while ideal for measuring broad attitudes and opinions and for measuring general nuance in said attitudes and opinions, are by no means a perfect system. As Ogden and Lo (2011) point out, Likert Scales “have their limitations and...data derived from their use should be understood within the broader context of participants’ decision making processes” (p. 360). In particular, the point to the multiple interpretations inherent in any question, and discuss the Likert Scale only measures what the participants perceives to be the question at hand, not necessarily what the researcher is actually looking for (Ogden & Lo, 2011). Furthermore, Wakita, Ueshima, and Noguchi (2012) found that statistical responses to Likert Scales actually changed depending on the number of response options available, with 7-option Likert Scales containing more negative responses but less extreme (as in, either end of the scale) responses than four-, five-, and six-option Likert Scales. Since this study modified to a five-option scale from Dumas’s (2010) original six-option, it is possible that the reliability of Dumas’s (2010) Likert Scales within the context of the questionnaire are very different from that of this thesis’s survey. However, this five-option choice was deliberate in allowing participants an ability to mark their own perceived neutrality, as I perceived this would yield interesting results in of itself. For instance, neutrality may indicate a conscious lack of positivity or negativity towards a topic, but might also point

to apathy. For the purposes of this study, a five-point Likert Scale and the option of neutrality were important.

**Survey Population.** Another major weakness of the study was the survey population and its size. The original planned population would include a pre-service and in-service group from each of the nine United States' Census zones, but limitations in time and participant response narrowed the participant populations down to three major locations: Kentucky, Indiana, and Arizona. Any respondents polled through personal communication were not required to give their location and were not affiliated with the organizations participating in the study. Obviously, this is not a statistically significant population choice, given the lack of involvement from ESL educators from all over the United States. Such involvement, had it occurred, would have provided a stronger, more statistically viable look at ESL educator perceptions as they stand across the entire U.S., rather than in two areas in which speculation to the greater American perceptions must be hesitantly assumed. A greater spread across demographic regions, such as age, gender, level of TESL education, and years of experience would also have given more concrete visualizations of exactly what perceptions are being held within the various subgroups of ESL educators with regards to gender identity and transgender issues.

**Lack of Dumas's (2010) Interview Portion.** Because the personal interview component of Dumas's (2010) study was removed, a great deal of qualitative data-collecting techniques were also lost in this thesis's study. In compensation, as mentioned in Chapter III, open answer portions were inserted at the end of the survey, but these do not completely replace the intrinsic power of an interpersonal interview when assessing the beliefs and attitudes of an individual, particularly in a deeply personal issue such as

gender identity. In particular, there was no opportunity for the researcher to ask for further elaboration from a participant's answer, and participants were left up to decide what was important and how to evaluate the meaning of a question when answering the open answer portion of the online survey. While this does indeed give a great deal of information in exactly *what* the participant thinks is important on the topic (thereby revealing their knowledge or misinformation and their understanding of how it relates to TESL), this does not make up for the lack of elaboration possible from responsive, personal interviews.

### **Areas for Future Research**

As mentioned throughout this thesis, this is the first instance of TESL research (known by the primary researcher) focusing exclusively on transgender and non-binary gender identity in ESL and American ESL educator perceptions towards the topic. Therefore, the realm of available research topics stemming from this topic is virtually limitless. First, and foremost, this study needs to be re-conducted on a broader, more statistically significant scale. From the attitudes found within a larger survey, more specific pedagogical strategies to problematizing gender identity in the ESL classroom can be developed, tested, and implemented. There also needs to be more research on transgender and non-binary ESL students, in particular, but also on the American cultural effects of transgender visibility (or lack thereof) that may influence students' gender identity creation, recreation, abandoning, and acceptance. While educators play a key role in the maintenance of social and cultural norms, the role of peers, family, and the wider American society in the lives of ESL students negotiating their gender identity should also be studied in-depth. There is also a rich history of transgender and gender

non-conforming communities on the Internet, which Miner, Bockting, Romine, and Roman (2012) note as a singularly important resource for gender identity research. Recent proliferations in pronoun creation, adoption, and assertion should also be investigated, particularly as it relates to the content absorbed by ESL learners using the Internet as a place of English learning. This is but a short list of potential topics for TESL researchers to begin mapping out the relationship between language and gender identity outside of the binary.

**Other Marginalized Identities.** Keeping in the spirit of intersectionality and recognizing marginalized groups hidden within acronyms and spoken for by non-group others, future research needs to also address other marginal sexual and gender identities, including, but not limited to, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, bigender, agender, genderqueer, genderfuck, demigender(s), etc. For the gender identities, ‘transgender’ can serve as an umbrella term, but not always and not for every unique individual, and the use of it in pedagogy and research without the explanation of the sheer diversity within it can do more harm than good. No researcher nor corpus should be complacent relying on a single umbrella term when such a multitude of potential research opportunities exist in the nuances of identity lumped under said umbrella term.

## **Conclusion**

The recent visibility of transgender individuals such as Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, Carmen Carrera, and Chaz Bono reflect a movement in American culture towards “recognizing” the trans topic. However, American culture is similarly marked by an extensive lack of understanding, apathy, and/or deep-seated transphobia, which continue to dominate many discussions of the topic. As asserted by West and Zimmerman (1987),

gender's social construction and performative aspects negate any inherent biological basis for binary gender itself. ESL educators working in the United States often find themselves as explicit educators of American culture as well, but also are responsible for the implicit cultural lessons embedded in their lessons and classroom environment. Solely inclusive pedagogies and programs often instead serve to other individuals more prominently, while allowing those in privilege to remain unchallenged within their own identities (Nelson, 2006; Ward, 2008). Therefore, queer theory's problematization and model of inquiry-based techniques, as already seen in some non-ESL classrooms, serve as a good start to addressing the issue of transgender and non-binary gender both in teacher training, the classroom, and the greater society as a whole. While the implementation of such techniques has occurred within other disciplines, it is markedly absent from TESL research and presumably from many ESL classrooms. Further interdisciplinary and intersectional research will tell us how deeply transphobic structures have infiltrated TESL, but it is already apparent that our own reservations as educators and as a cisnormative group have influenced the amount of research and implementation of this topic in the classroom. It is the author's sincerest desire that the field of TESL research move forward in its characteristic socially just manner and address this gap head-on, becoming advocates of deconstructing the inequitable gender system that awards and assumes binary placement rather than attempt to simply "include" gender diverse populations within it. By taking a critical look at how gender is constructed for *all* individuals, not simply those functioning inside *or* outside the binary, gender itself can be deconstructed and deemphasized as a static, set identity designation, and the lives and struggles of individuals who do not fit neatly into the binary can be improved

tremendously by removal of ostracism, discrimination, and persecution. The ESL classroom should not be a passive breeding ground for oppression, but rather should represent active, evolving progress, and finding the 'T' in LGBTQ TESL research and educator attitudes is an important step towards such classrooms.



## APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF RELEVANT TERMS

Please note that these terms are based upon my personal understanding of the critical language related to gender identity at this point in time. Given the evolving nature of language and of our societal understanding of complex issues related to sexuality and gender, these terms may be considered inappropriate, inaccurate, or insufficient in the future. This small collection of terms is by no means a full breadth of gender identity-related terminology, and should not be taken as such.

**AFAB/DFAB** “Assigned Female at Birth”/“Designated Female at Birth.” This acronym refers to the biological sex assigned at birth.

**Agender** A gender identity most commonly referring to the complete absence of gender.

**AMAB/DMAB** “Assigned Male at Birth”/“Designated Male at Birth.” This acronym refers to the biological sex assigned at birth.

**Androgynous** Falling exactly between the socially- and culturally-constructed masculine and feminine standards of appearance.

**Bigender** A gender identity most commonly referring to the presence of two genders.

**Biological Sex** A set of phenotypic (i.e. genitalia) and genotypic (i.e. sex chromosomes) characteristics used to assign a sex (and therefore, a gender) onto a person at birth.

**Cisgender** Identifying with the gender identity prescribed through biological sex at one’s birth.

**Cisnormativity** A system in place, enforced both overtly and subtly, that assumes all members of a society identify with the gender assigned to their biological sex.

**Demiboy** A gender identity that consists of partial male identification, mixed in with parts of other genders.

**Demigirl** A gender identity that consists of partial female identification, mixed in with parts of other genders.

**Dysphoria** Feelings of discomfort or disgust with one's own features, specifically that these physical features are incorrect for how one feels their body should look and/or feel.

**Genderfluid** A gender identity most commonly referring to someone who shifts and moves between any number of genders.

**Genderfuck** A gender identity most commonly referring to someone who actively chooses to "fuck" with gender and the societal constructions of gender.

**Genderqueer** Both an umbrella term and a gender identity for genders that fall outside the binary.

**Intersex** A state of biological sex which does not fit neatly into the binary. It can refer to phenotypic (i.e. genitalia) or genotypic (i.e. sex chromosomes) forms that vary all along a spectrum.

**Intergender** A gender identity in between the two binary genders.

**Non-Binary Conforming** A gender identity (often called 'non-binary') most commonly referring to someone who does not operate within the gender binary.

**Sexual Orientation** An umbrella term for the sexual and/or romantic preferences of a person.

**Transgender** Both an umbrella term and a gender identity for people whose biological sex and gender identity do not match up.

**Transsexual** A gender identity most commonly referring to someone who desires different biological sex indicators or has had completed sex reassignment surgery (i.e. genitalia).

## APPENDIX B: DUMAS'S (2010) ORIGINAL SURVEY

### Survey Questionnaire

1. On the whole, the textbooks in the program of Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) adequately reflect Canadian values.
2. I have adequate access to additional materials other than textbooks that reflect the aims of LINC to teach informed and active citizenship.
3. When I address citizenship values in the classroom, I think it's important to refer to Canadian laws.
4. I think there is a place for controversy in the classroom.
5. I think controversial topics are better dealt with in written assignments than oral discussions.
6. If political disagreements come up in the classroom, I tend to feel:
7. If the topic of euthanasia comes up in the classroom, I tend to feel:
8. If ethnic or racial issues come up in the classroom, I tend to feel:
9. If the topic of religion comes up in the classroom, I tend to feel:
10. If gay and lesbian topics come up in the classroom, I tend to feel:
11. I have never really thought about discussing gay/lesbian Participants in the classroom.
12. I think that discussions about gay/lesbian Participants are outside the mandate of LINC.
13. The idea of class discussions on gay and lesbian topics makes me nervous because of the following concerns: (Check any and all that apply.)
  - Students do not always have the necessary linguistic skills to discuss the topic.
  - The topic might arouse antagonistic comments from some students.
  - The topic might offend some students' cultural sensibilities.
  - The topic might offend some students' religious sensibilities.
  - I have personal moral concerns.
  - I feel ill-equipped to discuss sexual diversity in the classroom.
14. I know where to find resources for gay and lesbian people in my community.
15. I discuss questions of sexual diversity with my colleagues at work:
16. I have colleagues who are gay or lesbian.
17. I have or have had gay or lesbian students in my LINC classes.

My Age: Under 25 \_\_\_ 25–34 \_\_\_ 35–44 \_\_\_ 45–54 \_\_\_ 55 and over \_\_\_

My Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

LINC level I am currently teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of experience teaching ESL: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of experience teaching LINC: \_\_\_\_\_

I teach in: Edmonton /Calgary\_\_\_ Northern Alberta \_\_\_ Central Alberta \_\_\_ Southern Alberta \_\_\_

### **Guided Interview Questions**

#### 1. Role of Teacher

- a) What do you see as your main role as a LINC teacher?
- b) Do you think gay and lesbian issues are outside the mandate of LINC?
- c) Is there a place for open discussions of gay and lesbian issues in the classroom?

#### 2. Materials

- a) Do you think current materials adequately reflect the aims of LINC to teach informed and active citizenship?
- b) Do you have enough information to deal with issues of sexual diversity in your classroom? Enough support?
- c) Are there practical – i.e., quick and easy – strategies that could be made available to you?
- d) Do you think depictions of the family should be traditional? Why or why not?

#### 3. Students

- a) To your knowledge, have you ever had students in your classroom that identified as gay or lesbian?
- b) If yes, were the other students aware?
- c) Do your students ever make jokes about lesbians or gays? If so, how often? What is your response? Do you think it best to ignore such jokes? Is it best to respond?
- d) Do your students ever make disparaging remarks about lesbians or gays? Do you think it best to ignore such remarks? Is it best to respond?

#### 4. Classroom

- a) How often do gay and lesbian issues arise in the classroom? If issues do arise, what are they? Who brings them up? In what circumstances? How comfortable are you in dealing with them?
- b) Do you use role plays in your classroom? How often?
- c) Do you use family role plays? How often? In what context?
- d) Do you ever discuss marriage and the family? How often? In what context?
- e) When discussing marriage do you talk about gay marriage? If yes, what do you say about it?

Participant Age: Under 25\_\_ 25–34\_\_\_ 35–44\_\_\_ 45–54\_\_\_ 55 and over\_\_\_

Participant Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

LINC level currently teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of experience teaching ESL: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of experience teaching LINC: \_\_\_\_\_

Region: Edmonton/Calgary\_\_\_ Northern Alberta \_\_\_ Central Alberta \_\_\_ Southern  
Alberta \_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: SURVEY TOOL

### Pre-Service Teacher Questionnaire:

Likert Scale Questions, Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree on questions 1-5, Very Comfortable to Very Uncomfortable on questions 6-11.

1. The TESL pedagogies I am being taught will allow me to discuss American cultural values and diverse American experiences.
2. I have adequate access to additional TESL materials other than textbooks that reflect American cultural values and diverse American experiences.
3. When I address American culture in the classroom, I think it's important to refer to American laws.
4. I think there is a place for controversy in the classroom.
5. I think controversial topics are better dealt with in written assignments than oral discussions.
6. If political disagreements were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:
7. If ethnic or racial issues were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:
8. If the topic of religion were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:
9. If the topic of gender were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:
10. If gay and lesbian topics were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:
11. If transgender or gender non-conforming topics come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:

### Question with Check Boxes

12. The idea of class discussions on transgender or gender non-conforming topics makes me nervous because of the following concerns: (Check any and all that apply.)
  - a. Students do not always have the necessary linguistic skills to discuss the topic.
  - b. The topic might arouse antagonistic comments from some of the students.
  - c. The topic might offend some students' cultural sensibilities.
  - d. The topic might offend some students' religious sensibilities.
  - e. I have personal moral concerns.
  - f. I feel ill-equipped to discuss gender diversity in the classroom.
  - g. I do not feel nervous discussing this topic in the ESOL classroom.

### Yes/No/I Do Not Know Questions

13. I know where to find resources for transgender and gender non-conforming people in my community.
14. I discuss questions of gender diversity with my colleagues and peers.

15. I discuss questions of gender diversity with my friends and family away from work and school.
16. I have colleagues or peers who are transgender or gender non-conforming.

Open-Ended Questions

17. Please evaluate your awareness of transgender and gender non-conforming topics.
18. Please discuss your personal beliefs regarding gender in the ESOL classroom.
19. Please discuss your approach to LGBTQIA issues in the ESOL classroom.

Please choose your age range: 18-21 \_\_\_ 22-25 \_\_\_ 25-34 \_\_\_ 35-44 \_\_\_ 45-54 \_\_\_ 55 and over \_\_\_

Please list your gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Please choose the ESOL level(s) you plan to teach: K-12 \_\_\_ Non-Collegiate Adults \_\_\_ Collegiate Adults \_\_\_ Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Please choose your level of explicit TESL education (Check all relevant boxes): PhD \_\_\_ Master's \_\_\_ TESL Certificate \_\_\_ Bachelor's \_\_\_ Minor \_\_\_

**In-Service Teacher Questionnaire:**

Likert Scale Questions, Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree on questions 1-5, Very Comfortable to Very Uncomfortable on questions 6-11.

2. The TESL pedagogies I use in the classroom allow me to discuss American cultural values and diverse American experiences.
3. I have adequate access to additional materials other than textbooks that reflect American cultural values and diverse American experiences.
4. When I address American culture in the classroom, I think it's important to refer to American laws.
5. I think there is a place for controversy in the classroom.
6. I think controversial topics are better dealt with in written assignments than oral discussions.
7. If political disagreements come up in the ESOL classroom, I tend to feel:
8. If ethnic or racial issues come up in the ESOL classroom, I tend to feel:
9. If the topic of religion comes up in the ESOL classroom, I tend to feel:
10. If the topic of gender comes up in the ESOL classroom, I tend to feel:
11. If gay and lesbian topics come up in the ESOL classroom, I tend to feel:
12. If transgender or gender non-conforming topics come up in the ESOL classroom, I tend to feel:

Question with Check Boxes

13. The idea of class discussions on transgender or gender non-conforming topics makes me nervous because of the following concerns: (Check any and all that apply.)
- a. Students do not always have the necessary linguistic skills to discuss the topic.
  - b. The topic might arouse antagonistic comments from some of the students.
  - c. The topic might offend some students' cultural sensibilities.
  - d. The topic might offend some students' religious sensibilities.
  - e. I have personal moral concerns.
  - f. I feel ill-equipped to discuss gender diversity in the classroom.
  - g. I do not feel nervous discussing this topic in the ESOL classroom.

Yes/No/I Do Not Know Questions

- 14. I know where to find resources for transgender and gender non-conforming people in my community.
- 15. I discuss questions of gender diversity with my colleagues at work.
- 16. I discuss questions of gender diversity with my friends and family away from work.
- 17. I have colleagues or peers who are transgender or gender non-conforming.
- 18. I have or have had transgender or gender non-conforming students in my ESOL classes.

Open-Ended Questions

- 19. Please evaluate your awareness of transgender and gender non-conforming topics.
- 20. Please discuss your personal beliefs regarding gender in the ESOL classroom.
- 21. Please discuss your approach to LGBTQQIA issues in the ESOL classroom.

My Age: Under 25 \_\_\_\_ 25-34 \_\_\_\_ 35-44 \_\_\_\_ 45-54 \_\_\_\_ 55 and over \_\_\_\_

My Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Please choose the ESOL level(s) you teach: K-12 \_\_\_\_ Non-Collegiate Adults \_\_\_\_  
Collegiate Adults \_\_\_\_ Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Level of Explicit TESL Education (Check all relevant boxes): PhD \_\_\_\_ Master's  
\_\_\_\_ TESL Certificate \_\_\_\_ Bachelor's \_\_\_\_ Minor \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX D: RAW DATA FROM SURVEY**

**Note:** All data appears exactly as it was entered into the Survey Monkey system, with the exceptions of removal of potentially identifiable information (particularly with regards to location). No corrective changes have occurred.

**Key:** SD: Strongly Disagree; D: Disagree; NDNA: Neither Disagree Nor Agree; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree

VUC: Very Uncomfortable; UC: Uncomfortable; NUCNC: Neither Uncomfortable Nor Comfortable; C: Comfortable; VC: Very Comfortable

**PRE-SERVICE RAW DATA**

	SD	D	NDNA	A	SA
The TESL pedagogies I am being taught will allow me to discuss American cultural values and diverse American experiences	0	1	2	3	2
I have adequate access to additional TESL materials other than textbooks that reflect American cultural values and diverse American experiences.	0	2	3	1	2
When I address American culture in the classroom, I think it's important to refer to American laws.	0	0	3	4	1
I think there is a place for controversy in the classroom.	0	1	1	1	5
I think controversial topics are better dealt with in written assignments than oral discussions.	0	2	4	1	1

	VUC	UC	NUCNC	C	VC
If political disagreements were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	2	1	3	2
If ethnic or racial issues were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	3	1	3	1
If the topic of religion were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	1	3	1	2	1
If the topic of gender were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	2	2	2	2
If gay and lesbian topics were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	1	3	2	2
If transgender or gender non-conforming topics come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	2	2	2	2

	The idea of class discussions on transgender or gender non-conforming topics makes me nervous because of the following concerns: (Check any and all that apply.)
Students do not always have the necessary linguistic skills to discuss the topic.	1
The topic might arouse antagonistic comments from some of the students.	3
The topic might offend some students' cultural sensibilities.	1
The topic might offend some students' religious sensibilities.	1
I have personal moral concerns.	0
I feel ill equipped to discuss gender diversity in the classroom.	2
I do not feel nervous discussing this topic in the ESOL classroom.	5

	I know where to find resources for transgender and gender non-conforming people in my community.
Yes.	4
No.	3
I do not know.	1

	I discuss questions of gender diversity with my colleagues and peers.
Yes.	4
No.	4
I do not know.	0

	I discuss questions of gender diversity with my friends and family away from work and school.
Yes.	6
No.	2
I do not know.	0

	I have colleagues or peers who are transgender or gender non-conforming.
Yes.	5

No.	2
I do not know.	1

Please self-evaluate your awareness of transgender and gender non-conforming topics.
I attended a college which dealt with this issue and had dorms for transgender students(at their request).
I am fascinated by the topic, yet feel like I probably don't know very much, since I am outside the issue. I believe that each person who is transgender should be respected for their decision to be comfortable with who they really are. I don't really know what "gender non-conforming topics" even means. I believe a transgender person has experienced a lot of emotional distress for much of their life and they don't need to be denied opportunities just because they have had different experiences that I have. ,.
I know little. I have not had direct experiences with these issues.
I am a former CASA supervisor so so attended workshops and had transgender clients.
I have very limited knowledge of transgender and gender non-conforming, but I try to be open-minded and educate myself.
I am very aware of these topics and feel they need to have more presence in my EAP classroom

Please discuss your personal beliefs regarding gender in the ESOL classroom.
Everyone has the right to everything no matter who you are. Equality should exist and discrimination should be stopped.
Gender only becomes an issue when one gender dominates another which would adversely effect the functioning of the classroom.
I am not quite sure how to answer this. I try to treat everyone equally until necessary to change. If a person is a male who treats me with respect, I will treat them the same way as I treat a female who treats me with respect. I not sure what gender has to do with it.
I don't understand this question. If you mean how I feel about students being transgender or gender non-conforming I have no issue. If you mean how I feel about the topic in the classroom refer to question 11.
If there is a transgender in the ESOL classroom they have a right to be there and should be treated with respect.
I feel that these things should be discussed, but I am not equipped to have these discussions with students.
I think gender affects the classroom and am aware of its influence but do not always know how to adequately address it

Please discuss your approach to LGBTQQIA issues in the ESOL classroom.
The classroom is meant for ESOL, not a forum for political debates on this issue. I would try not to let this issue dominate the sphere of the classroom.
I think the only answer I can give is the same on as above. I haven't really started

teaching ESL, although I am teaching GED adults, and I am relating my answers to those experiences. My general approach to any of my students would be to seek information to share with a student who may ask for it, otherwise, I normally don't feel compelled to intervene in someone's personal life.
I would probably not initiate discussion on these issues but if students brought them up I am willing to discuss.
I would not raise an issue unless it was brought up either by the LGBTQ student or another student and would discuss in private or, if appropriate, in the classroom.
Currently, I have not experienced any of these issues, so I do not have an approach.
I do not discuss them because I worry my superiors would disapprove

	Please choose your age range.
18-21	0
22-25	1
25-34	1
35-44	2
45-54	2
55 and over	2

Please list your gender.
Female
should not be relevant
Female
Female
female
female
Female.
female

	Please choose the ESOL level(s) you plan to teach. Check all that apply.
K-12	2
Non-Collegiate Adults	6
Collegiate Adults	5
Other (please specify)	0

	Please choose your level of explicit TESL education. Check all that apply.
Minor	1
TESL Certificate	4

Bachelor's	0
Master's	3
PhD	0
Other (please specify)	1 Responses were: 1.) Earned 50 Hour Basic ESL Certificate; working on Advanced 50 Hour Certificate

### IN-SERVICE RAW DATA

	SD	D	NDNA	A	SA
The TESL pedagogies I use in the classroom allow me to discuss American cultural values and diverse American experiences.	0	0	2	12	6
I have adequate access to additional TESL materials other than textbooks that reflect American cultural values and diverse American experiences.	0	5	1	7	8
When I address American culture in the classroom, I think it's important to refer to American laws.	0	1	9	10	1
I think there is a place for controversy in the classroom.	0	1	1	12	7
I think controversial topics are better dealt with in written assignments than oral discussions.	0	8	11	2	0

	VUC	UC	NUCNC	C	VC
If political disagreements were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	1	0	12	7	0
If ethnic or racial issues were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	4	9	6	1
If the topic of religion were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	3	10	6	1
If the topic of gender were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	2	8	9	1
If gay and lesbian topics were to come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	3	8	8	1

If transgender or gender non-conforming topics come up in the ESOL classroom, I would feel:	0	4	11	4	1
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	The idea of class discussions on transgender or gender non-conforming topics makes me nervous because of the following concerns: (Check any and all that apply.)
Students do not always have the necessary linguistic skills to discuss the topic.	8
The topic might arouse antagonistic comments from some of the students.	10
The topic might offend some students' cultural sensibilities.	9
The topic might offend some students' religious sensibilities.	9
I have personal moral concerns.	3
I feel ill equipped to discuss gender diversity in the classroom.	8
I do not feel nervous discussing this topic in the ESOL classroom.	6

	I know where to find resources for transgender and gender non-conforming people in my community.
Yes.	8
No.	9
I do not know.	3

	I discuss questions of gender diversity with my colleagues and peers.
Yes.	7
No.	12
I do not know.	0

	I discuss questions of gender diversity with my friends and family away from work and school.
Yes.	16
No.	4
I do not know.	0

	I have colleagues or peers who are transgender or gender non-conforming.
Yes.	15
No.	2
I do not know.	3

	I have or have had transgender or gender non-conforming students in my ESOL classes.
Yes.	7
No.	5
I do not know.	8

Please self-evaluate your awareness of transgender and gender non-conforming topics.	
somewhat aware	
I'm definitely no expert, and I'm sure that there are many ways that I'm unaware of my own privilege as a heterosexual and perpetuate binary conceptions of gender. I guess I would say that I am compassionate and accepting of people, regardless of their gender identification, but I know that I could be more educated with regards to transgender issues.	
Gay and lesbian issues are pretty mainstream now, but I can't say the same of transgender issues. My awareness is pretty limited to what I see in the media. My awareness was probably higher when I lived in [city one] - big city, more diversity - but now I'm in [city two], so....	
I have a good sense of awareness	
Fully aware. I taught 10 years in an urban public high school and took several courses and workshops on LGBTQ issues.	
Tolerant but ill-informed	
I am very aware of the topics; however, there are few community resources available.	
I am very aware of them, but the idea of gender non-conforming is strange. It seems like making a big deal out of people who don't want to do typically boys and girls stuff. Who cares? I thought we dealt with that in the 1970s.	
Most are entirely unaware; a scarce few are informed, but even those that are aware of the issue still have difficulty discussing it openly.	
I teach in the same building as [a program for sexuality and gender studies]. Even if you never go it's hard to be completely oblivious to some things.	
good	
I am aware. Our university has several resources available. We provide their cards in our main office.	
Very low.	

Please discuss your personal beliefs regarding gender in the ESOL classroom.
respect everyone and encourage students to respect everyone in the classroom
I try to create a respectful community of learners in my classroom, and to me, that means accepting people as they are. To my knowledge, I've never had a gender non-conforming student in one of my classes, so I don't know how I would deal with other students' reactions. I like to think that I would work hard to help other students' understand/accept/respect individual gender identifications.
Our student population is heavily Arabic, so gender issues are certainly there. We have to be sensitive to how the Arabic men and women interact and what level of interaction their culture allows. I say "men" and "women," but our students are mostly teenagers. This is often the first time they have visited a Western country. If the men and women are uncomfortable being in discussion groups together - and you pick up on this after only a few class sessions - then I keep them separate. Just being in the same room together is a start!! They'll be spending 8 weeks in the same "cohort" with 4 classes, 5 days a week. So, even if I don't force them into close partnerships, I believe some desensitizing is still happening.
It does not need to be the focus of an ESL class. However, if the issue comes up during discussion, the teacher should be able to discuss it appropriately.
I make students aware of the possibilities that their current & future classmates as well as future professors may not fall into the typical male/female roles. In advanced classes, we watch the Gender Tango narrated by Susan Saradon as a class; however, I separate the class into male & female for the parts about Vanuatu's matriarchal and patriarchal tribes due to the nudity and sexual content. I actually allow the females to view it without me in the classroom (I am male).
N/A
It is my belief that everyone has a right to equal education regardless of race, gender, sex, religious orientation, etc.....



It depends. If we have Muslim women, it might be an issue. If not, then I don't really think about it.
In one respect, it depends on the classroom. If the course content does not at least indirectly address the issue, I am content not to bring it up overtly except when I go through the syllabus at the beginning of class. (I have a statement in the syllabus about how LGBT students should feel respected and welcome, how I will actively try to show respect for LGBT concerns and not impose gender norms, and how if I should act in a way that makes people feel uncomfortable or mistreated that they should feel free to bring it up to me or to the director (I also give them a means of doing so anonymously) and that I will do my best to right that wrong.) If, over the course of a whole session or semester, LGBT issues are not raised directly, then I do not feel a need to bring them up separately, although I respect those teachers who do feel that they should. On the other hand, there are things that do NOT depend on the classroom, and that are absolutes for me in every classroom. Whether or not I have an LGBTQ student in my class--and I work on the default assumption that I do have an LGBT student whether or not that person is "out" to me or others--I do see it as my responsibility as a teacher to confront anti-LGBT attitudes or anti-LGBT statements when expressed in or around the classroom. I understand that many cultures do not accept LGBT identities, but I do NOT see it as my responsibility to remain "neutral" or passive with respect to those beliefs or cultural practices. In the classroom, and in any situation in which I am responsible for managing a class, I will make it known that harassment or degradation of another person is not tolerated. It is a tough thing to tell people that they do not have the right to attack another person's identity, even if they believe that attacking it is part of their own identity. I don't have a great answer to that conundrum, but I do have a stance on it, and it is not negotiable.
I want everyone to be comfortable and feel able to participate. At times that does mean making accommodations for students from highly segregated cultures. When discussing gender issues, my classroom's approach is descriptive and comparative; we do not generally approach these issues or related issues from a persuasive or debating standpoint.
irrelevant to my essential purpose of teaching English
I think it is not a topic for discussion in the ESOL classroom. I believe there is far too little linguistic skill to properly address the issue especially for students who have just arrived from traditional societies where this cannot be addressed.
I think there is a place for this discussion, and I actively teach it, but I have only dealt with it in a very limited and binary way.

Please discuss your approach to LGBTQQIA issues in the ESOL classroom.
I sometimes bring up the issue as one of many "controversial topics" in the US: I allow students to say what they think/feel and, when asked, I tell them my belief that there is a wide diversity of people in the world and each individual should be appreciated and respected
I can't think of a time when LGBTQQIA issues have come up in my class, but they

<p>probably have and I probably steered the conversation away from them. I feel very ill-equipped for dealing with these issues in the classroom, as the majority of our students are from very conservative cultures.</p>
<p>I have to teach 7 different grammar points in 8 weeks. Or get them to write 5 different essays and try to eliminate run-ons and comma splices. I'm not really thinking about controversial gender issues unless it comes up organically. I'm uncomfortable showing a movie with heterosexual kissing to this mix of students! Also, they pay for the textbook, so if I don't use it, that gets touchy. And my textbooks have, thus far, not covered gay and lesbian topics, let alone transgender topics.</p>
<p>I never begin discussions about these issues because it would offend our population of students. However, I do encourage students to write about topics that interest them. So, a few of my students have in the past written about these issues.</p>
<p>As I wrote before, this is reality. You (students) will meet LGBT people in your life, and they are people with feelings like you. Don't make fun of them, don't question them and don't lecture them on moral grounds. Believe it or not, i have had several male students come out to me, and it really helped them to deal with who they are.</p>
<p>ignore or divert</p>
<p>When questions arise I attempt to address in a fair, nonbiased manner; however, I also explain that for some people in the US the topic of sexual orientation is much more controversial than others.</p>
<p>The students are not ready for it in many cases. They don't have the language to understand it.</p>
<p>That's a pretty intimidating alphabet soup there in the name. For me, I work in an EAP program, so I see my first and most important job as preparing them for the English they will encounter in the course of their academic studies. I rarely use materials that openly address LGBT concerns unless they are directly relevant to some other content goal. For example, I once had a few students who wanted to attend our Master's program in Sports Management, so I devised an elective class on "Sports in American Society," and obviously, in that class, we discussed LGBT issues in great detail. It was very hard for them to work through, and some of the conversations were very uncomfortable (at least for some of the students), but I felt that I had a responsibility to expose them to the issues and the reasons why LGBT rights, specifically in the context of athletics, were so important and central to the whole academic domain. When I teach low-level classes, however, the focus of the curriculum is on natural sciences (e.g. the water cycle, plant and animal life), and so I don't address LGBT hardly at all unless a student tries to make some claim about "natural" biological gender roles, in which case my approach is usually to restrict their choice of paper topics to things like clown fish, seahorses, ants, or orcas, and have them compare gender roles (we happen to teach comparison in that level). In short, I do not shy away from the issue and will actively bring it up whenever I see that it is relevant or useful toward some linguistic or other content-focused end. I think we should do more in our program to incorporate issues of gender into our courses that focus on Economics and Psychology, for example. That said, our core classes (Reading &amp; Writing, Oral Communication) are focused on the presentation of academic content in a specific content area, and we try to make that as relevant to our students' majors as possible. Most of our students have no interest at all in Gender Studies, so that would not be great of us to co-opt the program for those ends.</p>

If my students ask about terminology or cultural application I explain to the best of my ability. Otherwise, it does not tend to be a topic of discussion. As far as students' beliefs and identities go, my goal is to arrange the class so that nobody is uncomfortable with participation.
I have no "approach".
I have never brought this up in my classes. If I have a student who asks me, I refer them to the places on campus who are qualified to talk with them about resources available.
Pretty much LGB only. I don't feel competent to do any more than this.

	Please choose your age range.
18-21	0
22-25	1
25-34	6
35-44	3
45-54	5
55 and over	4

Please list your gender.
F
male
Female
Female
Female
female
male
Male
Male
Man
female
Female
Male
m
f
F

	Please choose the ESOL level(s) you plan to teach. Check all that apply.
K-12	3
Non-Collegiate Adults	7

Collegiate Adults	18
Other (please specify)	1 Responses were: 1.) Working adults

	Please choose your level of explicit TESL education. Check all that apply.
Minor	0
TESL Certificate	6
Bachelor's	2
Master's	16
PhD	2
Other (please specify)	3 Responses were: 1.) Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) 2.) You misspelled education. 3.) Current PhD Student

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