THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SELF-CONCEALMENT AMONG LGBQ+ COUNSELORS IN THE WORKPLACE

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SELF-CONCEALMENT AMONG LGBQ+ COUNSELORS
IN THE WORKPLACE

A Dissertation
Presented to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Richard Joseph Charette II

December 2021
THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SELF-CONCEALMENT AMONG LGBQ+
COUNSELORS IN THE WORKPLACE

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October 26, 2021

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ABSTRACT

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SELF-CONCEALMENT AMONG LGBQ+ COUNSELORS IN THE WORKPLACE

By

Richard Joseph Charette II

December 2021

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Debra Hyatt-Burkhart

This study sought to unearth the narratives of LGBQ+ counselors’ experiences of self-concealment in the workplace. Self-concealment was an identity management strategy that was defined as an active, and sometimes persistent effort to conceal LGBQ+ identity. Self-concealment of affectional identity was well researched in workplace contexts, however only one study existing study examined self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors. In that previous qualitative inquiry, Jeffery and Tweed (2014) called for further exploration of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors when self-concealment emerged as a surprising finding.

The phenomenon of self-concealment was under-researched in counseling but has been extensively conceptualized as both a developmental stage and identity management process among affectionally diverse people. The limited research relevant to self-concealment in counseling, and the relationship of the constructs of self-concealment and self-disclosure
warranted a thorough and broad examination of the available literature outside the field of counseling. Queer theory, minority stress theory, social constructionist theory, and hermeneutic phenomenology served as the theoretical foundations in which the study was grounded. This qualitative phenomenological inquiry was conducted through six individual interviews and one focus group comprised of 10 participants who were all LGBQ+ counselors. The results of the study identified themes that spoke to LGBQ+ counselors’ self-concealment decision making process, self-concealment motivation, self-concealment behavior, and the affects self-concealment had on LGBQ+ counselors and their counseling work. The implications for the field of counseling and directions for further research are discussed.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the ten counselors who trusted me with their stories by participating in this study. One of you said, “we don’t really have much research exploring the experience of us.” Know that this study was just the beginning of more research that explores our stories. There are about 100,000 words in this dissertation, and most of them are yours. I thank you all for the vulnerability in sharing your truth with me. I will always feel honored to have shared this space with all of you and to be trusted to share your stories.

This dissertation is also dedicated to all the queer and trans counselors and counselor educators who feel like their voices have not yet been heard. Know that there is space out here for you even when it seems like all you ever do is fight not to shrink yourself back into tiny boxes in a world that wasn’t designed with you or me in mind. We’re here, we’re queer, and they have no choice but to get used to it.

Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to the little queer kid who really thought that growing up would just make it all go away. Release yourself from letting people make you feel small and try to exhale occasionally. Be kinder to yourself and accept a lot more love. When in doubt, hear Deb’s voice in your ear saying, “you’re good enough, you’re smart enough, and gosh darn it people like you!” By the way, you grow up to be the person you needed most.

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced”
– James Baldwin
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without having had the chance to grow with all of you. Learning with and from all of you was like our own little private infinity and I will forever cherish our time together (especially that NOLA trip). You made the tough days bearable, and you made me feel safe. I love you all with all my heart (yes even you, Dan) and you’re stuck with me for life! Liz, it’s all happening.

To Mom and Dad, I would not be the success that I am today without your great combo of love and pushing me to grow. Thank you for allowing me to teach you about me and for growing right beside me. Know that the honor and pride that comes along with this achievement is shared with you. Love you both so much.

To my girls, thanks for 10 years of friendship, and for all your support and encouragement. I could not have survived college without you all as my chosen family. Cheers to no more missing vacations and lots more reunions.

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To Jared Florance, a great friend, ally, and supervisor. You have become a beacon of my approach to supervision and this dissertation would not have been possible without you. You gave me the space to show up authentically in the workplace and you pushed me to know myself in a deeper and more authentic way. I would not have been able to question how I self-concealed in my counseling work if you had not pushed me to look inward. I am forever grateful for that.

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CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

This study sought to unearth the experiences of LGBQ+ counseling self-concealing their affectional identity in their counseling work. Self-concealment referred to LGBQ+ counselors’ motivation to and behavior associated with a predisposition to actively prevent others in the workplace from knowing their identities. LGBQ+ counselors’ motivation to conceal and their concealment behaviors varied by context and individual circumstances. This study was important because it added to the limited literature about LGBQ+ counselor self-concealment as the first study to directly examine self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. The aim of the study was to use the narratives shared by the participants to inform the future practice of counseling, counselor education, and supervision of LGBQ+ counselors.

For the purposes of this study LGBQ+ referred to any individual whose affectional identity was lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or any other identity that they felt fit within the community of non-heterosexual affectional identities. It is important to note that the literature cited in this study used many different terms or acronyms that have been used interchangeably throughout literature. The acronym LGBQ+ was chosen to be inclusive of all individuals who did not identify as having a heterosexual affectional orientation and the ever-expanding identity communities. Affectional orientation or identity referred to the “direction (sex, gender identity/expression(s)) an individual [was] predisposed to bond with and share affection emotionally, physically, spiritually, and/or mentally” (Harper et al., 2013, p. 40).

Statement of the Problem

Meyer (2003) described the daily and repeated stressors that sexual, affectional, and gender diverse people experienced. This community experienced daily and repeated minority
stress, and despite the efforts made to make workplaces for counselors free of this stress, these individuals cannot divorce themselves from their experiences. The impact of this stress has been examined among lesbian and gay counselors, with particular attention to negotiation of self-disclosure of identity in counselor-client relationships. Moore and Jenkins (2012) found that years after Nason (1977) had examined self-disclosure, counselors still experienced ‘the fear of being negatively evaluated, fear of hurt feelings, and the fear of losing or damaging a relationship’ (p. 192). These findings continue to be relevant and provided a foundation for the present study. What was not captured in this literature was the experiences of sexual, affectional, and gender diverse counselors negotiating the process of self-concealment.

Self-concealment has been defined as the predisposition to consciously conceal personal information or attributes that were perceived to be negative or distressing (Larson & Chastain, 1990) by creating and maintaining a barrier around oneself (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). LGBQ+ people engaged in many different forms of self-concealment of their identity due to the perception that their identity may be undesirable to others (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Larson & Chastain, 1990). Self-concealing an identity contributed to the creation of a public and private self (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). Self-concealment took various forms including “thoughts, feelings, actions, or events” (Larson & Chastain, 1990, p. 440).

Self-concealment in any of the various forms was often used as a means of coping to avoid negative feelings associated with stigma (Miller & Major, 2000). LGBQ individuals experienced daily and repeated stigmatization from existing in a world where their rights were debated in a public forum (Drabble et al., 2018; Levitt et al., 2009) which could influence social attitudes about LGBQ+ identity. LGBQ+ individuals may also internalize these feelings as a reaction to existing in this environment (Meyer, 2003). LGBQ+ individuals may respond to this
ambient stress by concealing their identity which has been shown to negatively impact their health and wellbeing (Meyer, 2003). Navigating this distressing environment could cause LGBQ+ individuals to create a public and private self, categorizing all experiences into either self as a means of coping (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). The professional workplace was a space in which LGBQ+ people could categorize as the public self to manage distressing circumstances related to their identity. Carroll et al. (2011) suggested that for LGBQ+ counselors, the workplace experience was not free from stigmatization of sexual orientation, and LGBQ+ counselors still needed to constantly manage their identities. This was consistent with Bowers et al. (2005) who found that much like a reflection of the public, some counselors also had negative attitudes about LGBQ+ people.

**Self-Disclosure**

Self-disclosure in counseling was the act of a counselor revealing personal details about themselves to a client that would not otherwise be known (Hill & Knox, 2001; Norcross, 2002). There were many types of self-disclosure in counseling including sharing feelings, insights, or disclosures of immediacy (Knox & Hill, 2003). Another type of disclosure, called dialogic disclosures, referred to self-disclosures which were not verbal or direct, instead they occurred “in the context of a shared, dynamic, mutually influential relationship” (Russell, 2006, p. 80). LGBQ+ counselors may choose to directly disclose information about their identity in service to their clients, or in the case of a dialogic disclosure, the client would interpret the counselor’s identity from their behavior (Carroll et al., 2011).

Counselors were taught to only use self-disclosure in service to the client and to limit disclosures or not self-disclose at all (Knox & Hill, 2003). LGBQ+ counselors may fear the outcome of a disclosure of identity due to previous experiences in their personal lives with self-
disclosure of identity (Moore & Jenkins, 2012) causing a consistent struggle to determine if self-
disclosure of identity was appropriate (Knox & Hill, 2003). The struggle to determine appropriateness of disclosure, and fear based on past experiences, may motivate counselors to self-conceal despite self-disclosure being beneficial to the relationship. Knox and Hill (2003) found that clients perceived counselors who disclosed as being more authentic and human. Counselors who disclosed their lesbian or gay identity to their clients were also found to be more trustworthy (Carroll et al., 2011). Despite potential positive effects on the counselor-client relationship, LGBQ+ counselors do not self-disclose due to past experiences of trauma, fear of negative reactions, and concerns about the potential for their success in the profession (Carroll et al., 2011; Russell, 2006).

**Relationship Between Self-Concealment and Self-Disclosure**

Self-concealment and self-disclosure were two related identity management processes used by LGBQ+ people. The two processes were often conceptualized in the literature as opposites of one another, however this drastically oversimplified each construct. Self-disclosure and self-concealment both involved a motivational component and some type of action. Among LGBQ+ people, different social contexts may motivate the use of self-disclosure or self-concealment. The disclosure and concealment behaviors of LGBQ+ people appeared to be affected by contextual and individual factors. The relationship and differences between these two related processes is explored here.

Larson and Chastain (1990) in the validation of the self-concealment scale (SCS) differentiated self-concealment and self-disclosure as two distinct constructs distinguished by their impact on the individual. Self-concealment could be motivated by a need to “conceal traumas, stigmatized conditions, and other negative or distressing personal information” (Larson
et al., 2015, p. 708) whereas self-disclosure could be motivated by a need to strengthen a relationship or normalize an experience (Knox & Hill, 2003). Self-concealment was more than the act of not disclosing as it was concerned with management of how the entirety of an individual’s identity might be perceived. Hetrick and Martin (1987) noted that gay and lesbian teenagers learned to manage identity early by monitoring behavior in ways such as “how one dresses, speaks, walks, and talks” and limiting “one’s friends, one’s interests, and one’s expression” (p. 35). Self-concealment was the result of forces that prevented disclosure and understanding and examining self-concealment built upon the existing understanding and examination of self-disclosure (Larson & Chastain, 1990).

Cozby (1973) critiqued self-disclosure research for only focusing on the forces that promoted self-disclosure and for failing to examine forces that prevented disclosure. The field of counseling has grown to understand self-disclosure as an important process and useful technique, yet the forces which prevent or discourage disclosure are still not fully understood. A primary force that prevented disclosure and motivated concealment for LGBQ+ people was fear. LGBQ+ people may fear being perceived as non-heterosexual, viewing their identity as a negative aspect or risk (Croteau, 1996; Miller & Major, 2000) due to past negative experiences with identity-based trauma (Meyer, 2003). Navigating these potential risks caused LGBQ+ individuals to develop separate self-concepts for their private lives and public lives (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). These self-concepts were based on the perception that one’s LGBQ+ identity would be perceived negatively causing a reaction such as expecting rejection, internalized homophobia, or concealment (Meyer, 2003).

Self-disclosure was distinctly identified as a separate construct in the development of the SCS, however the two processes remain linked. The difference appeared to be in the impact each
process had on an individual. Self-disclosure has been broadly viewed as the main way LGBQ+ people could achieve a fully developed identity (Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). By this assertion, self-concealment prevented the development of a coherent sense of self. However, as Sedlovskaya et al. (2013) suggested, LGBQ+ people developed two distinct senses of self that were used to navigate situations that might be unsafe. Self-concealment as part of this navigation of the public and private self has been shown to contribute to increased feelings of depression, anxiety, physical health issues (Larson & Chastain, 1990).

LGBQ+ counselors encountered situations in their work which prompted disclosure or concealment of their identity. Fear about the reaction from the client or others in the workplace may cause LGBQ+ counselors to conceal or manage their identity through the course of their career (Carroll et al., 2011). Counselors have also reported fear of being accused of flaunting their identity though disclosure because heterosexual counselors do not need to consider identity disclosure (Carroll et al., 2011). The constant management of their identity may prevent the effective use of self-disclosure as a counseling technique due to feeling less genuine with their clients (Carroll et al., 2011). Self-concealment contributed to the overall negative physical and mental wellbeing among LGBQ+ counselors which compromised their ability to effectively support their clients. Self-concealment denies clients potential “meaningful access to the counselor’s personal identity (Carroll et al., 2011). While self-concealment negatively effects both the client and the counselor, the full effect is not well researched in the existing literature.

**Aims of the Present Study**

The phenomenon of self-concealment among non-heterosexual communities was well documented (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Larson & Chastain, 1990; Sedlovskaya et al., 2013) however only two studies mentioned self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors (Jeffery &
Tweed, 2014; Moore & Jenkins, 2012). Circumstances that prompted self-concealment in the private lives of LGBQ+ people, may be reflected in the workplace (Croteau, 1996; Ragins et al., 2003; Sedlovskaya et al., 2013, Tatum et al., 2017). However, the unique intimacy of counseling work changed how self-concealment may look and feel for LGBQ+ counselors and this picture has not been captured in the existing literature. Self-concealment may happen in counseling in several ways that were not directly related to the technique of self-disclosure in counseling, instead as a reflection of personal experiences. The effects of these possible types of concealment have not been explored in existing literature.

Despite existing research which suggested that disclosure helped clients to perceive counselors as trustworthy and genuine (Carroll et al., 2011), self-concealment still occurred among LGBQ+ counselors. Additionally, the experience of self-concealment in counseling has been reduced to the act of not disclosing. Framing self-concealment through self-disclosure may limit the full scope of the phenomenon. This did not leave room for LGBQ+ counselors to understand their own experience in the interaction of their public and private selves in the intimate space of counseling. Self-concealment was more than not disclosing LGBQ+ affectional orientation to a client, it could be any experience that was unpleasant or perceived as a potential threat (Larson & Chastain, 1990). Russell (2006) called the inferences that clients made about a counselor’s orientation from their behavior dialogic disclosures (Carroll et al., 2011). This inference could be perceived as a threat and was just one example of the unexplored ways in which self-concealment could occur in counseling. Self-concealment as a reaction to a perceived threat had the potential to negatively affect the client, the counselor, and the relationship.
**Purpose of the study**

This study sought to capture the essence of the experience of self-concealment of affectional orientation among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer (LGBQ+) counselors in the workplace. Self-concealment was an under researched and not well understood phenomenon that LGBQ+ people experienced while managing their identity in heteronormative social contexts. This study was important as it expanded the understanding of self-concealment as an identity management strategy among LGBQ+ people in general. This study also examined the nuanced experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors and deepened the understanding of the relationship between self-concealment and self-disclosure. The aim of this study was to draw meaning from the narratives of LGBQ+ counselors to inform counseling practice, education, and advocacy.

The purpose of this study was to explore how self-concealment was experienced by LGBQ+ counselors, explore the potential effects on counseling work, and deepen the understanding of the process of self-concealment of identity. A review of literature indicated that LGBQ+ individuals engaged in self-concealment in their private lives (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Larson & Chastain, 1980) and in the workplace, or public lives (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). The intimate nature of counseling work presented unique challenges for LGBQ+ counselors (Knox & Hill, 2003; Carroll et al., 2011) and this study explored how this intimate context might be influenced by a need to self-conceal.

Jeffery and Tweed (2014) found that counselors did engage in self-concealment of identity in their work. This study initially examined self-disclosure among LGB counselors, however self-concealment emerged as a theme in the analysis of qualitative data. Self-concealment was more than the intentional act of not making a verbal self-disclosure of identity.
Through centering the study on self-concealment as opposed to self-disclosure and widening the lens with which the narrative experiences were examined, this study sought to capture the additional thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that might be components of self-concealment. Self-disclosure could happen in many ways, including verbal and non-verbal means (Carroll et al., 2011; Hill & Knox, 2001; Knox & Hill, 2003) suggesting that there were many unknown ways in which self-concealment may occur. Through what Dilley (1999) called deconstruction this study attempted to capture what was said and unsaid, visible and concealed, to understand the motivation among LGBQ+ counselors to self-conceal LGBQ+ identity in counseling work and the effects this process had on counseling work and relationships.

**Research Questions**

The central guiding question of this study was: What is the experience of self-concealment in the workplace among LGBQ+ counselors? The following research questions guided the study to capture the full lived experience of participants:

- What are the internal experiences that lead LGBQ+ counselors to engage in self-concealment of their affectional orientation in the workplace?
- How do LGBQ+ counselors engage in self-concealment in the workplace?
- What is the experience of LGBQ+ counselors engaging in self-concealment in the workplace?

**Significance of the Study**

Continuing to expand the pool of literature on self-concealment among LGBQ+ people will assist counselors in understanding the ways in which self-concealment of affectional identity can negatively impact the overall health and wellbeing of clients. This study not only added to this body of literature, but it also explored an under-researched area which is the lived experience
of LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. Counselors may have the opportunity to attend professional development trainings or read literature about caring for LGBQ+ clients, but hardly learn about caring for their peers in the profession. LGBQ+ counselors met challenges unique to their identity groups in their work due to self-disclosure and self-concealment being a part of their everyday lives (Carroll et al., 2011).

Given that self-concealment was often a daily occurrence for LGBQ+ individuals in their personal lives, and the intimate nature of counseling relationships (Rogers, 1951), the positive and negative effects have the potential to be present in all areas of counseling work for LGBQ+ counselors. This study has the potential to increase the understanding of the effects self-concealment has on counselor client relationships, supervisory relationships, and workplace relationships. There was potential information that would be relevant to counselor education. The findings of this study have the potential to not only validate the lived experiences of affectionally diverse counselors, but also provide essential information for them to be aware of in their personal counselor development. The experiences captured in this study will hopefully provide increased insight into self-concealment of identity and more clearly define it in relation to self-disclosure.

Jeffery and Tweed (2014) unexpectedly found that there were significant costs associated with self-concealment in a study examining self-disclosure of LGB identity in counselor client relationships. Moore and Jenkins (2012) suggested that counselors considered concealment of non-heterosexual identity out of fear of the reaction to self-disclosure which reflected personal experiences with self-disclosure and societal factors. This study will expand upon these findings while refocusing the lens on the construct of self-concealment. The potential findings can then more clearly and accurately capture self-concealment in counseling work and develop new areas
for further research related to self-concealment as Carroll et al. (2011) suggested. The fear of the reaction to self-disclosure described in Moore and Jenkins (2012) appeared to be a part of the individual identity of the participants in the study whose counseling decisions were influenced by personal experiences with self-concealment. There is the potential for personal experiences with identity based self-concealment to interact and influence the development of a counselor’s identity. This interaction is not something that was reflected in the literature and this study had the potential to generate additional research questions related to identity development among LGBQ+ identified counselors.

The narrative experiences that were collected in this study had the potential to unearth some of the ways in which LGBQ+ counselors have dealt with the negative impact of self-concealment that was reflected in the literature. This information would contribute to the literature on self-care in the workplace, particularly for LGBQ+ counselors. This would also raise additional questions for future examination about the effectiveness of self-care strategies being employed by LGBQ+ counselors and how the counseling field can more effectively support these individuals. This study also had the potential to challenge established practices in counseling workplace self-care, particularly those that were presented by individuals who retain heterosexual privilege among other privileged identities. Finally, the results of this study could contribute to the literature about how LGBQ+ counselors manage experiencing vicarious trauma in their work, particularly related to concealment and disclosure on identity.
The Study

Participant Selection

Recruitment of participants was done through purposeful and snowball sampling to directly recruit individuals who identified with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). To participate in the study, prospective participants needed to meet the following criteria:

1) Self-identify as affectionally LGBQ+ (ex. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer etc.)
2) Have completed a master’s degree in counseling or a related field of study
3) Currently be practicing as a counselor or therapist

Purposeful sampling was conducted through several mediums including networking with supervisors, colleagues, and professional organizations that specifically served the target demographic of participants. Social media and online resources that specifically served the target population of LGBQ+ individuals were also used. Information was provided to these entities using a recruitment email (Appendix C). Confirmed participants in the study were also asked to share information about the study with prospective participants.

Counselors who were gender-expansive, trans or transgender, gender non-conforming (GNC), or one of the many identities under the transgender umbrella were not initially included in this study. These identities were not included in the recruitment for the study due to the vastly different experiences with self-concealment that they may encounter in the workplace. However, trans, gender-expansive, and GNC counselors could also be LGBQ+. The reasons for which trans counselors may self-conceal their identity were different than LGBQ+ cisgender individuals because their experiences were met with prejudice due to violating the socialized expectation of conformity to male and female gender expression (Herek, 1990; Worthen, 2013). This prejudice was the result of cisnormativity which was the expectation that all individuals had a sex assigned
at birth that corresponded to male or female gender expression (Bauer et al., 2009). Sumerau and Mathers (2019) called this “cisgendering reality,” described as the process in which as a society, intentionally or otherwise, an imaginary world was created where non-cisgender people did not exist, and their experiences were erased.

Trans individuals who were perceived to be violating the expectation that they did not exist or should conform to certain norms, such as through androgynous gender presentation, were viewed more negatively than individuals who may meet the expectation (Stern & Rule, 2017). An individual’s gender expression was a personal choice and the degree to which their expression met a socialized norm exposed them to different levels of risk. It was for these reasons that the motivations for trans, GNC, and gender expansive individuals to self-conceal and the associated self-concealment behaviors may differ from LGBQ+ cisgender people, indicating a need for a separate study. Examining the experiences of these counselors is a much-needed future study to combat cisnormativity and continued erasure of transgender narratives (Bauer et al., 2009).

**Data Collection**

The data for this qualitative study were collected through virtual interviews with participants and a virtual focus group. The use of virtual interviews was purposeful to meet varying geographic needs of the participants, as well as exercising an abundance of caution during the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual interviews were conducted using Zoom. Each participant was given a unique password protected link to their interview room and each room was locked following the participant joining to prevent potential intrusion. Interviews were recorded for data analysis purposes with the consent of participants. The interviews and the focus group were semi-structured and were kept to a one-and-a-half-hour time limit and two hours for
the focus group. The questions asked were grounded in the research questions of this study and focused on the workplace experiences of LGBQ+ counselors. In depth discussion of these questions can be found in Chapter 5. The goal of the participant interviews and the focus group was to collect the narrative experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors.

**Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Frameworks**

There was a limited body of literature that explored self-concealment among LGBQ+ people, and of these only one discussed self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors. This disparity existed in part due to the phenomenon itself. To discuss self-concealment of identity, LGBQ+ individuals must disclose their identity. This dilemma stressed the importance of examining this phenomenon “queerly” (Carroll & Gilroy, 2001 p. 54). Understanding this uniquely contextualized experience required approaching the study with a queer lens that was informed by queer theory (Jagose, 1996; McCann & Monaghan, 2020). Using a queer lens meant examining relevant literature looking for themes of power, privilege, and control (Carroll & Gilroy, 2001). While this study was broadly informed by queer theory, it was also rooted in the intersection of phenomenology, minority identity development, and social constructionist theory of identity.

The word queer was originally used as a pejorative term (Halperin, 2003) directed at people or ideas considered to be different, in this case LGBQ+. Queer has been reclaimed by the community that it has been used to degrade and has entered academia as a way of “naming, describing, doing, and being (Monaghan, 2016, p. 7). Queer theory came into being when academia began to reimagine and deconstruct established practices (Dilley, 1991; McCann & Monaghan, 2020) to be able to problematize issues (De Laurentis, 1991) that were overlooked or unspoken. As a reflection of a larger social context, academic research and literature were
impacted by heteronormativity (Warner, 1991) and queer theory challenged the valuing of heterosexuality as the norm (Jagose, 1996). Reclaiming the word queer empowered and embraced what was different and unique and through queer theory created space for “queerness” to exist (McCann & Monaghan, 2020).

Queer theory did not embody a solid identity (Jagose, 1996), embracing “many different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives” (Hall, 2003, p. 5). In counseling and counselor education, queer theory expanded beyond the binary understanding of sexuality and gender, to expose themes of power and privilege which underscored them (Carlson, 1998; Carroll & Gilroy, 2001). Queer theory informed this study examining the counseling workplace by “queering” (Carroll & Gilroy, 2001; Dilley, 1999) the lens through which counseling work is examined and looking for the intersection of affectional orientation of the counselor and the counseling work. Through “queering” the perspective, the phenomenon of self-concealment could be deconstructed and analyzed to capture the participants understanding of their own world (Dilley, 1999).

Van Manen (1997) described phenomenology as the interaction of several research activities including a description of a phenomenon and the researcher mediating between participants’ lived experiences and the essence of the whole. The essence of the whole was what Creswell (2007) described as the common experiences among participants of a particular phenomenon. This study used the common experiences among LGBQ+ counselors of self-concealment in the workplace to unearth the meaning that the participants made of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). The researcher also used Van Manen’s (1997) four lived existentials to explicate the data. Hycner’s (1985) guidelines for phenomenological interpretation were used to analyze the data and unearth the participant’s meaning.
D’Augelli (1994) stated that identity development took place in a sociopolitical context, suggesting there were personal and larger systemic processes that impact LGBQ+ people. These processes influenced interactions and caused LGBQ+ people to be vigilant in interactions with others, possibly expecting rejection or violence (Meyer, 2003) and be in constant negotiation between self-concealment and self-disclosure (DiPlacido, 1998; Meyer, 2003). The need to self-conceal LGBQ+ identity was a reaction to the oppressive structure of heteronormativity, a form of minority stress (Meyer, 2003). Gay men were socialized to conform to what was acceptable behavior for being a man (Barron et al., 2008; Hammack, 2018) and queer young people who received affirmative messages about their identity expressed lower motivation to self-conceal (Bregman et al., 2013). These experiences supported that self-concealment motivation was a reaction to the social construction of identity because of perceiving oneself to be stigmatized (Miller & Major, 2000). Horowitz and Newcomb (2002) stated that when viewing sexual orientation through a social constructionist lens, identity was “constructed and maintained through the process of social interaction in specific social and historical context” (p. 11).

Construction of sexual or affectional identity was a “continual, recursive interaction between oneself and one’s environment” (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002, p. 10). The interaction between the self and the environment allowed individuals to construct the perceptions of their identity in relation to the environmental context (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002). The perception that one’s minority identity would be negatively perceived by the majority was a form of minority stress that could result in concealment (Meyer, 2003). Illuminating these deeply personal experiences through capturing narrative data was an attempt to validate the experiences which could only be adequately achieved through sharing the voices of LGBQ+ counselors.
Explication of Data

Explication of the narrative data began with taking notes during the recorded interviews and the focus group and transcribing the recordings verbatim. The transcriptions were then explicated according to Hycner’s (1985) guidelines for phenomenological analysis of qualitative interview data. Data were bracketed using Van Manen’s (1997) lived existentials of lived body, time, space, and relation. The following ten steps from Hycner’s (1985) guidelines were used in the explication:

1) *Transcription* was the written record of the recorded interviews transcribed verbatim along with “significant non-verbal and paralinguistic communications” during the interviews by the researcher (Hycner, 1985, p. 280).

2) *Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction* was the process of beginning to draw meaning from the collected interviews, transcriptions, and notes (Hycner, 1985).

3) *Listening to the Interview for a Sense of the Whole* was listening to the audio recording and reviewing the transcripts multiple times to provide the context for meaning making (Hycner, 1985).

4) *Delineating Units of General Meaning* was a rigorous review of the data to capture the essence of what each participant said and condensing the information into meaningful units or chunks (Hycner, 1985).

5) *Delineating Units of Meaning Relevant to the Research Questions* was the process of examining the units of meaning for relevance to the research questions, and discarding units that were not relevant (Hycner, 1985).
6) *Eliminating Redundancies* was the process of examining the units of meaning to find and if necessary, remove redundant units that convey the same meaning, but have been expressed in different ways (Hycner, 1985).

7) *Clustering Units of Relevant Meaning* was the process whereby the researcher determined which units clustered together because of shared meaning (Hycner, 1985).

8) *Determine Themes from Clusters of Meaning* was where the process by which the researcher re-examined the clusters to see what themes emerged that captured the essence of the cluster (Hycner, 1985).

9) *Writing a Summary for Each Individual Interview* was when the researcher summarized each interview incorporating the themes that emerged from the explication (Hycner, 1985).

10) *Return to Participants with the Summary and Themes and Modify* was the process of sharing the meaning and themes that were unearthed with each participant to collaborate on truths and address misunderstandings or misinterpretations (Hycner, 1985).
Definitions

Affectional Orientation – Affectional orientation refers to “the direction (sex, gender identity/expression(s)) an individual is predisposed to bond with and share affection emotionally, physically, spiritually, and/or mentally” (Harper et al., 2013, p. 40). This term is sometimes used interchangeably with sexual orientation.

Cisgender – Cisgender refers to “an individual whose gender identity aligns with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth” (Harper et al., 2013, p. 39).

Heteronormative – Heteronormative refers to “the cultural bias that everyone follows or should follow traditional norms of heterosexuality” (Harper et al., 2013, p. 41).

Heterosexism – Heterosexism refers to the “assumption or idea that all people are heterosexual or should be” (Harper et al., 2013, p. 41).

Heterosexual – Heterosexual refers to “an individual who is emotionally, physically, mentally, and/or spiritually oriented to bond and share affection with those of the ‘opposite’ sex” (Harper et al., 2013, p. 41). Heterosexual is sometimes substituted for straight by participants in the study.

Self-Concealment – Self-concealment refers to “a predisposition to actively conceal from others personal information that one perceives as distressing or negative” (Larson & Chastain, 1990, p. 440) or the degree to which attempts are made to prevent others from knowing (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014) personal information. For the purposes of this study “personal information” refers to LGBQ+ affectional orientation or identity.

Self-Disclosure

Broadly. The act of revealing personal information about the self to another individual (Archer & Burleson, 1980; Collins & Miller, 1994).
**In counseling.** Thoughts or feelings the counselor has related to the counseling work, or factual information about the counselor, which the counselor chooses to share with a client (Hill & Knox, 2001; Farber, 2006; Moore & Jenkins, 2012)

**Of Identity.** The degree to which one has revealed a stigmatized identity to others (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014).

**Queer** – Queer refers to an identity outside heteronormative bounds, a political identity, or “an umbrella term referring to the LGBTQIQA community” (Harper et al., 2013, p. 42). Queer may also refer to an individual’s affectional orientation as defined by that individual.
Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 reviewed the background of the study, the focus of the problem, the purpose of inquiry, and the potential significance of the results. Chapter 2 reviews the current literature relevant to the problem, as organized by the following categories: terminology; theoretical foundations of the study; identity development; identity management; outness; authenticity; differentiating self-disclosure and self-concealment; self-disclosure; self-concealment; identity management in the workplace; and the context of counseling. Chapter 3 is a detailed description of the research design and methodology that shaped the study. Chapter 4 provides the results of the study in narrative form and a visual representation of the themes endorsed by the participants. Chapter 5 is a discussion and analysis of the results from the explication of the data. Chapter 5 also discusses implications for the field of counseling, questions generated by the research, and directions for future research.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The goal of this study was to understand the phenomenon of self-concealment more clearly among LGBQ+ counselors through examining their lived experiences in the workplace. Understanding the lived experiences of LGBQ+ counselors required an understanding of the context in which LGBQ+ identities developed and were continuously managed. The characteristics of counseling work that were relevant to this study are discussed in depth in this chapter. Chapter 2 explores affectionally diverse identity development, identity management, outness, authenticity, self-disclosure and self-concealment of identity, and self-disclosure and self-concealment of identity among LGBQ counselors. The chapter concludes with an overview of the lens through which the researcher viewed the study and issues in the literature that prompted this qualitative inquiry.

The following literature review begins with the relevant theory that informs the study and is followed by a summary of relevant literature from identity development, identity management, and counseling literature. The principal construct that the present study sought to understand, self-concealment, was an under-researched phenomenon, particularly in counseling. Self-concealment research was represented in the literature but was clouded by unclear distinctions between self-disclosure and self-concealment. This necessitated reviewing literature outside of the fields of counseling and counselor education and supervision. A wealth of literature existed exploring the use of self-disclosure as a counseling technique and self-disclosure of affectional identity in counseling. Only a single study was present in the counseling literature that examined self-concealment among affectionally diverse counselors therefore this inquiry had to be examined from many different perspectives outside of counseling.
Terminology

In this chapter you will encounter different terms and acronyms that have been used in the literature to describe various individuals or communities of affectionally diverse individuals. Some may be well known to you such as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) and other arrangements of this acronym like LGB. Some studies have described their samples broadly saying sexual minorities and some have specifically looked at individual identity groups such as Lesbian, Gay, Queer, or Bisexual individuals. Additionally, some of the literature cited in this section will reflect the use of outdated terminology. The word homosexuality was commonly used in the literature and this word reflected outdated terminology that was no longer used due to a history of pejorative use associated with studies that pathologized non-heterosexual identity (Harper et al., 2013). The different terms are noted in this literature review as a reflection of the terminology used in the literature supporting this study. Different terminology highlighted the vast identity differences within affectionally diverse communities and was a reminder that personal experiences related to identity are highly personal and highly contextualized. For the purposes of this study, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer (LGBQ+) was the terminology the researcher used to describe the population being examined. Other terminology is understood to be in reference to established research or terminology that was used by participants.

Identity Development

The context in which LGBQ+ and heterosexual people developed their identities may be the same, however it was experienced in vastly different ways (Gedro, 2009). Richard Troiden, known for his model of identity development described identity as “organized sets of characteristics an individual perceives as definitively representing the self in relation to a social
situation, imagined or real” (Troiden, 1984, p. 102). The characteristics may be “cognitive, affective, or behavioral” and vary in “value, salience, importance, centrality, and fixedness across situations over time” (Troiden, 1984, p. 102). Identity was a representation of the self in reference to a specific social context (Troiden, 1984) and the primary desire that underscored identity development was congruence between self-perception, behavior associated with the self-perception, and the perception of others about the self (Cox & Gallois, 1996). The social context of LGBQ+ identity development was heterosexuality being the acceptable identity (Cass, 1979). This section of the chapter will provide an in-depth review of the context of LGBQ+ development and the various models in existence. The established identity development models provided a framework through which LGBQ+ people could be conceptualized (Marrs & Staton, 2016). This framework was essential to understanding the phenomenon of self-concealment because self-concealment was an identity management process.

**Heteronormativity and Heterosexism**

Fully understanding identity development of affectionally diverse people required an understanding of the context in which developmental processes occurred. Non-heterosexual identity development occurred in the social context of assumed heterosexuality (Boatwright et al., 1996). Heteronormativity was the idea that heterosexuality was the default sexuality of all individuals (Malterud & Bjorkman, 2016) and normalized the comparison of all non-heterosexual identities against heterosexuality (Warner, 1991). This socially constructed ideology (Oswald et al., 2005; Warner, 1991) was so pervasive that it was barely noticeable (Herek, 1990). Heteronormativity not only privileged heterosexuality, but also concepts associated with it such as conventional gender roles and traditional family makeup (Oswald et al., 2005). Heteronormativity positioned heterosexuality as the moral and valuable way to be
(Oswald et al., 2005) resulting in pervasive heterosexism which denied and stigmatized any identities, behaviors, or communities associated with non-heterosexuality (Herek, 1990; Herek et al., 1997).

Heterosexism was so pervasive that children experienced internalized homophobia, also known as psychological heterosexism, before they had the language to identify as non-heterosexual (Herek, 1990, 2000). Throughout their development, affectionally diverse people learned the expected norms, thoughts, and behaviors that were associated with heterosexuality and the consequences of violating the norms of performing heterosexuality (Herek, 1990; Waldo, 1999). Heterosexism was predicated on the idea that heterosexuality maintained social superiority over other sexualities (Spencer, 2006). Non-heterosexual people struggled to resist these attitudes because heterosexuality was often the only social construct of identity available (Rust, 1993), and non-heterosexual social constructs were stigmatized. As a result of growing up in the social context of assumed heterosexual identity and stigmatized non-heterosexual identity, non-heterosexual people experienced internalized negativity (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Herek, 2000; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000; Mohr & Kendra, 2011).

Internalized negativity was “subtly sustained, legitimized, and covered up” by heteronormative attitudes (Malterud & Bjorkman, 2016, p. 1350). Internalized negative beliefs fostered the need to engage in self concealment. Self-concealment of identity was a “consequence of stigma that has been internalized, experienced, and resisted in various ways” (Malterud & Bjorkman, 2016, p. 1351). Even before there was an awareness of non-heterosexual identity, developing affectionally diverse people were alienated by the heteronormative social context in which they developed. Heteronormativity did not allow for positive representations of non-heterosexuality, facilitating the need to conceal any part of the self that could violate
expected norms (Herek, 1990). Heteronormativity was the context in which all affectionally diverse identity development took place and the relevant existing identity development literature relevant is discussed in the following sections.

The Stage Models

The early models of non-heterosexual identity development consisted of stages through which a person progressed to a fully realized identity. These models were characterized by an individual’s linear progression through the stages driven by a need for full integration as a non-heterosexual person, complete outness, and exclusively same-sex attraction (Eliason & Schope, 2007; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). A thorough review of stage models of LGBTQ identity development by Eliason and Schope (2007) found the following commonalities: recognition of feelings of difference; identity formation being a developmental process with later stages being associated with greater well-being; self-disclosure or coming out being essential; and identity pride and immersion in non-heterosexual culture. Self-concealment or the need to self-conceal was also present across many stage models. This section will provide a summary of prevalent stage models, discuss self-concealment within the models, and critique how stage models contributed to self-concealment among LGBQ+ people.

Vivienne Cass (1979) developed the first stage model of homosexual identity development consisting of six stages: identity confusion; identity comparison, identity tolerance; identity acceptance; identity pride; and identity synthesis. According to the Cass model, the four middle stages were where self-concealment of identity would most likely occur. Identity comparison was characterized by the recognition of stigmatized identity and alienation prompting the LGBQ+ person to pass as heterosexual to avoid negativity. In identity tolerance the person concealed their identity to heterosexual people, but significant effort was made to
combat isolation by seeking community which involved disclosure to other LGBQ+ people. As
the person moved into identity acceptance, there was increased contact with non-heterosexual
culture as well as increased effort to pass as heterosexual. Cass (1979) described passing as
purposeful “compartmentalizing of homosexual life to avoid the reactions of heterosexuals” (p.
232). LGBQ+ people also made substantial efforts to avoid being around heterosexual people.
As they moved toward identity pride, LGBQ+ people began using selective disclosure. This
involved disclosing to select heterosexuals to relieve the stress of concealment, while still
concealing with other heterosexuals. Some people also employed “nonconcealment” (p. 233) or
“passive passing” (p.233) where they concealed by not exerting effort to conceal but allowing
heterosexuals to believe they were also heterosexual.

Eli Coleman (1982) proposed five stages of identity development for non-heterosexual
people like the Cass (1979) model that culminated in the ideal stage of having a fully integrated
identity that “incorporate[d] their public and private identities into one self-image” (Coleman,
1982, p. 39). In this model, a fully integrated LGBQ+ identity was defined by not engaging in
self-concealment in any area of life. The five stages were pre-coming out, coming out,
exploration, first relationship, and identity integration. The pre-coming out stage was
characterized by experiencing stigmatization and protecting oneself from those feelings through
concealment. In the coming out stage individuals negotiated self-disclosure and self-concealment
based on the reactions of those they chose to disclose to or past negative experiences. Self-
concealment was not directly addressed in the last three stages, however Coleman (1982) noted
that a common struggle in the later stages was not having a fully integrated identity which
suggested that concealment may happen depending on individual contextual factors.
Richard Troiden (1989) proposed a four-stage model of development that diverged from the previous models, specifying that the stage progressions were not necessarily linear. Individuals did not necessarily pass through each stage in any certain order, not all stages would be experienced, some stages were merged, and some individuals may go back to stages because of individual circumstances (Troiden, 1989). Self-concealment was possibly associated with the sensitization, identity confusion, and identity assumption stages of the model. Troiden (1989) asserted that homosexual identity was a self-identity, a perceived identity, and a presented identity and that identity is most fully realized “where an agreement exists between who people think they are, who they claim they are, and how others view them” (p. 46-47). Across the previously mentioned stages of the model, there may be incongruence between the three components of homosexual identity. Individuals going through sensitization experienced a feeling of being different from their peers who were heterosexual because they felt their experiences were stigmatized for being associated with homosexuality. Identity confusion was characterized by individuals being unsure of their sexual identity status and experiencing inner turmoil over the confusion and not being heterosexual. In identity assumption, the individual acknowledged a homosexual self-identity and presented as homosexual to other homosexuals but may have concealed their identity around heterosexuals to be perceived as heterosexual. According to the Troiden (1989) model, a fully realized identity was an integration of the three components of homosexual identity and a commitment to “homosexuality as a way of life” (p. 63).

Anthony D’Augelli (1994) proposed the lifespan model of LGB identity development which was seemingly organized in stages. The D’Augelli model differed from other stage models in that the stages were processes that happened throughout the lifespan. D’Augelli also
accounted for differences in personal identity and social identity that LGB people experienced across the lifespan. The D’Augelli model resembled a stage model but left room for fluidity of identity in different social contexts and developmental periods. Individuals were conceptualized as being capable of moving back and forth between stages, not going in any specific order, or skipping stages all together, like Troiden’s (1989) model. This lifespan model recognized that individuals may be developmentally different across identity processes such as being out to oneself and having a non-heterosexual relationship but concealing identity from family. D’Augelli also recognized that outness and concealment may vary across contexts, providing a broader, more holistic framework for conceptualizing LGB identity.

The commonality across the stage models of identity development was the need for the individual to disclose their identity to experience identity integration. The D’Augelli (1994) model recognized that there may be individual differences regarding outness and concealment across the lifespan, but still framed integration as the way to a fully realized identity. Horowitz and Newcomb (2002) criticized this conceptualization as viewing a homosexual identity as an essential and static part of the individual. Viewing identity as static and essential meant that rejecting any part of one’s identity was a rejection of the whole self (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002). Labeling oneself as gay or disclosing identity to others could be a choice (Monteflores & Schultz, 1978) but that choice was not always acceptable in an oppressive and heterosexist social context (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002). Self-concealment was not always an indicator of identity development, but a strategy employed to manage identity in non-affirming contexts. The following sections will discuss broader conceptualizations of identity development.

The Inclusive Model
McCarn and Fassinger (1996) initially tested an inclusive model of sexual minority identity formation on a sample of lesbian women and the model was later validated with a sample of gay men (Fassinger & Miller, 1997). This model was labeled inclusive because it considered both individual and group identity development processes simultaneously. The model also asserted that the process of resolving identity questions, not the resolution itself, made an identity mature or fully realized (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). The inclusive model specifically addressed a critique of the stage models by acknowledging that an individual may choose to conceal their identity, but if the choice had been addressed, they could still achieve identity integration (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

The model consisted of four phases of individual and group identity development which could occur concurrently, but individual and contextual factors influenced each process separately (Fassinger & Miller, 1997). The inclusive model provided a critical framework through which to view LGBQ+ identity development because it recognized that individuals could develop a congruent personal identity while still recognizing that they were members of a group or community that was negatively impacted by social and political heterosexism (Fassinger & Miller, 1997). Disclosure through this lens was not seen as a developmental milestone that must be achieved and concealment was recognized as being a choice that individuals may make to protect themselves. Disclosure and concealment decisions and behaviors were then understood to be the result of personal and contextual factors, allowing flexibility in conceptualizing identity development (Fassinger & Miller, 1997). LGBQ+ identity development was not something that could be understood without recognizing contextual factors that may differ across intersecting identities such as race, age, location, or profession (Fassinger
& Miller, 1997) and there was a wide variety of developmental trajectories among these communities.

**Social Identity Models**

Cox and Gallois (1996) put forth a conceptualization of affectional identity based on the social aspects of identity and how these aspects interacted with different social structures. Everyone has multiple intersecting social identities, and using social identity theory, the problems individuals with marginalized identities had could be understood (Cox & Gallois, 1996). The social identity perspective acknowledged that homosexual people were impacted by heterosexual comparison of their identity and expression against what was considered acceptable and evaluating homosexual people negatively (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Viewing homosexual identity development through a social identity lens suggested that self-categorization has happened, and the individual has made evaluations about social categories (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Homosexual individuals self-categorized as homosexual and incorporated the categorization into their personal identity, social identity, or both (Cox & Gallois, 1996). This view recognized that many individuals aspired to incorporating self-categorization into both social and personal identity (Cox & Gallois, 1996) but that the range of identity experiences among homosexual people was broad. Individuals who expressed less outness or integration between social and personal identities were not viewed as developmentally stunted (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

The multidimensional model of identity development by Horowitz and Newcomb (2002) stated that sexual identity was developed and maintained through social interaction. Using the social constructionist framework Horwitz and Newcomb (2002) asserted that LGBQ+ individuals actively co-created their identity through recursive interaction between the self and
the environment. Social constructionist theory emphasized individual and etiological factors as being the primary influences on homosexual identity development with no specific set of factors predicting identity development (Hart, 1984; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002; Richardson, 1984). Individual experience varied widely but the “universal goal to be achieved is that the individual experiences sexuality in a positive light and has tolerance for diversity and ambiguity within oneself.” (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002, p. 3). Achieving this goal could be impeded by negative experiences with the world, the meaning the individual took from these experiences, and the relationship between affectional identity and other aspects of the self (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002). This model suggested that experiences such as heteronormativity, heterosexism, or identity-based violence impacted everyone differently and that understanding disclosure and concealment behaviors was based on the meaning the individual took from experiences that prompted the disclosure or concealment.

**Positive View of Identity**

Heteronormativity, and risk for stigmatization, could cast LGBQ+ identity development in a negative light when only the risks of developing a marginalized identity in a privileged identity context are considered. Riggle and Scales Rostosky (2012) challenged this notion by proposing a positive view of identity and recognizing that not all aspects of sexual identity development needed to be negative. The positive view of identity did not specify what it meant to have a fully realized or congruent identity instead it suggested themes that characterized a positive LGBT identity. The eight themes were: living authentically; increased self-awareness; feelings of freedom related to gender and gender expression; having supportive emotional connections and families of choice; exploring one’s own sexuality and having intimate relationships not bound by heteronormative rules; embracing one’s own perspective on life;
being a social justice advocate; and having community (Riggle & Scales Rostosky, 2012). Unlike the previously mentioned models, this perspective asserted that experiencing feelings of authenticity was the goal of identity development (Riggle & Scales Rostosky, 2012; Riggle et al., 2014; Riggle et al., 2017). What may be confusing was that the positive aspects of identity appeared to all involve some level of disclosure, suggesting that authenticity was reached through some level of disclosure to the self or others.

**Identity Development as Context**

Identity development models provided a framework through which to understand development of LGBQ+ identity and the previously explored models illustrated that development occurred in diverse patterns (Rosario et al., 2011). Early stage models suggested a specific trajectory of development that included disclosure of identity as a developmental milestone in achieving the eventual goal of a fully realized, integrated, and congruent identity. This assumption was problematic because coming out was not a singular event (Guittar & Rayburn, 2016) and coming out itself did not directly lead to identity consolidation (Diamond, 2006). The time after an individual initially came out as LGBQ+ may have involved recursive cycles of questioning one’s sexual identity as individual and contextual factors changed and different parts of one’s identity became more or less salient (Diamond, 2006). Cass (1979) believed that reaching congruence may be impossible for homosexuals because of western society attitudes, but that incongruence could be reduced as an individual proceeded through stages of development. The stage models stressed the importance of disclosure of identity because LGB individuals who concealed may struggle to commit to an identity (Potoczniak et al., 2007; Marrs & Staton, 2016). This framed the context of LGBQ+ identity development
through the lens of disclosure much like the prevalent research on self-concealment that will be discussed later in the chapter.

Contrasting the early stage models, the multidimensional, social identity, and positive perspectives of LGBQ+ identity provided a framework through which the broad spectrum of LGBQ+ developmental experiences could be understood. Conceptualizing LGBQ+ identity development through these lenses stressed not just the impact of disclosure, but the decision-making process of constantly negotiating disclosure and concealment decisions and the meaning taken from this process (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002). These models were particularly pertinent to understanding this research because the understanding of self-concealment in the available literature was clouded by research that conceptualized self-concealment as a part of self-disclosure. This conceptualization failed to recognize the process and meaning that LGBQ+ individuals took from self-concealing their identity and assumed that disclosure was the ultimate goal. What was common across the previously discussed models was stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999). Stigma consciousness was the individual’s recognition of being a member of a stigmatized social group and how that stigmatized identity was internalized and effected interactions with others (Pinel, 1999; Pinel & Paulin, 2005). Stigma consciousness can be a factor in negotiating concealment and disclosure decisions as well as determining an individual’s level of outness.

Identity development literature was relevant to self-concealment because the development of concealment strategies occurred during identity development. Existing theories conceptualized some concealment strategies as stages or phases of identity development. Some of the theories noted that concealment strategies were features of developmental stages. More recent identity development models described the social construction of identity and how
concealment was related to perceptions of acceptance. In the next section, self-concealment is further explored as an identity management process, rather than a developmental stage. Self-concealment, however, was situated within identity development because identity management strategies were developed as LGBQ+ identity developed in social contexts.

**Identity Management**

Identity management was the process through which individuals who have stigmatized identities that are socially devalued (Goffman, 1963) controlled information about and access to their stigmatized identities (Goffman, 1986). Looking specifically at LGBQ+ communities, affectional identity management was the process of managing access through concealing or revealing minority affectional identity to others (Tatum, 2018). This process involved multiple and repeated daily decisions (Lidderdale et al., 2007) across multiple contexts and while meant to be protective, contributed to increased stress and poorer mental health for LGBQ+ people (Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007).

Stigmatization of LGBQ+ people happened across contexts (Croteau et al., 2008) at the individual, interpersonal, and societal levels (Hatzenbuehler, 2017; Veldhuis et al., 2018). Experiencing stigmatization prompted the need to manage one’s identity, particularly an invisible identity (Croteau et al., 2008). According to Croteau et al. (2008), experiencing stigma caused LGB people to carefully examine the potential costs of identity disclosure and the potential benefits of concealment. This section will describe identity management in the context of broad stigmatization of LGBQ+ people in a heteronormative context as well as discuss identity management strategies employed by LGBQ+ people.

**Rejection Sensitivity**
Rejection sensitivity (RS) was the degree to which a person was vigilant about or sensitive to cues that suggested they would experience rejection in some form (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; London et al., 2012). LGBQ+ people may experience RS because of past experiences of discrimination or stigmatization and their identities being a challenge to heteronormative expectations. RS theory as described by Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002) and London et al. (2012) suggested that the knowledge of one’s own identity as being stigmatized in society as well as awareness of or witnessing discrimination against others can cause sexual minorities to develop RS. Individuals who were chronically exposed to discrimination may experience heightened states of sensitivity to rejection or disrespect (Pinel, 2004) because they were preoccupied with stigmatization (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; London et al., 2012). Dyar et al. (2018) hypothesized that there may be a connection between RS and motivation to conceal identity. Sexual minorities used concealment to avoid identity-based discrimination and rejection, which possibly indicated that individuals with higher RS would conceal identity more often for protective reasons (Dyar et al., 2018). RS was discussed throughout the identity management literature which warranted its inclusion as part of the context of identity management.

Identity Management Strategies

Affectional identity management was often thought of as controlling one’s individual degree of outness, however identity management was a concept that encompassed more than just disclosure decisions. The process of managing one’s affectional identity was not a “summary of disclosure actions over time” (Croteau et al., 2008, p. 550) but the total accumulation of multiple and repeated daily decisions about disclosing or concealing (Clair et al., 2005; Croteau et al., 2008). Overall disclosure was not a good measure of identity management because identity
management occurred for personal reasons, contextual reasons (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001), and many other reasons (Croteau et al., 2008) suggesting a need to constantly negotiate between concealing and revealing. Choices regarding revealing or concealing were based on previous outcomes of either strategy as well as an individual’s calculation of the risks and benefits of each strategy each time a management decision needed to be made (Clair et al., 2005; Croteau et al., 2008). Several models of affectional identity management will be explored in this section.

Appropriate for the current study, several established models of affectional identity management were developed using the workplace as the context (Griffin, 1992; Woods & Lucas, 1993; Ragins, 2004, 2008; Clair et al., 2005), stressing a need for different strategies between the work and home contexts. Griffin (1992) put forth a model comprised of five strategies for identity management in the workplace based on the experiences of gay and lesbian educators. Four of the five strategies involved some degree of concealment. Griffin (1992) distinguished between active passing and passive passing in which active passing involved deliberately making others believe that one was heterosexual, while passive passing involved allowing others to assume heterosexuality and not correcting the mistaken label. The strategy of covering involved “omitting information or censoring” (p. 176) and was distinctly different from passing because no attempts were made to deceive others by intentionally appearing heterosexual. Some participants in Griffin’s (1992) study used a strategy called being implicitly out. Implicitly out individuals did not make direct disclosures but shared personal information about themselves that allowed others to make inferences about the individual’s identity.

The concept of inferred disclosure noted by Griffin (1992) was of particular interest when examining concealment. Inferred disclosure could be interactional, curricular, or professional in the workplace (Griffin, 1992). Interactional inferences were perceived by participants when they
spoke about or against anything that appeared to be “gay-related” (p. 180) such as prejudiced jokes or AIDS (Griffin, 1992). Curricular inferences were perceived when any reading or education materials were introduced and had gay or lesbian authors or addressed homosexual related topics (Griffin, 1992). Professional inferences were perceived when an individual took a role in the workplace that “defied traditional gender roles that might be associated with a gay or lesbian stereotype” (Griffin, 1992, p. 180). Inferred disclosure had the potential to motivate individuals to employ different concealment strategies because the disclosure in this sense was not in the control of the LGBQ+ individual, but in the perception of others.

Woods and Lucas (1993), in their novel detailing the lives of gay men in corporate America, found that at some point in their careers, all of the men had posed as heterosexual in the workplace. The authors proposed three strategies for identity management, all of which may involve concealment in some form. Counterfeiting, like Griffin’s (1992) passing strategy involved purposeful characterization of the self as heterosexual (Woods & Lucas, 1993). The avoidance strategy shared similarities with Griffin’s (1992) passing and covering strategies, involving active avoidance of references to anything personal or outside of work (Woods & Lucas, 1993). The final strategy, integration-disclosure, may involve concealment similarly to individuals using Griffin’s (1992) implicitly out strategy. Integration-disclosure involved direct disclosure through challenging assumptions or displaying personal items that would indicate homosexuality such as displaying a family picture (Woods & Lucas, 1993).

Ragins (2004) proposed a model that focused on disclosure behavior as a means of managing stigmatized identity based on Goffman’s (1963) stigma theory. There are four interrelated factors that may predict disclosure in the workplace according to Ragins (2004); anticipated consequences, social stigma, psychological factors, and environmental factors.
Adding to her work, Ragins (2008) coined disclosure disconnects to describe the variations in disclosure between work and home contexts. Ragins (2008) suggested three types of disclosure disconnects, two of which involved concealment of identity. Identity denial, while framed as complete non-disclosure, involved complete concealment of identity from others. Identity disconnects happened when disclosure varied across contexts with the individual concealing identity in certain contexts.

The conceptual framework for workplace identity management proposed by Clair et al. (2005) also used Goffman’s (1963) stigma theory to describe three strategies for passing and three strategies for revealing a stigmatized sexual identity. Four of the six strategies involved concealment in some form. The fabrication strategy involved active passing (Griffin, 1992) as an individual with a false identity that was not stigmatized. Concealment involved the individual preventing others in the workplace from learning related information that could reveal a stigmatized sexual identity. The discretion strategy involved the individual distancing themselves from anything that could possibly reveal their identity or allow others to perceive their identity. Signaling involved the individual using cues or symbols to reveal their invisible stigmatized identity to other individuals with stigmatized identities but conceal their identity from individuals with dominant identities (Clair et al., 2005).

Being “In the Line of Fire”

Identity management models, particularly those drawing on Goffman’s (1963) stigma theory did not encompass the full extent of identity management. In a study of young queer individuals Orne (2013) found that reactions to queer identity were often conceptualized as being accepting or hostile, but that a significant spectrum of reactions exists in between these two extremes. The middle zone of this spectrum was characterized by reactions that were
“ambiguously hostile, uncertain, ‘tolerant,’ socially awkward, or invasively questioning” (Orne, 2013, p. 230). Recognizing the existence of this middle space had serious implications for the established working models of LGBQ+ identity management. The queer people Orne (2013) interviewed reported existing in the middle space more often than the extremes of the continuum, causing a constant negotiation of identity that Orne (2011) called strategic outness. Strategic outness was the “continual contextual management” (Orne, 2011, p. 682) of queer identity in which a person had specific motivations and used specific strategies to manage who knew about their queer identity (Orne, 2011, 2013).

Orne (2013) described queer people as being “in the line of fire when they feel that they will be called to account for their identity, are questioned, are not fully accepted, are ‘tolerated,’ feel ‘socially awkward,’ or feel they are being stereotyped” (p. 240). These experiences existed on a continuum on which queer people were always anticipating “bullets” in the form of reactions from others. Queer people in the line of fire could take the bullet, deflect it, or dodge it completely (Orne, 2013). Taking the bullet meant confronting the reaction directly and attempting to educate the reacting individual whereas deflecting meant tailoring one’s identity or identity label to something that was more easily understood by the reacting individual. Dodging the bullet involved the queer individual ceasing all interactions with the reacting individual. Orne (2013) suggested each strategy in this model, as well as passing or covering (Griffin, 1992), was implemented because queer people understood the worldview of others and because of previous experiences with reactions across the spectrum. Participants in Orne’s (2013) study stressed the importance of the perception of how individuals in their environment felt about them and about LGBQ+ identity in general because these appraisals influenced their use of identity management strategies.
Two of the strategies in Orne’s (2013) framework, deflecting and dodging, were identity concealment processes. Queer individuals who deflected may not necessarily pass for heterosexual, however they concealed some aspect of their identity or identities that made their existence more palatable to others, with the intention to manage the interaction (Orne, 2013). Interestingly, dodging did not always completely conceal identity from the other individual but through ceasing all interactions with the individual, the queer person maintained the safety of feeling concealed. A final important contribution from Orne’s (2013) framework was the recognition of stigma resistance as a part of identity management. Stigma resistance was the recognition that practicing identity management strategies did not always correlate with negative feelings about the self or queer identity (Orne, 2013). Stigma resistant queer people recognized that their identity was not stigmatizing, and that stigmatization was actually the result of heteronormative and heterosexist culture (Orne, 2013), but LGBQ+ people may still expect to experience stigmatization in all interactions (Pickern & Costakis, 2017).

**Identity Management as Context**

Based on the available models, identity management primarily occurred in social contexts where interaction with others was necessary, because the need to manage a stigmatized identity, was often dictated by the actions or expectations of others in specific social contexts. LGBQ+ identity management happened in the same heteronormative and heterosexist context in which LGBQ+ identity developed, but identity was not just a “truth that is discovered, it is a performance, which is enacted” (Ward & Winstanley, 2003, p. 452). LGBQ+ identity was performed in social contexts with varying degrees of outness with the hope of receiving positive appraisals as feedback (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Significant effort was made to elicit positive appraisals about gay or lesbian identity and individuals who received more negative appraisals.
struggled to cope with awareness of having a stigmatized identity (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Knowing that their identity performance may receive negative appraisals caused LGBQ+ people to engage in the recurring process of identity management.

LGBQ+ identity had to be consistently managed because the existence of LGBQ+ people violated the assumption that all people were heterosexual (Dewaele et al., 2013). The need to constantly manage identities drained the coping abilities of sexual minorities (Dewaele et al., 2013) and placed extreme pressure on them as “constant self-monitoring and vigilance over safety consumed a fair amount of psychological energy” (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000, p. 99). Even in the absence of overt threats or discrimination, anticipated discrimination or perceived danger in any social interaction caused significant stress (Mink et al., 2014). Identity management strategies were used by LGBQ+ people despite the potential for experiencing significant costs. Schmitz and Tyler (2018) found that the most salient motivator for engaging in identity management for LGBTQ college students was contextual specific factors that led these students to manage their identities to avoid victimization. Identity management motivation and behaviors likely differed for every individual, but available literature suggested there were certain factors that influenced motivation and behavior for affectionally diverse people.

A study of LGB youth found that every social interaction required some type of cost-benefit analysis of the interaction between the youth and others that determined future management strategies (Dewaele et al., 2013). The feedback loop described by these youth was a defining feature of some of the previously mentioned management models in which strategies that gave a desired outcome (safety achieved through concealment or authenticity achieved through disclosure) were reinforced (Clair et al., 2005; Croteau et al., 2008; Lidderdale et al., 2007). Self-efficacy about identity management behaviors, such as effectively using passing as
heterosexual to conceal one’s identity, also influenced the use of certain behaviors in the future (Lidderdale et al., 2007). Individual differences in identity development and the way an individual maintained their sense of self could also influence management behaviors and motivation (Clair et al., 2005; Croteau et al., 2008). Another individual factor was the degree to which an LGBQ+ person monitored how well they fulfilled a socially expected role in a specific context (Clair et al., 2005). For example, a Queer man who worked in an office where male coworkers typically adhered to traditional expectations of masculinity may monitor how well they fulfilled this masculine role and exert effort to manage their queer identity where necessary.

The most prominent and well researched identity management strategy was disclosure. Disclosure has been described as the means to achieving an integrated identity (Cass, 1979, 1984; Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Troiden, 1989) and part of the coming out process (Guittar & Rayburn, 2016; Morris 1997; Troiden, 1989). Orne (2011) argued that disclosure was an identity management process rather than an identity development milestone. Disclosure appeared to be a key part of identity development and the means through which some LGBQ+ people “come out” but it was also a specific type of identity management strategy. Visibility management, a specific identity management concern, was the process through which people who had concealable stigmatized identities negotiated disclosure across contexts (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Lasser & Wicker, 2008). Disclosure was a context dependent strategy aimed at managing visibility of identity in various social contexts (Miller et al., 2019).

Concealment was a visibility management strategy employed when an individual was attempting to maintain a privacy boundary (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Information that was concealable was typically consciously known to the individual and purposefully kept from others
To conceal LGBQ+ identity the individual had to have an awareness of their identity and through some behavior keep others from knowing about their identity. Schlenker (1980) asserted that concealment was caused by social interactions where distressing information could potentially be disclosed. When an individual claimed a non-heterosexual affectional identity in a heteronormative world, every social interaction has the potential to be distressing (Riggle et al., 2017).

Concealment and disclosure had a complex relationship and as Lasser and Tharinger (2003) and Lasser and Wicker (2008) suggested, the ability to use disclosure to manage identity visibility was predicated on the fact that the identity was concealable and stigmatized. Concealment and disclosure of affectional identity involved complex calculations of risk to determine which strategy and which way of enacting the strategy was most appropriate for everyone in their social context (Bry et al., 2017). The current study was situated in the complex contexts of identity management and development where the two related phenomena of self-disclosure and self-concealment of identity occurred across various social contexts. While the current study was focused on self-concealment as a visibility management strategy, the literature was clouded by the complex relationship between self-concealment and self-disclosure. Each of these related but distinctly separate constructs will be explored in depth later in the chapter.

**Outness**

Outness was a complex construct, encompassing many different meanings, measurements, and theories about positive or negative impact (Feldman & Wright, 2013). Outness was commonly conflated with the coming out process. Outness was associated with the degree to which others knew about an individual’s sexual identity. Outness was often achieved through the separate but related process called “coming out.” Linear models of development that
were discussed previously appeared to point to “a final queer subject who is out, proud, and
normatively happy” (Klein et al., 2015, p.320). This conceptualization positioned complete
outness as a developmental goal and the way in which one achieved identity integration and
mental wellness (Cain, 1991; Carroll & Gilroy, 2000; Healy, 1993). Measures of outness tended
to focus on the initial disclosure of coming out but failed to recognize the ongoing nature of
coming out (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). Previous studies have measured outness using a scale of
degrees of openness about affectional identity (Pachankis et al., 2008; Ullrich et al., 2004).
Morris et al. (2001) measured outness as a combination of reported level of disclosure, personal
attitudes about outness, and behaviors that demonstrated outness. Mohr and Fassinger (2000) in
creating the outness inventory discussed the nuanced nature of outness because coming out could
happen in so many ways. Meidlinger and Hope (2014) called for a broader measure of outness
because measures that focused on disclosure failed to capture the continuous decision-making
process of deciding whether to conceal or disclose identity.

The meaning of outness varied individually and across contexts and individuals were able
to manage outness to the extent that they could change social contexts (Harry, 1993). Existing
literature suggested that outness existed on a continuum that may differ for every individual
(Mohr & Fassinger, 2000). For example, a study of teachers’ outness found that outness existed
on a continuum from only being out to those outside of work to complete outness to all members
of the school community (Connell, 2012). This measure was context dependent for the teachers
that were surveyed. LGBQ+ individuals may experience similar continuums that are dependent
on their individual social contexts. The following sections will explore two ways in which
outness could be measured and conceptualized: coming out and being out.

**Coming Out**
“Coming out” was described by Harry (1993) as an identity formation process while Orne (2011, 2013) suggested that coming out was likely an identity management strategy. The term “coming out” held significance for LGB people but narrowly captured the experience of making one’s identity visible to others because it was associated with a single event and suggested a specific type of communication (Dewaele et al., 2013). Guittar and Rayburn (2016) conceptualized coming out as the continuous, possibly lifelong process of maintaining LGBTQ identity, calling the process a career and a “perpetually managed social endeavor” (p. 352). Some LGBTQ+ people only came out to certain people, or never came out at all (Coolhart, 2005). The meaning of coming out and how it was embodied was likely different for every LGBTQ+ person, but the varying definitions clouded research that examined degrees of outness (Orne, 2011).

While specific definitions varied, the existing literature described coming out as a non-linear (Morris, 1997; Rust, 1993; Troiden, 1989) highly contextualized (Klein et al., 2015; Langdridge, 2008; Orne, 2011) process that included individual internal and external factors (Cain, 1991; Guittar & Rayburn, 2016; Klein et al., 2015). Coming out must always be understood in a social context and coming out decisions were often dictated by the desired social context (Orne, 2011). For example, a person may choose not to come out to prevent changing the dynamic between their friend group. For this person, their connection to friends or identity they retain through friendship may be more salient than their affectional identity. Personal internal and external factors impacted social context and individual desires.

Internal factors that may impact coming out included a person’s acceptance of their identity, the salience of their identity, and the process of managing a marginalized identity in a heteronormative social context (Guittar & Rayburn, 2016; Orne, 2011). The identity management aspect of coming out was particularly relevant to this research, because coming out
did not always involve disclosure. “Affirming [identity], deciding when to speak of it, when to deflect, when to compartmentalize” were all essential parts of coming out (Guittar & Rayburn, 2016, p. 352-353). Guittar & Rayburn (2016) described the negotiation of identity which was a crucial part of the construct of concealment. Coming out may involve concealment because understanding the complexities of coming out meant understanding influences of fear and safety concerns. Klein et al. (2015) found that queer youth were often focused on maintaining safety and coming out decisions meant grappling with what they were prepared to lose. Self-acceptance and the desire to live authentically were not the only motivators for coming out. Coming out for these youth meant the potential loss of safety, family and friend relationships, and increased fear (Klein et al., 2015). These findings suggested that concealment of LGBQ identity may be related to negotiating coming out decisions.

Identity development models placed great significance on the first time an LGBQ+ person came out, negating the repeated nature of having to come out because of assumed heterosexuality (Ward & Winstanley, 2003; Guittar & Rayburn; 2016) and constantly having to manage information about their identity after the initial disclosure (Goffman, 1963; Guittar & Rayburn, 2016). The continuous contextual nature of the coming out process may also involve returning to the closet and concealing because of contextual or individual needs (Langdridge, 2008). Theorists differed in their value of the non-linear trajectory of what it meant to come out, and LGBQ+ people likely differed individually as well. Identity development models suggested coming out was a vital step toward authenticity and integration (Rasmussen, 2004) but coming out, specifically through disclosure, was made more complex by “forms of privilege and oppression and by other contextual factors such as levels of social support, financial independence, one’s relationship with one’s family, and one’s geographical location” (Klein et
al., 2015, p.320). Failing to acknowledge the many social interactional and contextual influences on coming out processes and decisions assumed an essentialized view of identity where LGBQ+ people could not have a fully formed identity without leaving the closet (Connell, 2012; Phelan, 1993).

**Being Out**

Harry (1993) described “being out” as distinct from “coming out” as the “presentation of the self to others as homosexual” (p. 26) involving a continuous process of assessing context specific risks and the importance of to whom an individual was considering self-disclosing. Carroll and Gilroy (2000) stated that being out also had nonverbal and behavioral aspects such as engaging in behaviors or expressing nonverbal cues openly that were associated with non-heterosexual identity like dress or hairstyle (Khayatt, 1997). How LGBQ people expressed their outness was an individual decision-making process that was impacted by the context in which outness was expressed and the individual’s perception of acceptance in that context (Carroll & Gilroy, 2000; Sabat et al., 2014).

Coming out and being out appeared to differ primarily in that coming out involved a disclosure and being out was the performance of what was disclosed. These two processes were distinct, but related pieces of the construct of outness. Coming out was primarily conceptualized as a milestone in various identity development models but it may be an identity management strategy. The risk assessment, as Carroll and Gilroy (2000) called it, associated with being out and trying to sense acceptance across social contexts suggested that being out was related to managing one’s identity.

The level of outness an LGBQ+ person expressed has been conceptualized as both a developmental stage and a management process. The act of coming out was a form of self-
disclosure. Coming out being a type of self-disclosure suggested that lower levels of outness were associated with greater concealment. Outness was relevant to this research because of how closely related outness, and a lack of outness were to self-concealment. Outness, self-disclosure, and self-concealment were all distinct, but related constructs. Understanding outness was key to this research because the three constructs were often muddled or used interchangeably in the literature. A clear understanding of each construct and how they related to each other allowed for the gathering of accurate data about self-concealment by ensuring the correct construct was being examined.

**Authenticity**

Clair et al. (2005) suggested that sexual identity management was "shaped by not only the threat of stigmatization but also by concerns of authenticity and legitimacy” (p. 79). Authenticity in terms of LGBQ+ identity was a feeling of being true to oneself and the degree to which one felt they could be honest about their identity with others (Riggle et al. 2017). Authenticity was a distinctly different construct from the previously discussed construct of outness. Outness was concerned with interactions between the self and others while authenticity “focuse[d] on intrapersonal decisions and assessments of whether one [was] being true to oneself and one’s values within the external context” (Riggle et al., 2017, p. 56). Wood et al. (2008) described authenticity as having a conscious awareness of “the true self,” “behaving and expressing in such a way that [was] consistent” with one’s true self, and “being true to oneself in most situations and living in accordance with one’s values and beliefs” (p. 386).

Feelings of authenticity were noted as an important component of psychological (Harter, 2002; Riggle et al., 2017) and emotional wellbeing for LGBQ+ people and a key part of a positive identity (Riggle & Scales Rostosky, 2012; Riggle et al., 2014). The identity
development models, and identity management strategies discussed in previous sections focused heavily on disclosure and outness. The strong focus of authenticity being achieved through disclosure and high levels of outness clouded the effect of concealment on feelings of authenticity (Riggle et al., 2017). Although LGB people may experience feelings of authenticity when they self-concealed for the purpose of maintaining their safety (Riggle et al., 2017), the relationship between authenticity and concealment was under researched. Available literature on disclosure suggested LGBQ+ people would experience less authenticity when concealing but disclosure could lead to feelings of inauthenticity if an individual did not feel a particular label conveyed their own understanding of their identity to others (Riggle et al., 2017). Feelings of authenticity may have an influence on the decisions LGB people made about disclosure and concealment of identity (Riggle et al., 2017) and the influence on concealment specifically warranted further exploration.

**Differentiating Self-Disclosure and Self-Concealment**

Self-disclosure and self-concealment were distinctly separate constructs (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014) and were typically understood as being opposite ends of a spectrum of outness (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). This understanding was influenced by research that measured outness as the degree to which a person disclosed their affectional identity regardless of whether the construct being measured was concealment (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). This binary understanding of disclosure and concealment was also influenced by high concealment typically leading to less disclosure and high disclosure typically indicating less concealment (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). However, all instances of lower or non-disclosure were not necessarily self-concealment (Riggle et al., 2017). The clear differences between concealment and disclosure
were muddled because concealment, particularly identity concealment, was a less understood and under-researched construct.

The available literature defined concealment as the degree to which attempts were made to prevent others from knowing one’s stigmatized identity (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). Concealment involved not only attempts to prevent disclosure (Jackson & Mohr, 2016) but also “a desire to prevent disclosure” (Schrimshaw et al., 2013, p. 142). Self-disclosure, in contrast, was defined in the case of identity as the degree to which one has revealed a stigmatized identity to others (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). The definition of self-disclosure was not to be confused with outness. Self-disclosure always involved an action whereas outness did not always involve an action. The use and measurement of the constructs of concealment, disclosure, and outness interchangeably was understandable because the constructs were closely related (Meidlinger & Hope, 2016; Riggle et al., 2017) and the differences were nuanced, making them difficult to separate. While concealment was not fully understood, the available literature suggested that the primary differences between self-concealment and self-disclosure were differing motivations, associated behaviors, and consequences.

Self-concealment has been shown to be driven by a desire to protect oneself from negative feelings, identity-based discrimination, and harassment (Anderson et al., 2001; Pachankis, 2007). Self-disclosure may be used to experience authenticity or to improve interpersonal relationships (Bosson et al., 2012; Jackson & Mohr, 2016). Self-concealment behaviors like passing (Cass, 1979; Clair et al., 2005; Griffin 1992; Goffman, 1963; Woods & Lucas, 1993), covering (Griffin, 1992), concealment, discretion (Clair et al., 2005), identity denial or disconnect (Ragins, 2008), and rejection sensitive hypervigilance (London et al., 2012; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002) were active or passive, implicit or explicit, and aimed at
preventing identity information from being known to others. Self-disclosure behavior could also be active or passive, implicit or explicit, but typically involved the sharing of information.

Even when used for protective reasons, the consequences of self-concealing a stigmatized identity were typically negative. Validation of the concealment subscale of the Nebraska Outness Scale (NOS) found that concealment was associated with increased social anxiety, decreased access to social support, poor quality of life, and increased identity related rejection sensitivity (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). Self-concealment was connected to increased stress from identity-related thoughts (Smart & Wegner, 1999), increased feelings of difference, and internalized homophobia (Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Meidlinger & Hope, 2016; Pachankis, 2007). Disclosure could put LGBTQ+ people at risk for victimization (Klein et al., 2015) but had also been connected to better psychological health and wellbeing and increased access to social support (Beals et al, 2009). Disclosure also had a level of permanence because it usually could not be undone, whereas concealment could be undone through disclosure (Jackson & Mohr, 2016).

Self-concealment and self-disclosure were demonstrated to be related but ultimately separate constructs. The available literature did not always demonstrate this difference because studies examining concealment often operationalized and measured concealment through a lens of non-disclosure, as opposed to the active process of self-concealing. This study aimed to increase understanding of the construct of concealment by not viewing concealment solely as non-disclosure. The available literature on self-concealment of LGBTQ+ identity and costs associated with concealment will be discussed in depth later in the chapter.

**Self-Disclosure**

Self-disclosure was broadly defined as the act of revealing personal information about the self to another individual (Archer & Burleson, 1980; Collins & Miller, 1994). Derlega and
Chaikin (1977) described self-disclosure as being made up of boundaries; a “dyadic boundary” and a “self boundary” (p. 104). The “dyadic boundary” established the context in which it was safe for the discloser to share personal information and ensured that the information would not be shared with others. The “self boundary” was the boundary of non-disclosure that the individual created around themselves that was opened when they disclosed personal information. Disclosures have been shown to have a positive impact on individual health when important and meaningful personal information was disclosed (Goodstein & Reinecker, 1974; Jourard, 1958). Self-disclosure varied in levels of intimacy depending on the context and content of the information disclosed (Green et al., 2015; Herek, 1996). Self-disclosure of affectional identity, which could be a particularly intimate disclosure, is discussed in the next section.

**Self-Disclosure of Identity**

Self-disclosure of affectional identity has been used as a measure of successful identity development as discussed in the identity development section of this chapter. Self-disclosure of affectional identity involved the revealing of an individual’s identity as an LGBQ+ person through verbal disclosure, through symbols, or nonverbal cues that communicated information about a person’s identity to others (Miller et al., 2019). With the increased use of social networks Kim and Dindia (2011) found that even photos could communicate disclosures non-verbally. The literature on coming out and identity management suggested that self-disclosure of identity was the preferred management strategy and promoted self-integrity and less open identity management was psychologically harmful even when employed for protective reasons (Croteau et al., 2008). People who disclosed their affectional identity typically did so to find support and improve relationships, enhance their overall wellbeing, and to influence societal attitudes and change (Creed & Scully, 2000; Herek, 1996; Green et al., 2015). Disclosure could also occur
because LGBQ+ people experienced a lack of authenticity due to different levels of outness across contexts (Harry, 1993).

Self-disclosure was experienced by all LGBQ+ people differently and was influenced by different forms of oppression in different contexts (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Self-disclosure has been shown to have potential negative effects on social relationships and promoted wellbeing among LGBT youth (Kosciw et al., 2015). Victimization of LGBT youth varied across school and communities (Kosciw et al., 2015). What specifically motivated LGBQ+ people to self-disclose their identity required context specific examination because motivation was highly contextual (Orne, 2011). Later in this chapter self-disclosure of affectional identity in the context of the workplace and in the context of counseling will be discussed as relevant to the present study.

**Self-Concealment**

The Self-Concealment Scale (SCS) developed by Larson and Chastain (1990) provided the first explicitly clear definition of self-concealment as a separate construct from self-disclosure. “Self-concealment [was] defined here as a predisposition to actively conceal from others personal information that one perceive[d] as distressing or negative” (Larson & Chastain, 1990, p. 440). Larson and Chastain (1990) noted that concealment was a conscious effort to conceal information that not only the individual perceived as distressing or negative, but that might be perceived by others as such. Since then, several studies have attempted to define self-concealment. Meidlinger and Hope (2014) conceptualized concealment as the degree to which individuals avoided disclosure, a narrow definition of concealment. With respect to affectional identity, concealment “involve[d] actively preventing others from learning personal information that ha[d] the potential to reveal a stigmatized identity” (Croteau et al., 2008, p. 541).
Concealment of affectional identity involved altering behaviors or managing information to actively and purposefully restrict access to a person’s identity (Orne, 2011).

Self-concealment of LGBQ+ identity was the predisposition to actively and purposefully conceal any information that may signal or reveal LGBQ+ identity to others. LGBQ+ identity was a stigmatized identity which was distressing to many LGBQ+ people (Goffman, 1963). LGBQ+ people learned to conceal their identity through social experiences with stigmatization and developed a set of boundaries to negotiate potentially negative social interactions while protecting their privacy (Petronio, 2002). The motivation behind and behaviors associated with self-concealment of LGBQ+ identity were influenced by individual and contextual differences (Cain, 1991). LGBQ+ people may conceal their identities without exerting a lot of energy, but some others felt the need to give a lot of energy to concealing their identities for other reasons, such as avoiding discrimination (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). Concealment motivation and behavior are explored in the following sections.

**Concealment Motivation**

Meyer’s (2003) minority stress framework asserted that concealment may be used by people with a stigmatized identity to cope. Concealment may be motivated by experiencing internalized stigmatization or identity-based shame or by the need to feel safe in a specific context (Cain, 1991; Riggle et al, 2017). A study of LGB teens found that experiencing greater levels of identity-based shame was associated with an increased need for privacy, motivating LGB teens to conceal their identities (Bregman et al., 2013). LGBQ+ people may also conceal their identities to protect themselves from discrimination, violence, or hostility (Compton & Dougherty, 2017; Croteau et al., 2008). Stigmatized individuals entered social situations with the expectation of negative reactions because of past experiences (Tatum et al., 2017) such as
rejection or discrimination, so they avoided certain social contexts (Pachankis, 2007) to protect themselves from negative outcomes (Dejordy, 2008; Fuller et al., 2009). Conversely, some individuals with stigmatized identities self-concealed with others to feel acceptance in a social context (Newheiser & Baretto, 2014). A study of gay men found that concealment was motivated by specific social circumstances (Cain, 1991). These situations included not knowing someone well enough, disclosure potentially causing a problem and not being worth the stress, concealing out of respect for others’ beliefs, or political reasons such as pointing out that heterosexuals did not need to disclose identity. A particularly interesting finding was that queer identified people may feel less motivated to conceal due to being less affected by pressure to conform to internalized stigma (Cramer et al., 2018).

**Concealment Behavior**

Identity management strategies that involved forms of self-concealment were discussed previously in the chapter. A limited number of studies were present in the literature that specifically examined concealment behavior and the strategies used by LGBQ+ people to conceal their identity. The most common form of concealment behavior discussed in the literature was passing. Warren (1974) described passing as ensuring that discrediting information, such as identity, was kept private while allowing a continuous flow of incorrect or misleading information to others. This was done through active passing (Fuller et al., 2009; Griffin, 1992) in which the LGBQ+ person deliberately made their identity appear heterosexual (Willis, 2011). In a qualitative study of LGBQ participants, Fuller et al. (2009) distinguished concealment through passing from being in the closet, because participants reported that concealment was context dependent while being in the closet could be stable across contexts. Participants in this study described active passing and intentionally conforming to be perceived
as heterosexual. Passing also happened passively (Griffin, 1992) when LGBQ+ people allowed their identity to be assumed as heterosexual through silence or non-disclosure (DeJordy, 2008; Fuller et al., 2009; Wells & Klein, 1987; Willis, 2011). According to Fuller et al. (2009) concealment through active passing was determined by a question of acceptance whereas passive passing was a question of whether LGBQ+ identity was perceived by others in a specific context.

A study of LGBQ workers found that in the workplace, LGBQ people tried to make their identity invisible through monitoring or modifying their speech to avoid any suspicion that they might be LGBQ (Willis, 2011). Orne (2011) found that queer people employed a strategy called speculation which left others wondering about their identity but did not involve active self-concealment. In a study of LGB service members, participants reported concealing their identity through strategic self-disclosure in which only certain other service members knew about their identity which created a small network of strategically out coworkers (Van Gilder, 2017). Many of these studies examined concealment in the workplace which spoke to the highly contextualized nature of self-concealment behavior. Limited research existed on which self-concealment strategies were preferred (Croteau et al., 2008) but it appeared that motivation behind choosing to conceal and the desired outcome of concealment, as well as past experiences with successful concealment dictated which concealment strategy was employed by LGBQ+ people.

**The Cost of Concealment**

Coleman (1982) asserted that concealment was a strategy used early in developmental stages to protect oneself from anticipated rejection. While concealment could be protective it came with health-related (Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007), social (Newheiser & Barretto, 2014), and psychological costs (Tatum et al., 2017). Concealment was significantly more costly than
disclosure because it took significantly more energy to consistently monitor one’s language and behavior to ensure that identity cues were not being communicated to others (Healy, 1993). LGBQ+ people, because they had a concealable stigma, became preoccupied and hypervigilant about having their identity discovered (Pachankis, 2007). Repeated and continuous concealment could have a cumulative effect on the individual (Fisher, 1972) and became a chronic stressor itself (Meyer, 2003). Larson et al. (2015) noted that self-concealment strategies prevented individuals from regulating distress, so while concealment itself increased distress it prevented people who concealed from developing adaptive responses to other life stressors.

Larson and Chastain (1990) found that self-concealment was significantly correlated with self-reports of anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms in the development of the SCS. Self-concealment of identity generally had a negative impact on well-being (Larson & Chastain, 1990; Riggle et al., 2017; Selvidge et al., 2008) and has been linked to increased risk for depression and related symptoms (Bruce et al., 2015; Frost et al., 2007; Riggle et al., 2017; Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). Hoy-Ellis (2016) noted the particularly deleterious impact of concealment on mental health in a study of LGB older adults. When an LGB person concealed identity, the negative impact was difficult to see because the negative internal feelings were associated with the identity, meaning they were concealed as well (Hoy-Ellis, 2016). The real and perceived need to conceal identity was found to be a significant barrier for LGB older adult health overall (Hoy-Ellis & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2016). A study of LGB college students found that self-concealment was associated with poor mental health (Leleux-LaBarge et al., 2015). Concealment was a strategy that could be used to cope with stigmatization (Riggle et al., 2017) but concealment itself also created and perpetuated stress significantly (Frost et al., 2007; Riggle et al., 2017). Self-concealment was an active energy consuming process (Selvidge et al., 2008).
that was simultaneously a coping strategy, a symptom of mental health problems, and a cause of poor mental health (Frost et al., 2007). Access to social support could mitigate the effects of this type of trauma (Helens-Hart, 2017) but self-concealment was also an isolating process.

LGBQ+ people who concealed their identity often did not have the benefit of community and shared experience with others who also experienced stigmatization. The lack of access to social supports, particularly those with shared identities and experiences, could perpetuate internalized negative feelings (Pachankis, 2007). Self-concealment has been shown to decrease overall feelings of belonging because concealment prevented individuals from being their authentic selves in social encounters (Newheiser & Barretto, 2014). Concealment in some social contexts had the potential to impair close relationships, even those in which the individual may have disclosed, because of cognitive and affective impairment that occurred when one concealed an important part of the self (Pachankis, 2007). Potoczniak et al. (2007) found that self-concealment was significantly related to social anxiety among LGB people. The social costs of self-concealment were not limited to interactional encounters between LGBQ+ people and others. Self-concealment of LGBQ+ identity also meant concealing details about other life domains that were not explicitly related to identity such as with whom one spent the holidays or weekends (Kavanaugh, 1995). Self-concealment of identity meant potentially concealing many other details about oneself that may give away clues about identity and expose LGBQ+ people to additional distress.

Warren (1974) illustrated the lengths to which some LGBQ+ people may go to maintain a boundary of safety between themselves and others to conceal their identity. Warren (1974) described the creation of an entirely separate imaginary heterosexual identity, even making up heterosexual encounters, that came at great cost to the individual attempting to pass. The amount
of time spent attempting to pass made concealment a central focus of LGBTQ people’s lives (Fuller et al., 2009). The preoccupation with remaining hidden was accompanied by self-doubt about one’s ability to maintain identity concealment (Pachankis, 2007). Chronic self-concealment of any significant aspect of the self, such as LGBQ+ identity, had psychological costs (Meyer, 2003). Self-concealment could cause negative thinking related to internalized heterosexism (Pachankis, 2007) as well as the creation of distinct private and public selves (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). A particularly distressing consequence of self-concealment was that in the attempt to protect themselves from prejudice and discrimination, LGBTQ people observed these processes more closely because perpetrators viewed them as heterosexual (Fuller et al., 2009). LGBQ+ people who self-concealed may also feel guilt and shame about keeping their identity hidden (Pachankis, 2007) in addition to feeling inauthentic and non-genuine (Fuller et al., 2009). The psychological turmoil of experiencing stigmatization may lead people to conceal and concealment had the potential to increase and perpetuate turmoil. Pennebaker (1985) captured this saying “the act of not discussing or confiding the event with another may be more damaging than having experienced the event” (p. 82).

**Identity Management in the Workplace**

Identity management was a range of strategies used in the assessment of revealing or concealing affectional identity (Griffin 1992) in which an individual may make an effort to present themselves to be perceived as an acceptable norm (Pickern & Costakis, 2017). Professional workplaces tended to emulate broader societal contexts (Gates, 2012) which suggested the need to manage LGBQ+ identity in work contexts as one might in non-work or personal contexts. Despite affectional identity being a concealable identity, and sometimes invisible to others, affectional identity was a workplace issue because the workplace was not
exempt from heteronormativity (Gedro, 2009). Identity management occurred in the workplace because LGBQ+ employees did not know how coworkers might react to their identity, so they attended to cues in social interaction to gauge the level of safety (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). The literature suggested that affectionally diverse employees expected some level of discrimination in the workplace, because they experienced discrimination outside of work (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Compton, 2016; Pickern & Costakis, 2017). In contrast to social environments, changing one’s work environment was not always an immediate option so LGBQ+ individuals had to negotiate management decisions (Tatum, 2018).

Identity management decisions in the workplace were influenced by individual factors and workplace specific contextual factors (Lidderdale et al., 2007; Ragins et al., 2007). Concealment or disclosure decisions were complex because they involved attending to specific cues from others in the particular context (King et al., 2017). Constantly monitoring oneself to avoid giving potential cues and monitoring others for potential negative reactions and perceived acceptance or discrimination consumed a great deal of energy (Lindley, 2006). Working in a discriminatory environment and coping by using identity management strategies was shown to negatively impact the work experiences LGBQ+ people. Affectional minorities who experienced the workplace as hostile or negative reported lower levels of work satisfaction (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Velez & Moradi, 2012). Affectionally diverse workers also disengaged from their work in heterosexist work contexts (Hollis & McCalla, 2013).

Workplace discrimination varied in its presentation, sometimes taking the form of overt harassment (Shih et al., 2013) or presenting in more subtle ways that left LGBQ+ employees unsure of how to act (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Hebl et al, 2002). Sometimes discrimination was so subtle that it was only perceived by gay and lesbian workers (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). A study
of LGB workers across various states and professions reported that the most common experience in the workplace was one of mixed messages from coworkers, supervisors, workplace policies, and workplaces norms (Compton, 2016). Mixed messages often lead to self-concealment or strategic outness, only disclosing to a small group of trusted peers perceived to be accepting (Compton, 2016). A study of the lived experiences of lesbian executives found that unclear messages about their identities left participants debating between maintaining safety through distance and living inauthentically (Heintz, 2012). Identity concealment occurred in an ambiguous space between acceptance and stigmatization (Helens-Hart, 2017) and between organizational policy and how LGBQ+ employees are actually treated (Compton, 2016). The next section of the chapter will discuss the space between disclosure and concealment in depth.

**The Space Between Disclosure and Concealment**

Orne (2013) conceptualized the space between concealment and disclosure as the space where queer people most often existed, constantly negotiating identity, and trying to anticipate potential reactions from others. LGBQ+ people found themselves negotiating between concealment and disclosure across many life domains (Creed, 2006) because most individuals existed in a world where their identity was not necessarily known to everyone (Harry, 1993). LGBQ+ people had to filter their identities (Velez et al., 2013) to attempt to meet both a need for belonging and congruence (Bosson et al., 2012). Disclosure could lead to rejection or discrimination (Bosson et al., 2012) but may also lead to feelings of self-integrity (Meyer, 2003). Concealment may protect LGBQ+ individuals from the negative effects of disclosure (Meyer, 2013) but also lead to increased fears of being discovered as non-heterosexual (Creed, 2006) and being incorrectly perceived as heterosexual (Bosson et al., 2012).
In Meyer’s (2003) minority stress framework, identity management negotiations were described as an either-or decision between concealment and disclosure. Orne (2011) and Riggle et al. (2017) argued that disclosure and concealment could occur in the same social interaction and sometimes occurred almost simultaneously. Negotiating the often ambiguous space between concealment and disclosure involved a labor-intensive (Wells, 2019) complex risk management analysis of every choice in every individual context (Bry et al., 2017). However, each identity management choice was not a discrete occurrence, but a matter of ongoing maintenance and vigilance (Wells, 2019). Identity management being highly contextualized meant that each individual person used an individualized set of resources to manage social contexts (Bry et al., 2017) but the amount of labor involved in negotiation was common among most queer people (Wells, 2019). Queer labor as Wells (2019) called it, was relational labor in which heterosexual people did not have to engage. Queer labor involved queer people negotiating a heteronormative world while trying to embrace their own identities which were repeatedly othered (Wells, 2019).

There were many factors that may influence an LGBQ+ employee’s negotiation in the workplace. The structure of the workplace and the policies in place gave LGBQ+ employees clues about the acceptable level of outness in the workplace (Detert et al., 2000). Disclosure or concealment could be influenced by geographical cultural norms that were present in the workplace, such as differences in urban and rural settings (Marrs & Staton, 2016). LGB workers who concealed experienced workplace pressure to disclose to advocate for others in the workplace and could also be judged for concealing by coworkers who had disclosed (Marrs & Staton, 2016). The thoughts and feelings associated with consistently having to negotiate the space between concealment and disclosure could negatively impact the wellbeing of LGBQ+ workers (Selvidge et al., 2008).
There was a unique strategy that LGBTQ+ people employed to cope with constant negotiation that had specific implications for the workplace. LGBTQ+ people could create a private self and a public or professional self that they presented in the workplace or other unsafe contexts (Gray, 2013; Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). The private self referred to the individual’s life outside of work and professional self referred to the life the individual presented in the workplace (Gray, 2013). While this strategy was meant to protect the individual from the stress of negotiating identity management in the workplace, it could be detrimental to the self-concept. Employing a public self at work and private self elsewhere could lead LGBTQ+ individuals to categorize every life experience as one self or the other (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). A study of gay and lesbian teachers revealed that negotiating the public and private selves between home and school left participants constantly working to make sense of cultural considerations in both settings. The creation of a public or professional self was a concealment strategy that was used for protective reasons and reinforced negative feelings associated with concealment. Concealment in the workplace will be discussed more in depth later in the chapter.

**Self-Disclosure in the Workplace**

Workers bringing concealable stigmatized identities into the workplace were met with a unique set of challenges because identity disclosure exposed them to potential negative or mixed reactions and had the potential to pave the way for change and reduction of stigma (Creed & Scully, 2000). Disclosure happened on a continuum (Ragins, 2008) and LGBTQ+ workers had to negotiate self-disclosure decisions each time they encountered something new in the workplace, such as meeting a new coworker (Creed, 2006). Depending on the type of work, this could happen more frequently through meeting people outside the immediate group of coworkers, and each time the individual might have to return to the closet or negotiate coming out again (Ward
Negotiating workplace self-disclosure was made more complex by the assumptions of colleagues about affectional identity or coworkers initiating self-disclosure on behalf of a coworker who was concealing (Einarsdóttir et al., 2016). Self-disclosure in the workplace was not typically a one-time decision (Button, 2001; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001). Each disclosure decision could be influenced by the people in the immediate work context, workplace norms, workplace policies, and individual factors.

Self-disclosure of identity in the workplace typically happened on an individual, person by person basis (Cain, 1991; Ragins et al., 2007) because studies suggested that affectionally diverse people would prefer to self-disclose selectively (Croteau, 1996; Lance et al., 2010). Disclosure often happened in interactional situations such as discussing out of work activities or plans for holidays (Einarsdóttir et al., 2016). Helens-Hart (2017) found that affectionally diverse employees used implicit strategies to test reactions in these instances of disclosure. A person might nonverbally refer to their identity through their appearance or personal items in their office. Implicit verbal disclosure occurred through using gender neutral terms such as “partner” or discussing identity related issues (Helens-Hart, 2017). Einarsdóttir et al. (2016) noted that interactional disclosures were often out of the control of LGB employees because the questions were prompted by colleagues and assumed heterosexual identity of the LGB employees, forcing a decision to be made. LGB employees also disclosed because they were intentionally or unintentionally outed by colleagues, wanted to stop unwanted sexual attention, were standing up to homophobia, or experienced a personal issue that required disclosure (Einarsdóttir et al., 2016).

The dominant culture of the workplace significantly impacted self-disclosure decisions (Marrs & Staton, 2016) and workplace norms dictated how identity was approached and
discussed (Compton & Dougherty, 2017). Heteronormativity may have influenced workplace policies (Compton & Dougherty, 2017) and coworker assumptions that all their colleagues were heterosexual (Einarsdóttir et al., 2016). A workplace norm of assumed heterosexuality exposed LGB workers to homophobia because their identity was repeatedly wrongly assumed and colleagues may have felt free to make negative comments in their presence (Einarsdóttir et al., 2016). Workplaces that were perceived to have more LGB employees or management were perceived to be more supportive of self-disclosure (Ragins et al., 2007). Supportive policies such as non-discrimination protections have been shown to promote self-disclosure (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). LGB workers were more likely to disclose “when there was concrete evidence of support for diversity, including development and enforcement of nondiscrimination policies and positive treatment of others who have revealed their identity” (Croteau et al., 2008, p. 541). The perception of support from colleagues and the workplace in general has also been shown to make LGBTQ+ employees feel safer to self-disclose (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins et al, 2007).

Mixed or inconsistent messaging (Compton, 2016) could make disclosure decisions even more complex for LGBTQ+ workers. Supportive policies being in place did not automatically mean those policies were upheld and that workplaces were free from discrimination. Connell (2012) found that LGBT teachers were concerned about self-disclosure in schools even when supportive policies were in place. LGBT teachers feared “quiet bias” (p. 175) because they felt that the personal attitudes of their colleagues did not align with legal protections (Connell, 2012). Affectionally diverse women reported that they were nervous to self-disclose in the workplace unless the workplace norms aligned with non-discrimination policies, or they felt protected by norms in the absence of a policy (Helens-Hart, 2017).
Self-disclosure decisions in the workplace were also driven by individual factors. To whom an individual was out outside of work (Griffith & Hebl, 2002) as well as past or present experiences with discrimination outside of work (Ragins, 2004) have been shown to influence self-disclosure in the workplace. LGB employees also felt safer to self-disclose if other LGB employees were visibly present in the workplace (Ragins et al., 2007). LGB employees who experienced self-integrity and other positive psychological states were motivated to self-disclose, particularly if those feelings were reinforced in a non-stigmatizing workplace (Croteau et al., 2008). Lesbian executives reported that self-disclosure was driven by a need to be authentic in the workplace, but also expressed concerns about not wanting to cause other issues by disclosing (Heintz, 2012). LGBQ+ workers did not always feel safe to self-disclose or choose to self-disclose in the workplace, but research suggested that disclosure across life domains could have positive outcomes (Lindsey et al., 2019).

The safety and ability to be their authentic selves across life domains has been shown to lead to overall greater life satisfaction for LGB workers (Lindsey et al., 2019). Gay and lesbian workers who disclosed more in the workplace experienced less dissonance between their private and professional selves (Day & Schoenrade, 2000). Increased outness in the workplace was also shown to be associated with increased job satisfaction for affectionally diverse workers (Ellis & Riggle, 1996) particularly in affirming workplaces (Tatum, 2018). Feelings of perceived support of self-disclosure by LGB workers (Beals et al., 2009; Legate et al., 2012) were also associated with decreased anger, depressive feelings, and increased self-esteem (Legate et al., 2012). Hoy-Ellis and Fredriksen-Goldsen (2016) found that self-disclosure could mediate the negative effects of internalized heterosexism and stress on LGB individuals’ health. While there were many benefits to workplace self-disclosure of LGBQ+ identity, the literature also pointed to a few
potential risks associated with disclosure decisions. Negotiating self-disclosure was not only a balancing act between varying degrees of disclosure (Williamson et al., 2017) but also a balancing act between the benefits and risks of each decision.

Attempting to manage varying degrees of self-disclosure required a lot of personal resources which took a toll on the individual (King et al., 2017; Malterud & Bjorkman, 2016). The repeated need to make disclosure decisions increased personal stress that compounded work stress, consuming extensive resources and leading to disengagement from work (DeJordy, 2008). Lesbian executives (Heintz, 2012) and LGB teachers (Gray, 2013) reported feeling that post self-disclosure their work was under extreme scrutiny. The executives shared that they coped with the scrutiny by over performing at work to compensate for the negative perceptions of their identities (Heintz, 2012). LGB people considered potential negative reactions when making disclosure decisions (Badgett & King, 1997) and the persistent fear of negative reactions has been shown to impede work satisfaction (Ragins et al., 2007). LGB workers who feared potential discrimination after self-disclosing reported experiencing increased stress, depression, irritation, and psychological strain (Ragins 2004; Ragins et al., 2007). The research supported fear about potential negative consequences of self-disclosure of LGBQ+ identity. LGBT employees reported feeling isolation, discrimination (D’Augelli & Grossman, 2001; McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2018), and even being threatened with violence or terminated (D’Augelli & Grossman, 2001) after disclosing identity in the workplace.

**Self-Concealment in the Workplace**

Self-concealment in the workplace warranted examination because the degree of workplace self-disclosure did not capture the complexity of workplace identity management (Croteau et al., 2008). Workplace identity management involved “numerous daily choices about
revealing and/or concealing sexual identity in the face of potential discrimination and hostility” (Lidderdale et al., 2007, p. 248). Gates (2014) asserted that LGB workers had high stigma consciousness and may expect to be stigmatized in the workplace. The expectation of being stigmatized as well as past negative experiences with disclosure could motivate LGBQ+ workers to conceal their identity (Clair et al., 2005). When LGBQ+ people worked in a context that reacted negatively to affectional identity, they adapted to the workplace through concealing their identity as a means of self-preservation (Tatum et al., 2017). The literature suggested self-concealment in the workplace was motivated by encountering new or less intimate social situations, job security and not wanting to cause a problem, having witnessed discrimination in the workplace, fearing that secure relationships would change, or that discrimination would happen covertly.

LGB workers reported using concealment more often when they interacted with clients or someone who may not know or assume they were LGB (King et al., 2017). LGBQ+ workers reported avoiding all topics related to sexuality or sexual identity because they felt it would jeopardize their job security or change workplace norms (Compton & Dougherty, 2017). Willis (2011) found that LGBQ workers were motivated to conceal because they had witnessed or experienced heteronormativity and discrimination in the workplace by coworkers or supervisors. When workplace relationships began, LGB workers unintentionally passed as heterosexual (Marrs & Staton, 2016) and out of fear of changing established positive relationships may conceal their identity (Dejordy, 2008). LGB workers also self-concealed because they worried supportive workplaces, even those with policies in place, were non-genuine and discrimination would continue covertly (Gates, 2014). LGBQ+ people may attempt to avoid occupations where
concealment was necessary or hard to maintain (Badgett & King, 1997) or they developed strategies to self-conceal when necessary.

Self-concealment required “constant and careful attention by self-monitoring conversations and behaviors” (Spradlin, 1998, pp. 598-599). Concealment strategies were reviewed previously in the identity management and self-concealment sections and strategies employed in the workplace will be discussed in this section. Passing, whether intentional or unintentional, active or passive, was the most well researched strategy in self-concealment literature. To pass as heterosexual, LGBQ+ workers made an effort to avoid topics or conversations associated with identity (Cass, 1979; Spradlin, 1998; Woods & Lucas, 1993) or used counterfeiting which involved intentionally creating a false heterosexual identity and providing personal details that feigned heterosexuality (Cass, 1979; Woods & Lucas, 1993). Shih et al. (2013) found that self-concealment could happen through identity switching. This strategy involved attempting to hide one’s identity by emphasizing other identities that were more acceptable or less stigmatized. Clair et al. (2005) called this discretion in which the individual attempted to make their stigmatized identity, in this case being LGBQ+, less prominent using “disidentifiers” (Goffman, 1963; Shih et al., 2013) which were identity cues that pointed to a more acceptable identity. Shih et al. (2013) also found that identity recategorization was used when employees sensed discrimination and tried to refocus their own minds to deemphasize a stigmatized identity. This could involve an LGBQ+ worker attempting to make one of their other identities more salient. Roberts (2011) observed this in a sample of gay men from diverse professions who concealed by downplaying their gay identity and emphasizing their professional identities in their presentation of themselves in the workplace. Participants felt that their professional identity would overrule their gay identity. A similar strategy was used when
LGBQ+ people concealed through avoiding referencing their personal lives in any way in the workplace (Button, 2004; Dejordy, 2008).

Self-concealment was often used as a coping strategy for stigmatization, but the use of self-concealment could backfire and negatively impact the stigmatized individual (Miller & Major, 2000). The use of identity management strategies could result in varying levels of identity integration in professional settings (Woods & Lucas, 1993) and strained personal relationships outside of work (Williamson et al., 2017). Fear was a common theme present in the concealment motivation literature, and fear that motivated concealment was significantly associated with work related stress and depression among LGB employees (Ragins et al., 2007). A study of lesbian physical education teachers found that concealment consumed a lot of energy and left participants unable to be fully present at work (Woods & Harbeck, 1992). Concealment has been shown to increase negative psychological distress among affectionally diverse employees (Clair et al., 2004; Croteau et al., 2008; Dejordy, 2008; Velez et al., 2013), particularly employees who already experienced discrimination and internalized heterosexism (Velez et al., 2013). Self-concealment in the workplace was associated with feelings of inauthenticity (Marrs & Staton, 2016; Meyer, 2003) and interfered with experiencing identity congruence (Croteau et al., 2008; Shih et al., 2013).

The Context of Counseling

This section will discuss self-concealment and self-disclosure in the unique context of the counseling workplace and counseling work. The highly contextualized nature of workplace identity management (Lidderdale et al., 2007; Ragins et al., 2007) warranted a context specific discussion of workplace identity management. The context of counseling work was particularly interesting because as a profession there was an established set of expectations and protocols for
the use of self-disclosure. Carroll et al. (2011) suggested that most counselors negotiated disclosure decisions every day. This presented unique challenges for LGBQ+ individuals working as counselors who may already have their own standards of practice for self-disclosure in their personal lives. Self-concealment overall was an under-researched phenomenon and has been minimally explored in a counseling context.

Working as an LGBQ+ counselor negotiating identity management was complex. Carroll et al. (2011) explored the nuanced experiences of LGB counselors and found that identity management among the participants mirrored the process of managing stigmatized identity experienced by all LGB people. The potential need to self-disclose identity to show expertise in working with LGB clients was juxtaposed against being accused of flaunting their identity. The authors also noted that concealing identity “undermin[ed] counselor feelings of authenticity and den[ied] clients meaningful access to the counselor’s personal identity” (Carroll et al., 2011, p. 146). Liddle (1996) also suggested that concealing through passing and presenting a false self, inhibited the counselor’s participation in the counseling process. The unique challenges experienced by LGBQ+ counselors negotiating disclosure and concealment are explored in depth in this section.

**Self-Disclosure as a Counseling Technique**

The literature about the use of self-disclosure in counseling made a clear distinction between disclosures and self-disclosures. Disclosures were defined as thoughts or feelings the therapist had that were related to the client and the counseling work which the counselor chose to divulge, and self-disclosures involved factual information about the counselor (Hill & Knox, 2001; Farber, 2006; Moore & Jenkins, 2012). Hill and O’Brien (1999) referred to disclosures of immediacy, referring to immediate thoughts, feelings, and experiences by the counselor of the
client in session. Through the remainder of the literature review and the study, the term self-disclosure refers to personal information about the counselor that are not thoughts or feelings of immediacy.

The use of self-disclosure in counseling was a well-researched topic, but conclusions about the use of this sometimes controversial tool varied widely. Satterly (2004) noted that some of the common factors that influenced self-disclosure were the counselor’s theoretical orientation, transference/countertransference, transparency, and the demographics of the client and counselor. Matthews (1988) found that counselors also self-disclosed to promote universality or to reality test their clients. Weiner (1983) stated that self-disclosure was the use of self in counseling while remaining in a professional role, to show the client that the counselor was also a human being. Use of self-disclosure was significant in the counseling process for Weiner (1983) because it showed that the counselor was more than just that professional role and promoted openness and genuineness. Myers and Hayes (2006) found that counselors were rated more positively, and sessions were described as deeper, when a counselor used self-disclosure in a positive counselor-client alliance. Knox and Hill (2003) noted that self-disclosure of values in the beginning of a counselor client relationship could assist in making a decision about goodness of fit. While counselors were trained to use self-disclosure minimally, it could be used as an opportunity to model appropriate self-disclosure (Knox & Hill, 2003; Mahalik et al., 2000). Counselors used self-disclosure to communicate to the client the importance of the relationship between them (Petersen, 2002). Counselors who worked with clients who were culturally different from them may have needed to self-disclose their identity to promote trust in the counselor client relationship (Sue & Sue, 1999).
The previously mentioned factors that could influence self-disclosure all involved active, typically verbal self-disclosure, but there could be information that was disclosed through the client’s observation of the counselor. Self-disclosure was inevitable when a client observed a counselor’s demographics such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, or physical limitations (Mahlik et al., 2000). Counselors could also self-disclose through their clothing choices, office décor, practice location, or populations served (Mahlik et al., 2000). Elder (2005) noted that it was essential to acknowledge events or changes that occurred in the counselor’s life that may be visible to the client such as pregnancy or injury. Self-disclosure happened on a continuum from what was immediately observable to the client to active verbal self-disclosure of previously unknown information (Mahlik et al., 2000). Whether the self-disclosure was observable to the client or a choice by the counselor to actively self-disclose, self-disclosure decisions often happened spontaneously in response to client needs (Petersen, 2002). Counselors had to consider costs and benefits of self-disclosure as well as the ethical implications of each self-disclosure and how the client reacted to the self-disclosure (Petersen, 2002).

The literature suggested that there were more potential benefits than costs when self-disclosure was carefully considered and done in service to the client (Knox & Hill, 2003). Barrett and Berman (2001) conducted a study that asked counselors to self-disclose in response to a client disclosure, and the clients reported decreased distress and increased positive feelings about the counselor. Self-disclosure has been shown to help normalize client experiences (Farber, 2006; Knox & Hill, 2003; Lane & Hull, 1990; Mahalik et al., 2000), demonstrate counselor authenticity (Robitschek & McCarthy, 1991; Rogers, 1951), and decrease power differentials in counseling (Jourard, 1971). Self-disclosure also exposed clients to new perspectives (Knox et al., 1997) and facilitated development of client insight (Knox & Hill, 2003). Self-disclosure also had
the potential, particularly if the possible negative impact had not been considered prior to disclosure, to shift the focus of counseling away from the client (Barrett & Berman, 2001; Hill & Knox, 2001; Moore & Jenkins, 2012). Self-disclosure could also alter the boundaries of the counseling relationship or clients could react negatively to the counselor’s level of openness (Hill & Knox, 2001; Hill et al., 2018). Many of the costs and benefits of disclosure were focused on the client, but Hill et al. (2018) noted that self-disclosure posed the risk of making the counselor feel too vulnerable.

**Self-Disclosure of Identity**

Affectional identity being a potentially stigmatized and concealable identity typically meant that self-disclosure decisions rested with the counselor (Moore & Jenkins, 2012). However, as previously discussed, clients could infer a lot of personal information from a counselor based on personal attributes. Russell (2006) noted that clients could determine many things about their counselors from how they were in session, and in the larger world. Ongoing unspoken self-disclosure, even about the counselor’s social and political beliefs, was embedded in the relationship between the counselor and client (Russell, 2006). The counselor’s affectional identity was not a neutral factor in counseling (Guthrie, 2006) and the responsibility of assessing how the client would receive the counselor’s identity fell on the counselor (Moore & Jenkins, 2012). This responsibility added an additional layer of consideration for LGBQ+ counselors negotiating self-disclosure decisions.

The literature suggested that self-disclosure of identity, particularly for LGBQ+ counselors, could have positive or negative effects and was relevant to some clients but irrelevant to others. In a study with lesbian clients, Galgut (2005) found that it was important to almost every client that the counselor self-disclosed their identity. Hanson (2005) noted that
counselor self-disclosure was experienced as helpful, particularly for women, lesbian, and gay clients. A study of LGB counselors’ self-disclosure found that “all of the participants experienced it as enhancing in (i) removing barriers and creating credibility, (ii) having a powerful effect on the client, and (iii) feeling empowered and gaining feedback” (Jeffery & Tweed, 2014, p. 44). Moore & Jenkins (2012) found that self-disclosure by lesbian and gay counselors was typically received positively and resulted in a strengthening of the counselor-client relationship. Bafiti et al. (2018) examined when self-disclosure was important in the counselor-client relationship and found that potential clients did not consider it in choosing a counselor, but later made assumptions about the counselor’s identity. Similarly, Evans and Barker (2010), found that for most participants in a survey, self-disclosure of identity was not important or irrelevant, but participants still made assumptions about the counselor’s identity. The counselor’s affectional identity was present in the relationship even in the absence of self-disclosure (Evans & Barker, 2010).

LGBQ+ counselors considered a range of different factors when negotiating self-disclosure decisions because no model for negotiating self-disclosure of identity in counseling existed (Satterly, 2006). Frost (1998) framed this negotiation for gay male counselors as experiencing “conflicting imperatives: internally feeling the need to affirm his gay positive identity, while feeling the need to remain therapeutically aloof; externally feeling a pull from the [client] to disclose, while feeling a pull to remain apart and opaque” (p. 6). Moore and Jenkins (2012) in a similar study of gay male counselors found that they experienced high anxiety, feared being judged, and wanted to protect themselves from unaccepting clients. Feelings experienced by LGBQ+ counselors negotiating self-disclosure may mirror identity management negotiations outside of counseling.
The available literature suggested that motivations for self-disclosure varied based on many different factors. Deborah Coolhart (2005), a counselor and counselor educator, wrote that she was motivated to self-disclose to clients who made negative comments about queer people. She felt that clients expected her to support their comments and that she self-disclosed because her feelings about the clients’ comments impacted her ability to work with them effectively. Gay counselors in the Moore and Jenkins (2012) study reported wanting to use self-disclosure because clients repeatedly assumed they were heterosexual. Satterly (2006) reported that gay therapists considered the following factors before self-disclosing: professional identity (such as working with the LGBQ+ population), organizational norms, what they believed about self-disclosure in counseling, the client potentially already knowing their identity, a desire for authenticity, the need to affirm their identity particularly when they were assumed to be heterosexual, their professional boundaries, and their social identities. A potential benefit of using self-disclosure noted by Jeffery and Tweed (2014) was that self-disclosure could help consolidate a gay counselor’s personal and professional self. Client and counselor factors as well as the context of each counselor client relationship were considerations in self-disclosure decisions. Self-disclosure of identity in counseling was weighed differently than other decisions and each decision was considered individually for costs and benefits (Jeffery & Tweed, 2014).

**Self-Disclosure to LGBQ+ Clients**

Self-disclosure of LGBQ+ identity by a counselor to LGBQ+ clients presented some slightly different challenges than with heterosexual clients, and counselors considered different factors before making a decision. Frommer (2000) described specific emotional issues experienced by gay and lesbian counselors because of their past experiences with negotiating disclosure. The specific issues the counselor had dealt with and different identity management
strategies they have employed, consciously or unconsciously impacted the self-disclosure decision making process with clients (Frommer, 2000). Coolhart (2005) stated that LGBQ+ counselors may disclose to LGBQ+ clients to communicate a personal understanding of oppression, to communicate a shared experience, or to model that internalized negative feelings could heal. LGBQ+ counselors may also self-disclose to give clients a positive and healthy role model (Cabaj, 1996; Coolhart, 2005; Pearlman, 1996). Frommer (2000) noted that self-disclosure to clients experiencing isolation could also be a helpful tool. Sometimes counselors self-disclosed before meeting clients, such as on their website or marketing materials, to indicate that they were a safe person for LGBQ+ clients (Cabaj, 1996; Coolhart, 2005). Pearlman (1996) shared that she was motivated to self-disclose to clients to not feel fraudulent because a lesbian client was unaware that her approach was informed by her own personal experience as a lesbian woman.

Non-Disclosure

This section will discuss literature relevant to this study that discussed motivation for LGBQ+ counselors to not employ self-disclosure but that did not specifically discuss concealment. Counselor self-disclosure posed many risks because it was irreversible (McWilliams, 1994). Confidentiality was a concern as well because the counselor could not guarantee that the client would uphold the same standards as they did (Sweezy, 2005). LGBQ+ counselors who self-disclosed risked being outing in other areas of their life (Coolhart, 2005; Moore & Jenkins, 2012). The literature suggested that reasons for not self-disclosing were related to considerations or fears about clients and personal experiences of not being able to self-disclose. Self-disclosure was not used to keep the session focused on the client, maintain boundaries (Simone et al., 1998), because the client could view the self-disclosure as a sexual
advance, because of the client’s religious beliefs (Moore & Jenkins, 2012), and because of an overall fear of the client reacting negatively (Moore & Jenkins, 2012; Porter et al., 2015). Participants in the Moore and Jenkins (2012) study reported not self-disclosing their identity due to a fear of increased anxiety, internalized homophobia, and previous experiences with homophobia. Porter et al. (2015) found that gay counselors identified protective motivations for not self-disclosing. Participants shared experiences of considering participating in homophobic remarks by a client and feeling that homophobia from a client had activated previous protective defenses.

Self-Concealment in Counseling

A review of the literature produced only one study that mentioned self-concealment among affectionally diverse counselors. Jeffery and Tweed (2014) conducted a qualitative study using interpretive phenomenological analysis to interview eight LGB mental health clinicians about their experiences with self-disclosure. The damaging costs of self-concealment among this group of clinicians was an unexpected finding to the researchers. Most of the participants in this study reported exerting significant effort to conceal their identities. Self-concealment was related to training that discouraged self-disclosure, particularly about identity. Participants felt they had control over the choice to self-disclose while simultaneously experiencing negative physical and psychological outcomes. The counselors in this study indicated that self-concealment always impacted the counselor negatively and sometimes had a negative impact on the counselor client relationship.

Participants described concealment as a loss of self and a “lack of wholeness” (p.44). One participant spoke of having a “false professional identity” (p. 45) and others spoke of losing parts of their identity that they felt were fully integrated. One participant spoke of active self-
concealment as the process of creating lies to prevent her client from knowing her identity and the significant distress this caused. One participant shared that clients could be impacted because “feeling the need to conceal represented a lack of intimacy or genuineness within the relationship” (p. 44). Jeffery and Tweed (2014) called for further exploration of concealment in saying “the psychological wellbeing of clients is paramount, but the wellbeing of the clinician should not be overlooked, and the powerful impact revealed here warrants further exploration.” (p. 47).

The study was conducted in the United Kingdom, a different context socially and politically, particularly given recent events in the United States’ sociopolitical landscape. The Jeffery and Tweed (2014) study initially examined self-disclosure among LGB counselors and information about self-concealment was an unexpected result. Additionally, the occupation of counselor had different meaning compared to the present study. The counselors in Jeffery and Tweed (2014) were not practicing in the same way counselors did in the context of this study, and some of the participants did not have clinical training in counseling or psychotherapy. The different context, participant criteria, and framing of self-concealment through the lens of self-disclosure in the Jeffery and Tweed (2014) study indicated that there may only be one study that examined the phenomenon of self-concealment.

**Theoretical Foundations of the Study**

This was a qualitative, exploratory study that was guided by hermeneutic phenomenology and informed by Meyer’s (2003) minority stress theory. A queer theory lens was used to unearth the experiences of LGBQ+ counselors by “queering” their narratives. “To queer something [was] to analyze a situation or a text to determine the relationship between sexuality, power, gender, and conceptions of normal and deviant, insider and outsider” (Dilley, 1999, p. 458). Myself as
the researcher was also positioned queerly in conducting the study because I recognized that I could not fully escape the implications of my identity as queer man or the heteronormative context in which I developed (Honeychurch, 1996). What situated this study in social constructionist theory was the work of Goffman (1963) about concealable stigmatized identities. Van Manen (1997) stated that qualitative researchers were drawn to a phenomenon, an “abiding concern” (p. 31) in which they were interested. I was drawn to this work through my own experiences with self-concealment in my personal and professional life as a counselor. I turned to the literature and found that the voices of LGBQ+ counselors negotiating self-concealment were not present, and that warranted thoughtful exploration.

**Phenomenology**

Creswell (2007) stated that phenomenology described what participants had in common as they experienced a particular phenomenon. This study specifically sought to unearth the common themes among LGBQ+ counselors who were experiencing self-concealment in their counseling work. Phenomenological studies were meant to describe the meaning that participants made of their lived experience (Creswell, 2007). Van Manen (1997) stated that phenomenology was not a set of rules for conducting research, but the interaction of several research activities. Phenomenology did not just involve a description but involved the researcher mediating between the lived experiences and the essence of the whole (Van Manen, 1997). As the researcher in this study, I mediated between the participants’ lived experiences and the essence of the whole by categorizing the units of meaning according to Van Manen’s (1997) lived existentials body, time, space, and relation. Hycner’s (1985) guidelines for phenomenological interpretation were used to thematically analyze the lived experiences of LGBQ+ counselors and unearth the meaning of experiencing self-concealment.


**Minority Stress Theory**

Meyer (2003) asserted that concealing one’s identity was both a protective factor and a proximal stressor. Self-concealment reduced the visibility of a stigmatized identity, but over time could expose the individual to increased psychological stress (Meyer, 2003). LGBQ+ people experienced daily and repeated minority stress because of the social context of heteronormativity which devalued and stigmatized non-heterosexual identity (Herek, 1992; Herek et al., 1997; Warner, 1991). This level of increased stress exposed minority individuals to greater risk for psychopathology (Hatzenbuehler, 2009). Self-concealment has been demonstrated to be used as a coping mechanism for minority identity-related stress but could also become a stressor itself (Meyer, 2003). Minority stress theory informed how self-concealment was conceptualized as possibly having a strong protective purpose but a potentially detrimental impact on the individual, and their work as a counselor.

**Queer Theory**

Dilley (1999) provided three tenets of queer theory in qualitative research: examining queer lived experience, juxtaposition of that lived experience against the norm, and examining how these lives experiences are othered. Queer theory was not a means of explaining the oppression of queer identities, but about interrogating the structures that created the oppression (Seidman, 1994). Sedgwick (1990) argued that the Western world shaped an understanding of queer identity that was based on an “out” versus “closeted” binary. This study used queer theory to challenge this binary understanding of identity that positioned self-concealment as a sign of immature identity. Queer theory allowed the researcher to interrogate the power structure that made self-concealment a necessary management strategy, which was heteronormative culture.
Queer theory included “any form(s) of communication used to convey an understanding of one’s world” (Dilley, 1999, p. 459). This study used the voice that participants gave to their experiences to capture the essence of the phenomenon of self-concealment and have the participants’ experiences reflected in the literature. Creswell (2007) asserted that queer theory explored how identities “perform[ed]” (p. 29) in social settings. A queered perspective allowed the researcher to explore how LGBQ+ counselors performed self-concealment in the social setting of the workplace, including counselor and client relationships.

**Social Constructionist Theory**

This inquiry was grounded in social constructionist theory because identity was socially constructed (Goffman, 1963; Rust, 1993; Troiden, 1984) and knowledge was socially constructed (Hughes, 2017; Merriam 2009). Earlier in this chapter, the stage models of development were reviewed, and they asserted that self-concealment was an identity development stage or process, when it was an identity management strategy. These models positioned self-concealment of a stigmatized LGBQ+ identity as a step in development but also something that prevented LGBQ+ people from reaching identity integration. Social constructionist theory challenged this in recognizing that construction of identity was a personal interpretation of available constructs (Rust, 1993). In a heteronormative context, the primary constructs available for LGBQ+ people were stigmatized because they were not heterosexual. Goffman (1963) discussed this noting that identities were not stigmatizing themselves, stigma was an attribute given to those identities based on social norms. For the purposes of this study, LGBQ+ counselors may have employed self-concealment as a response to being stigmatized in a heteronormative workplace environment. The next chapter will discuss the purpose of the study,
the theoretical framework of the study, methodology, sampling strategies, participant recruitment, research design, data collection, and data analysis.
Chapter Summary

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ+) individuals and communities have been examined from many different perspectives and different language has been used in various research studies. The language an individual chose to identify themselves with was based on the meaning the individuals held for that specific label. This study used the acronym LGBQ+ to be inclusive of a wide range of non-heterosexual identities that make up this community. The experiences of Transgender counselors were not explored in this study because the literature indicated that their motivation to self-conceal warranted its own inquiry.

LGBQ+ identities developed in a heteronormative context that privileged heterosexuality and stigmatized LGBQ+ identities. The stage models of identity development primarily organized development as a linear process that began before the individual recognized they were LGBQ+ and ended with a fully integrated “out” identity. More recent non-linear models recognized that complete outness was not always the goal for the developing individual and recognized the impact of the heteronormative context.

Coming out was a complex construct and process. Coming out was previously conceptualized as an identity development stage but was reconceptualized as an identity management process. Identity management was the ongoing and repeated process of managing a stigmatized identity across social contexts. LGBQ+ people developed strategies to manage their stigmatized identities in often ambiguous social contexts. Two of the primary strategies that were employed were self-disclosure and self-concealment. These two strategies have long been conceptualized as opposites of an identity management spectrum, but were complex, separate, and related constructs.
LGBQ+ counselors existed in a space between self-disclosure and self-concealment where they attempted to interpret cues from social environments about whether they would face discrimination and rejection. Self-disclosure as a counseling technique presented unique challenges for LGBQ+ counselors because of their personal experiences negotiating self-disclosure outside of work. Self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors was an under-researched phenomenon that warranted thoughtful exploration through qualitative inquiry.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of LGBQ+ counselors engaging in the identity management practice of self-concealment in the workplace. Identity management and self-concealment are well-researched phenomena, while the experiences of counselors engaging in self-concealment and the possible affects this has on the practice of counseling, counseling relationships, and counselors themselves is unknown. What is present in the literature is a clear call to further investigate self-concealment (Dejordy, 2008; Jeffery & Tweed, 2014; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). This study seeks to bring to light a richer understanding of the experience of self-concealment, with particular attention to what self-concealment looks and feels like among LGBQ+ counselors. This inquiry is important in the field of counseling because of the potential negative effects that self-concealment can have on practicing counselors, their clients, and the profession.

Research Design

This study used hermeneutic phenomenology grounded in social constructionist theory (Goffman, 1963; Rust, 1993) Queer theory (Dilley, 1999; Sedgwick, 1990), and Minority Stress theory (Meyer, 2003) to understand the experiences of LGBQ+ counselors self-concealing their identity in their counseling work. Qualitative research, particularly when looking at affectionally diverse populations, focuses on finding and expressing the richness of in-depth experiences with specific phenomena (Singh & Shelton, 2011). Qualitative research approaches have been shown to be particularly useful with these communities because of the vast within community diversity of this population (Dowsett, 2007; Sing & Shelton, 2011). Hycner’s (1985) guidelines for phenomenological data analysis were used to analyze and unearth meaning from the collected
data. This section of the chapter will explore the rationale behind the qualitative research design, sampling, participation criteria, and participant recruitment.

**Qualitative Inquiry**

This study used a qualitative design to grasp the essence of the experiences of participants with the phenomenon of self-concealment (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 1997). The phenomenon of self-concealment was identified by the researcher as an experience that was missing from the professional counseling literature. The researcher used the qualitative approach of phenomenology to develop a description and an understanding of a group of individuals’ experiences with self-concealment (Creswell, 2007). Through collecting and analyzing the lived experiences the researcher sought not to explain what self-concealment is, but to unearth the meaning of experiencing and engaging in self-concealment by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomena that are under-researched or not well understood are most suited for qualitative inquiry (Carpenter, 1995). Self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors was under-researched, and the literature has not demonstrated an understanding of how self-concealment was experienced among this population. Through qualitative inquiry aimed at capturing the meaning of the experiences of LGBQ+ counselors, the essence of self-concealment in their counseling work emerged.

**Sample**

As stated previously, the purpose of qualitative phenomenological inquiry was capturing the essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen 1997). The phenomenon this study sought the essence of was the identity management strategy of self-concealment. This study specifically sought an understanding of the enactment of self-concealment among counselors who are also managing their identities as LGBQ+ people. The goal of this approach to research
is not necessarily generalizability of the results, but an understanding of a phenomenon that leads to additional questions. Self-concealment is not a well understood experience in existing literature due to conflicting definitions of what self-concealing means, and the framing of studies about self-concealment through the lens of self-disclosure. To unearth this understanding, and describe the essence of a phenomenon, it is essential that all participants have experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The researcher recognized that self-concealment may not be a strategy that every LGBQ+ counselor employs, however the literature on identity development and management indicates that self-concealment is a common experience among LGBQ+ people in the workplace. This commonality suggests that LGBQ+ people working as counselors likely employ the strategy of self-concealment in their work.

Getting at the essence of a phenomenon, required gathering data about daily lived experiences, often from a small sample of participants (Creswell, 2007). Specific sample sizes varied among qualitative research traditions. Creswell (2007) suggested five to twenty-five participants and Morse and Field (1995) recommended at least six participants for a phenomenological study. This study determined the sample size based on saturation of the data. Participants were recruited until data analysis yielded no additional emergent themes from additional participants. Recruitment was ended for this study when saturation was reached at 10 participants.

**Purposeful Sample**

Purposeful sampling was used in this study to directly recruit individuals who may be experiencing the phenomenon being studied. A recruitment email (Appendix C) was distributed through a professional counseling listserv that engages counselors and counselor educators, in a graduate student group for counselors, and through the researcher’s professional network.
Snowball sampling, which identifies participants from individuals who may know someone who meets criteria and has experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) was used by asking participants to share information about the study with other LGBQ+ counselors whom they knew might be interested in participating. Snowball sampling was used to specifically recruit individuals who may share professional space with other participants who met criteria and to address challenges with recruiting participants who may have not publicly disclosed their identity (Guittar & Rayburn, 2016).

The researcher distributed the recruitment flyer through a national listerv and national graduate student group to attempt to recruit a diverse sample. Among non-heterosexual communities there is great diversity of identity, but the researcher also sought a racially and geographically diverse sample. The researcher also sought a sample that was diverse in terms of approaches to counseling, counseling settings worked in, and cultural norms related to affectional identity. Currently, all identity management happens in a heterosexist context (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002) and while that experience is shared, perceptions of what is appropriate disclosure of identity can vary based on context (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002; Miller et al., 2019). While it is a separate construct from self-disclosure, self-concealment happens in this same heterosexist context. The shared context suggests that enacting self-concealment may vary dependent on individual context, stressing the importance of a contextually diverse sample to accurately capture the phenomenon.

**Recruitment of Participants**

The primary method used by the researcher to recruit a purposeful sample were dissemination of an email (Appendix C) through a professional counselor education listserv and networking in the researcher’s own professional network. These two methods were chosen due to
the membership of the listserv and professional organizations consisting primarily of practicing counselors and counselor educators who may also be working as practicing counselors or be associated with practicing counselors. The email (Appendix C) sought participants who would meet criteria for participation and asked that individuals who are not interested or may not meet criteria share the information with those who may be interested. Networking within the professional organizations sought participants who may be interested in participating or who may know other members who would be interested in participating.

Snowball sampling was used as well due to its’s viability in meeting challenges of gathering a diverse LGBQ sample (Guittar & Rayburn, 2016). Recruitment of LGBQ+ participants is challenging due to participants needing to self-identify which is a risk for individuals who have a stigmatized identity. Snowball sampling with this population is predicated on the idea that individuals who have self-identified to participate in the study may also know others who have self-disclosed (Guittar & Rayburn, 2016) and would be willing to share their experience.

Criteria for Participation

The criteria for participation in the study required that interested individuals have completed a master’s degree in counseling or a related field. Participants had to be working as a practicing counselor or therapist. Finally, to meet criteria for participation, potential participants had to feel comfortable to self-identify to the researcher as LGBQ+. Participants were asked to self-identify due to the wide-ranging diversity of personal identifying labels among LGBQ+ people.
Data Collection

The data in this study were composed of themes explicated from the shared narratives of the participants about their experiences as LGBQ+ counselors and their interactions in and with the counseling workplace. The narratives were gathered through semi-structured interviews and a focus group which took place virtually. This section discusses the interview procedures, the questions asked of each participant to guide the interviews and focus groups, and how the data was interpreted and managed.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The individual interviews as well as the focus group were semi-structured to ensure credibility of the research by maintaining continuity across interviews while allowing participants to share meaningful narratives. The researcher used the semi-structured approach to maintain “unobtrusive control” (Gillham, 2000, p. 45). Unobtrusive control allows the researcher to control the direction and pace of the interview or group while allowing for flexibility. This level of flexibility is important in qualitative inquiry, because it allows for additional questions to clarify information shared by the participants and space for the participants to feel unrestrained in sharing meaningful narratives.

Transcription

The interview and focus group recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were then reviewed while listening to the recordings to ensure accuracy and for the researcher to be grounded in the text. During the interviews, the researcher took field notes which were later combined into the margins of the typed transcriptions as suggested by Hycner (1985). Each participant was asked to select a pseudonym for themselves to protect their identity in the transcription.
Interview Questions

The researcher ensured that each interview was semi-structured by establishing a set of questions to be asked in each interview. These questions provided the interviews with structure as well as ensured that the content of the interviews remained focused on the purpose of the study. The following questions were used as focusing points for the interview:

1. What internal experiences lead you to engage in self-concealment of your affectional orientation in the workplace?
2. Who knows about your identity?
3. How do you decide to not conceal your affectional orientation with your clients?
   Coworkers?
4. What are the differences in how you conceal between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ clients?
   Coworkers?
5. How do you conceal your affectional orientation in your counseling work and relationships?
6. How does concealing your affectional orientation affect your work as a counselor?
7. How does concealing your affectional orientation emotionally affect you?
8. What are the risks associated with concealment in your counseling work?
9. What are the protective factors associated with concealment in your counseling work?
10. How do you experience the relationships between clients and coworkers differently?
11. Is there anything else about your experience that I didn’t cover that I should know about?
12. How was it for you to talk about concealment experiences with me?

The Instrument
Qualitative inquiry required that the researcher recognize their role as an instrument of data collection and the impact this can have on data gathering, data analysis, and presentation of the results (Creswell, 2007). This section includes a description of the researcher’s position in relation to the research and a reflexive account of how the researcher acknowledged his impact on the participants, the research, and the readers (Creswell, 2007). The researcher adopted what Strauss and Corbin (1994) called theoretical sensitivity to “challenge [his] own assumptions and delve below [his] own experiences” (p.76). The researcher recognized his insider status as having shared identity with the participants and reflected on how shared identity does not always equate to shared experience (Rasmussen, 2006).

**Researcher as the Instrument**

Conducting qualitative research required that as an instrument, both having created the context in which the data was collected and collecting the data myself, I acknowledge, examine, and manage my influence on the research process, the data, and the participants. I chose to do this through a self-reflexive account of my identity and experience with the phenomenon of self-concealment to give the reader a clear understanding of the location of my knowledge claims (Cassell et al., 2009). First, I acknowledged my embodied identities as a white queer cisgender counselor (Allen, 2010). I disclosed my identities not to communicate what knowledge I can produce or what I am privy to, but to position myself in the context of a queer counselor who engages in self-concealment while retaining white and cisgender privilege. My position means I have experience with the phenomenon in the larger heteronormative context that simultaneously privileges the identity perceived by others if I self-conceal and stigmatizes me if I disclose. Disclosing my identity through this reflexive account preserved the credibility of the research.
I first reflected on what brought me to this inquiry, and it was not that I am a queer man or a counselor, but that I am this particular queer counselor with my particular experience (Sedgwick, 1990, 2008). Self-concealment of my queer identity is so present in my life that I was not aware of all the ways in which I concealed my identity until I critically examined my experiences to prepare for this research. I have changed the way I dress, act, talk, and be myself to prevent other people from perceiving that I might be queer. This was a critical revelation for me, that I was not trying to make myself look straight, I was trying to make other people believe I was straight. My experiences as a queer counselor engaging in self-concealment are highly contextualized, and while I may share commonalities the participants, I do not have greater authority to find meaning from the collected data because of my experiences (Allen, 2010; McDonald, 2013). Through the lens of intersectional reflexivity (Jones, 2010) I examined how my multiple different intersecting identities influence my social position to challenge the misconception that these identities privilege my relationship to knowledge (Allen, 2010) about queer counselor self-concealment.

I became aware of how I managed my identity about a year into my work as a practicing counselor. I worked in an office that was directly adjacent to a large college campus and the walk to and from my car everyday took me down a street of houses where I knew straight men lived. Reflecting on that time, I realized I perceived that straight men lived there who would be critically evaluating how I presented my masculinity as I passed their houses each morning and afternoon. At the time, it did not matter that they likely did not notice me as I walked by and that there were women living on this street as well. What mattered was that this experience was familiar to me because of my experience being a closeted queer student at a large university. The script I had created for what happens when you’re in that environment made me change how I
presented myself. This became most salient for me because of my lunch box. I carried a lunch box each day that I loved, but that because it was brightly colored and had been marketed toward women, it looked like a purse. I became aware of how someone might notice that I was carrying a “purse” and I felt like that put me at risk for verbal threats or actual violence. I caught myself changing the way I carried that lunch box or putting it in another bag until I reached the safety of my office.

When my concealment was brought into my awareness, I became hyper aware of where else I might be concealing my queer identity. At this time some of my clients knew that I was queer and everyone in my office knew about my identity. It is likely that many people who did not work within my agency knew or assumed my identity because of my clinical interests in working with LGBTQ+ clients. I had even disclosed my identity at the interview prior to being hired as test to see if I would be supported as a queer clinician. The dynamic where my concealment and disclosure varied was with my clients. All my LGBTQ+ clients knew about my identity because they had requested to work with a queer therapist, or I reflected their disclosure of identity with my own. Some clients I believe knew because of the posters and resources in my office. Some clients knew I had a male partner because I had used informational disclosures. When I evaluated who it was that I was concealing with I came to recognize that I was primarily concealing my identity from clients whom I assumed to be straight men.

I assumed my clients’ straightness because they aligned with an archetype of masculinity that I associated with straightness and because I am not immune from perpetuating heteronormativity. I noticed that when I would work with these clients, I might sit in a way that I thought would make my clients believe I was straight. I can remember a particular client that caused such anxiety for me that I took my jewelry off before the appointment. I never went
through with it, but there were many times that I considered removing my “everyone is welcome here” rainbow sign and my queer and trans resources from my bulletin board. I found myself wondering if the décor in my office, which was much homier and had more plants than some other offices would give away my identity. I now realize that for some clients, I passively concealed because my clients assumed that I was straight. The longer I reflected, I realized that some of the behaviors stemmed to my childhood when I would “straighten” myself to make sure that my parents and friends never had a reason to think I was not straight by dressing, acting, and talking in ways that I thought would convey my straightness. I must reiterate that I engaged in these various concealment behaviors because I never wanted to give any straight person around me a chance to stigmatize me or make me feel unsafe by even questioning my identity.

The impact of constantly having to manage my identity affected me both personally and in my counseling work. I prevented myself from forming relationship with peers that I perceived to be straight and never allowed anyone that I thought might not understand close enough to me to know me. I created an entire other persona that I let the world see to protect the terrified person underneath that persona. This prevented me from being my authentic self with the clients that aligned with the archetype of masculinity I described previously. I felt that if I was too much of myself, they would see me negatively, and this prevented me from fully engaging in counseling relationships with those clients. I distanced myself from these clients because I was afraid that being authentic in my queer identity would expose me to stigmatization. Distancing myself only reinforced feelings of inauthenticity and because I felt inauthentic in my counseling work, I questioned my abilities as a clinician.

My personal experiences with self-concealment had the potential to introduce substantial bias into the research. The introduction of bias began prior to the creation of the research context
because I recognized a need for research in this area based on my own experience with the phenomenon. The research questions and literature review were shaped by my social position as a queer person who experiences stigma because our social position informs our experience of the world (McDonald, 2013). I addressed this bias through by continued engagement in reflexive practice and by grounding the research study in queer theory. Queer theory maintains that qualitative researchers attend to the different ways in which identity was experienced among LGBTQ+ people (Cannon, 2007) and how sexuality intersected with other identities (Jones, 2015) which ensured that I was not viewing the problem solely through my own lens. Finlay (2008) called this “reflexivity as intersubjective reflection” (p. 8), which involves the researcher critically evaluating their emotional investment in the research. This research was deeply personal to my experience as a queer counselor, and not attending to this emotional investment could have biased the results of the study in favor of my need to have my experiences validated.

Prior to beginning the study and engaging in reflexive practice, I believed it was important that I as a queer person do this research because only I could understand the nuanced phenomenon being studied. The reality is that I understand self-concealment as I experience it but being Queer does not allow me to objectively understand all experiences of self-concealment better than a non-queer researcher. Reflexivity challenges the idea that my research would carry more weight than research done by a straight counselor because I share a part of my identity with the participants (hooks, 1989; McDonald, 2013). In addition to reflexive writing throughout the study, to address this bias I grounded the research in queer theory, social constructionist theory, and minority stress theory to create a lens through which to interpret the results. Having been the instrument that collected the data, it is inevitable that my identity will have influenced the results in some way (Moore & Jenkins, 2012).
A final area where I saw the potential for bias was the reporting of the results. All writing is positioned and reflects our interpretation of our world (Creswell, 2007). I went to great lengths to ensure that the reported results reflected the interactive process between myself and the participants (Gilgun, 2005) and gave voice to participant experiences without making assumptions based on their identities (McDonald, 2013). I employed my committee and the participants themselves to verify that the units of meaning that emerged from the data reflected participant experiences. I also journaled through the course of the research process to address the impact of the research on myself and the participants (Veroff & DiStefano, 2002) and to continue managing my bias which is detailed in the next section.

Something worth noting in this section emerged from the participant interviews related to reflexivity. While my experience as a queer counselor does not make the researcher more credible, participants shared that they felt more comfortable to share their experiences with me because prior to the study they believed that I was queer. Participants shared that they thought I was doing the research because I had experience with the phenomenon as a queer person. One participant also mentioned that they felt safe to participate because they saw that I had my pronouns in my email signature and a banner indicating that I was a member of SAIGE, division of the American Counseling Association (ACA), that advocates for sexual, affectional, and gender diverse clients. Participants would have been less likely to participate in the study had they not perceived that I was queer.

**Researcher Note Taking and Journaling**

The researcher took notes during each interview to document participant behaviors that were not captured in the audio recording. These notes were then combined with the verbatim transcriptions. Following each interview, the researcher journaled his initial thoughts,
impressions, reactions, and curiosities to monitor and address the potential introduction of researcher bias. The journals were reviewed prior to the explication of data. Journaling while conducting qualitative inquiry is an effort made by the researcher to maintain what Haraway (1988) called objective vision. Objective vision is used by the researcher to understand their positionality in the research through reflecting on how the researcher influences the creation of the research. Journaling is also done to ensure the researcher reflects on their personal experience with and biases about the phenomenon being studied. This is particularly important if the researcher has lived experience with the phenomenon. Journaling is the means through which the researcher continuously exercised reflexivity throughout the researcher process. Reflexivity through journaling allowed the researcher to consider his own experience with self-concealment of his identity and how this contributed to the creation of the research context and the knowledge co-created by the researcher and the participants (Reed et al., 2012). Journaling allowed the researcher to use reflexive self-appraisal to examine the researcher’s personal barriers that may affect the research and provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of how his own identities and values impacted his relationships with the research and research participants (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). The researcher continued journaling through the completion of the study to reflect on how his identity may have changed through the course of the research (Rooke, 2009; McDonald, 2013). The researcher engaged what DeVault (1996) called personal writing in which the researcher acknowledged that the personal struggles and new challenges encountered during the research process will not be resolved through completion of the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study was submitted, reviewed, and accepted by the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board. The researcher constructed informed consents and built measures
into the research process to ensure the confidentiality of participants, the ethical treatment of participants, adequate and accurate reporting of the results of the study, and time limits related to the collected data.

**Informed Consents**

The process of informed consent took place in three stages beginning in recruitment. The purpose of the study was included in the email that was distributed to the listserv and professional networks. The purpose of the study was also conveyed to potential participants in networking in professional organizations as well as made available in writing. Interested participants who contacted the researcher were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) to see if they met criteria for participation. This questionnaire asked participants to self-identify their affectional orientation, age, race and ethnicity, type of their degree, work setting, population served, licensure status, and years of experience.

Interested individuals who did not meet criteria for participation were informed via email of the reasons they did not meet criteria, thanked for their interest, and notified that they could contact the researcher with follow-up questions. Individuals who met criteria for participation were provided with a consent form. The consent form (Appendix D) for individual interviews described the time and length of the study, the purpose and aims of the study, confidentiality, and the methodology. A separate consent form (Appendix E) also included information about the limits of confidentiality in a group setting. Once a participant gave consent to participate in the study, they were scheduled for an interview on zoom to conduct the semi-structured interview. Informed consent was briefly reviewed prior to the start of each interview which allowed each participant an opportunity to address last minute questions. A summary of the themes that
emerged from the study was provided to each participant to maintain transparency and ensure accuracy of the interpretations.

**Treatment of Participants**

Ethical treatment of participants was the first priority of the researcher in completing this study, particularly given the potentially sensitive nature of the information being sought. The small potential for risk was communicated to potential participants beginning in the recruitment phase. It was also verbally discussed with participants in the informed consent discussion and detailed in the informed consents (Appendix D; Appendix E). The nature of the information the researcher was seeking was discussed as having the potential to bring up negative feelings for the participants. Participants were informed that if they became upset, overwhelmed, were feeling unsafe, or experiencing negative feelings they could stop participating at any time. Participants were notified that if they chose to discontinue participating and revoke their consent that their recorded interview and the researcher’s notes would be destroyed immediately.

As a licensed professional counselor, with experience working with the participant population, I am experienced in providing trauma focused support and crisis intervention with specific considerations for identity-based trauma. The risk to participants was evaluated to be low especially given the option for participants to stop the interview and leave the study at any time. The researcher also provided a list of support options and clinical follow up options to each participant if needed.

**Confidentiality**

Participants were informed of how their information would be kept confidential through the process of data collection, storage of the data, and reporting of the data and results. Each participant selected a pseudonym for themselves to be used in the transcription of the interviews,
the field notes, and the final report. Additionally, the results of the study were reported in aggregate. The actual identities of participants were only known to the researcher and the dissertation committee only knew participants by their pseudonyms. All notes, transcriptions, and journals were secured in a locked cabinet and electronic data was password protected on a password protected device.

**Data Storage and Retention**

Participants were informed of how data would be stored until the completion of the study and when data would be destroyed. Recordings of the interviews were stored electronically in a password protected file on a password protected device as were electronic consent forms. Field notes, transcriptions, the researcher’s journals, and other related documents were stored in a locked cabinet that only the researcher had access to when not in use. The participants were all recordings, electronic documents, transcripts, and other related papers would be permanently destroyed within five years of the completion of the study.

**Report Findings**

Participants were informed of how the findings would be reported at the conclusion of the study. The information was reported without any identifying information and pseudonyms were used where necessary. Prior to reporting the findings, summaries of the themes were provided back to participants to review them for accuracy and corrections if needed. Participants were also offered a copy of the final report at the conclusion of the study.

**Reflexivity**

The researcher self-disclosed his identity as a queer counselor with the participants to maintain transparency with the participants and to convey understanding of his positionality in the research (Miller et al., 2015). The researcher considered that this could minimize the
bracketing of his experience that is essential to the construction of meaning from the participant narratives in phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). The researcher chose to self-disclose for the potential comfort and safety of the participants and to acknowledge that the narratives in this qualitative inquiry are being co-constructed by the researcher and the participants. The researcher also intentionally chose not to engage in the identity management strategy of self-concealment to present his authentic self in the research.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using Hycner’s (1985) guidelines for phenomenological analysis. The researcher grounded himself in hermeneutic phenomenology, social constructionist theory, queer theory, and minority stress theory to develop a lens through which the data was analyzed at each step in the process. Themes were unearthed from the gathered narrative data until saturation was reached. This section of the chapter provides a detailed description of the guidelines used to analyze the transcriptions.

**Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction**

The recorded interviews and the focus group were transcribed verbatim and to begin the analysis the researcher listened to the recordings while reading the transcription to check for accuracy and to be grounded in the text. The researcher then bracketed the participants’ narratives using Van Manen’s (1997) lived existentials of body, time, space, and relation. The researcher used the transcriptions and field notes to begin the process of determining units of general meaning (Hycner, 1985). In this initial step the researcher used his journal and practiced reflexivity to maintain an understanding of his position in the research and remain open to whatever emerged from the data (Hycner, 1985). As a queer counselor who has experience with
self-concealment, the researcher diligently managed his own preconceptions and biases about what would emerge from the data to allow the participants experiences to speak, not his own.

**Listening to the Interview for a Sense of the Whole**

The researcher listened to each interview many times as suggested by Hycner (1985) to gain an understanding of the context of the data. The researcher listened with particular attention to what was not verbalized to understand what both was said and unsaid, visible and concealed (Dilley, 1990). Using queer theory, the researcher attempted to grasp a sense of the whole while being mindful that the experiences of participants happen in a socially constructed heteronormative context that normalizes and privileges heterosexuality and stigmatizes the lived experiences of non-heterosexual people (Warner, 1991).

**Delineating Units of General Meaning**

This step involved multiple rigorous reviews of the data to capture the essence of what each participant said and chunking the information in to units of meaning (Hycner, 1985). This process was done with an openness for what will emerge, not to tailor the units to the research questions (Hycner, 1985). The researcher used reflexivity here to address his position and connect to and within the research to manage his own expectations and presuppositions about the data. The researcher also used supervision member checks with my committee chair to ensure that delineating the units of meaning was not done from a perspective of bias.

**Delineating Units of Meaning Relevant to the Research Questions**

In this step of the process, the researcher re-orientated the data to the context of the research questions and examined the emergent themes for relevance to questions (Hycner, 1985). This involved multiple iterative reviews of the themes. Themes that were not relevant to the research questions were not used in further analysis.
Eliminating Redundancies

In this step the researcher examined the units of meaning for redundancy. This process is done to discern if different units may be expressing the same meaning in different ways (Hycner, 1985). Redundant themes were removed if necessary.

Clustering Units of Relevant Meaning

Clustering is the process whereby the researcher determines which units cluster together because of shared meaning (Hycner, 1985). The researcher clustered the themes by reviewing the data repeatedly and allowed common meanings and themes to emerge on their own (Hycner, 1985). The researcher used queer theory, social constructionist theory, and minority stress theory as a lens through which meaning could emerge. The participants’ meaning emerged in a heteronormative context where identities are socially constructed and evaluated.

Determine Themes from Clusters of Meaning

In this step the researcher revisited the clusters of meaning to determine if there are central themes that emerge from multiple clusters that captured the essence of the cluster (Hycner, 1985). My committee chair was employed to ensure that this analysis was accurate and ensure that the emergent themes were representative of the participants’ voices and not the researcher’s biases and presuppositions.

Writing a Summary for Each interview

The researcher summarized the themes that emerged from each interview and provided the summary to each participant individually (Hycner, 1985).

Return to Participants with the Summary and Themes and Modify

The summaries prepared in the previous step were provided back to the participants and they were offered the option of providing feedback to the researcher (Hycner, 1985). Based on
the feedback from the participant accuracy checks, the researcher modified the themes if necessary. This process ensured the credibility and trustworthiness of the research as well as accurate presentation of the findings (Hycner, 1985; Croteau, 1996).

**Dependability and Credibility**

Singh and Shelton (2011) assert that trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry should be intentionally built into every step of the research process. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended using at least two strategies to ensure the credibility of the research. The researcher in this study ensured credibility by using multiple strategies which were built into each step of the research process beginning with construction of the study through to presentation of the data and final report writing. The researcher first used reflexivity and reflected in this chapter on the researcher being an instrument (Morrow & Smith, 2000). The researcher also reflected on positionality to recognize his place as creator of the research context and his relationship to the research (Jones et al., 2014; Lincoln, 1995; Singh & Shelton, 2011) having experienced the phenomenon being studied. In the previous reflection, the researcher took great care in conveying to the reader his understanding of that position as well as his past experiences which inform his biases and assumptions about self-concealment of his queer identity (Merriam, 1988) and how they have shaped his approach to and interpretation of the study (Creswell, 2007). Reflexivity and positionality also ensured ethical validation of the study by ensuring the researcher reflected on his own privilege and beliefs to ensure equitable care of marginalized voices (Angen, 2000).

The researcher engaged in journaling to continue managing his biases and assumptions and to maintain heightened self-awareness of his emotional investment throughout and after the conclusion of the study (Lincoln, 1995). Credibility was ensured during the data collection using
semi-structured interview questions which were asked to every participant, and participants were asked if they wanted to include additional information to ensure their experience was fully communicated (Levitt et al., 2009). The researcher ensured credibility in the data analysis by using Hycner’s (1985) guidelines for phenomenological analysis with each set of data and by triangulating multiple sources of data including interviews, verbatim transcriptions, and field notes (Janesick, 1998; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also employed reflexivity and positionality in the data to ensure that the data analysis gave voice to the participants’ experiences (Lincoln, 1995) and that a balance was maintained between researcher interpretation and participant meaning (Miller et al., 2015; Williams & Morrow, 2009). This balance was also maintained through member checks (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Miller et al., 2015) in which summaries of the themes that emerged from the analysis were provided back to the participants for them to judge the accuracy of the interpretation of their shared narrative and edited if needed (Hycner, 1985).

Finally, the researcher ensured credibility in the reporting of the results through multiple strategies. The researcher exercised great care in clearly and accurately communicating the findings (Williams & Morrow, 2009) through rich description of the data (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). The researcher included direct quotes to communicate an understanding of the participants’ experiences (Croteau, 1996; Miller et al., 2015) in the reported results. The measures to maintain credibility of the data are not presented to convince the reader of the credibility of this research, but to ensure that the researcher understood the data and communicated it effectively (Wolcott, 1990).
Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to give voice to the experiences of LGBQ+ counselors engaging in self-concealment of their identity in the workplace. Only one study discussed this phenomenon in the context of counseling work, and these studies are contextually different from this inquiry. This study was designed with a qualitative approach grounded in queer theory, social constructionist theory of identity, and minority stress theory which allowed the researcher to situate the study in the heterosexist context in which the participants exist and to recognize the effect this context has on the phenomenon of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors.

Participants were recruited using purposeful and snowball sampling, and participants who met criteria for inclusion participated in a semi-structured interview or a semi-structured focus group. The interviews and focus group were recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis using Hycner’s (1985) guidelines for phenomenological data analysis. Researcher fieldnotes were combined with the transcriptions and multiple credibility strategies were employed to ensure credibility of the data. Multiple themes emerged from the explication of the data. Additional questions and directions for research were also generated by this inquiry. Chapter 5 will detail the meaning and themes that emerged from each interview and the focus group. The saturated themes, implications for counselors, and future directions for research are presented in chapters 4 and 5.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

The findings of this qualitative inquiry helped unearth the lived experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. The researcher used a qualitative methodological inquiry to capture the essence of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 1997). Self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors was an under-researched phenomenon, which meant it was best suited for qualitative inquiry (Carpenter, 1995). The researcher sought to unearth the meaning (Moustakas, 1994) of experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. The narratives that are explored in this chapter represent a variety of experiences from LGBQ+ counselors making self-concealment decisions, engaging in self-concealment behaviors, and experiencing the effects of self-concealment in the counseling workplace.

This study was informed by hermeneutic phenomenology (Hycner, 1985; Van Manen, 1997), queer theory (Dilley, 1999; Jagose, 1996; McCann & Monaghan, 2020), minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), and social constructionist theory of identity (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002). The researcher used semi-structured interviews to maintain “unobtrusive control” (Gillham, 2000, p. 45) of the interviews, while allowing the participants to speak to their own experiences and meaning. Hycner’s (1985) guidelines for analyzing qualitative interview data were used to interpret the interview data and unearth themes from the participants’ narratives.

This chapter provides a review of the data collected from the individual interviews in a case-by-case analysis and a review of the data collected in the focus group analyzed in aggregate. The researcher organized the themes into tables that provide significant phrases from each participant that correspond to the themes that emerged from their interviews. The chapter
concludes with a cross case analysis to provide a deeper and richer understanding of the unique and highly contextualized experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors.

Demographic Information

A total of 10 participants were interviewed for the study. Six participants participated in a semi-structured interview and four participants participated in a semi-structured focus group. Participants initially completed an electronic demographic survey to ensure they met the participation criteria for the study. The participants ranged in age from 27 to 39. Each of the ten participants held a master’s degree in counseling. Four of the ten participants also held a PhD in counselor education and supervision. Six participants were in the process of completing a PhD in counselor education and supervision. While not required to participate in the study, nine of the participants reported that they were licensed counselors, and the tenth participant was in the process of becoming licensed. The work settings of each participant and primary populations with which each participant practiced varied. Each participant was given an ID number and allowed to choose their own pseudonym to be used in the reporting of the study results. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants’ self-reported demographic information.

Table 1

<table>
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<th>ID</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Affectional Identity</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Education</th>
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<td>Gay</td>
<td>Cis Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master’s, PhD in Progress</td>
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<td>Woman</td>
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Focus Group and Individual Interviews

The individual interviews and the focus group were semi-structured in format and conducted through zoom in order to reach a geographically diverse sample and to ensure the health and safety of the participants and the researcher during the COVID-19 pandemic. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researchers took notes during the interview and focus groups to note participants’ non-verbal behaviors. The notes were later combined into the margins of the transcribed interviews and used for triangulation of the data. The researcher used member checks with my committee chair and a reflective journal throughout the interview process to bracket suppositions and to monitor bias in the research process. The researcher also recorded initial impressions and discussed them with my committee chair. The individual interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 1 hour and 13 minutes. The focus group lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes.

Presuppositions

Ethical and credible qualitative inquiry required that I as the researcher acknowledge my position in the research as an instrument of the research (Jones et al., 2014) and my position as the creator of the research context (Jones et al., 2014; Lincoln, 1995; Singh & Shelton, 2011). I have created the research questions, constructed the narrative that supports the necessity of asking the research questions, and chose the context in which the interviews would occur. I have also analyzed the data using Hycner’s (1985) steps as a guide and employed member checks with my committee chair. As the researcher, I have overseen each step of the research, and as a person

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who has experienced the phenomenon being studied, there was a substantial risk for the introduction of bias into the research. I took great care using multiple strategies to minimize the effect that my own experiences with self-concealment as a counselor in the workplace could have on my approach to collecting and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2007). This section details the process in which I bracketed my presuppositions about the phenomenon.

Bracketing my presuppositions in this study began at the creation of the research questions. The first presupposition I had to reflect on was the idea that every LGBQ+ counselor experienced self-concealment in the workplace. I presumed that because of my experience with self-concealment, it must be happening to every counselor regardless of contextual factors. I reflected in my research journal and discussed with my committee chair the possibility that participants would report that they did not engage in self-concealment. The potential that not all participants would have used self-concealment in their counseling work meant that the research and interview questions, as well as my approach to collecting and interpreting the data had to be open to the possibility that this phenomenon may not be something that other LGBQ+ counselors experience or that the experiences were not universal among LGBQ+ communities.

A second presupposition I discovered was the idea that LGBQ+ counselors would have an awareness of whether they self-concealed and how they self-concealed. This presupposition was supported by my awareness of my self-concealment behaviors. My awareness of self-concealing prompted my investigation of the existing literature about self-concealment. I assumed that if a participant was responding to the call for participants, they must have an awareness of their concealment in the workplace. During the interviews I found myself shocked at how many participants had to reflect on the interview questions. One participant stated that she had never thought about self-concealment until she was asked about it. I reflected in my journal
about my awareness of my behaviors and what possible influence this could have on how I would interpret the data.

The third presupposition I uncovered was my belief that concealment behaviors would be universal among the participants. I immersed myself in the research around concealment motivation, which I believed was highly contextualized. However, I believed a more uniform set of behaviors associated with varying motivations would emerge from the data. This presupposition was fueled by the behaviors I noticed myself exhibiting to prevent my queer identity from being known by clients or colleagues in the workplace. This presupposition was a particular challenge because during the first interview, participant 1, Jasper, shared that he had engaged in the exact concealment behavior that had inspired this entire qualitative inquiry. This experience is explored more in depth later in the chapter. This presupposition was also influenced by an experience I had while writing chapters 2 and 3 in which I found myself preparing to conceal my identity in a public place because of my own fear and anxiety. Member checks with my committee chair and the reflective journal were used extensively to mitigate this presupposition.

The final presupposition I discovered was the belief that the effects of self-concealment would be primarily negative. This presupposition was primarily informed by the negative impact that I have felt from self-concealment in my personal and professional life. This impact inspired my inquiry and the choice to pursue this topic as my dissertation research. I found myself surprised when several participants spoke about how self-concealment allowed them to connect with certain clients through shared experience. I reflected on this in my journal and was able to recognize that I had positive experiences associated with self-concealment, however the negative experiences outweighed them.
Having conversations about reflexivity and positionality with the study participants and my committee chair were essential to challenging my assumptions about self-concealment and my desire for answers. These conversations allowed me to maintain a reflective space in which I could journal about my experiences as well as frequently document my impressions and questions about the data. After the first interview I began to take several days between each interview and investigating the verbatim transcription. A journal entry that stands out to me is one where I reflected on my committee chair telling me I was “too much in the data.” My excitement about the process and the similarities between myself and one of the participants had me seeing too much of my experience in the data, as opposed to the participant’s narrative. This practice became essential as I continued analyzing the data. I also began to leave several days between analyzing each interview so that I could go into each transcript with an openness to what might emerge from the participant narratives.

**Analysis of the Interviews and Focus Groups**

The process of analyzing the data in this study began after the first interview and was ongoing while subsequent interviews and focus group were conducted. After each interview was transcribed verbatim, the researcher listened to each recording several times while reviewing the transcripts to ensure accuracy, take additional notes, and ground himself in the data. The researcher used Hycner’s (1985) steps for analyzing qualitative interview data to determine what themes emerged from the participant narratives. The data from each interview and the focus group were then bracketed using Van Manen’s (1997) four lived existentials and reduced to general units of meaning. The researcher then reviewed each transcript multiple times to ensure accurate phenomenological reduction of the data. The researcher then organized the data in a table, grouping the units of meaning relevant to each of the three research questions. Units of
meaning that were not relevant to the research question were not included. The researcher examined the data across each interview and the focus group and clustered units of meaning that appeared to have shared themes (Hycner, 1985) that spoke to the phenomenon of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors.

The researcher took great care in ensuring that units of meaning that were clustered communicated the same meaning, not simply used the same language (Hycner, 1985). Through this process six thematic categories that were relevant to the research question emerged. Each of six general categories was composed of relevant sub-categories based on the participants’ experiences. The six master categories were:

1. The Concealment Decision
2. Deciding Not to Conceal
3. Concealment Motivation
4. Concealment Behavior
5. Concealment Affects the Counseling Work
6. Concealment Negatively Affects the Counselor

Saturation of the data was reached during the focus group. The six individual interviews were conducted prior to the focus group. The focus group confirmed the themes from the individual interviews and no additional themes emerged from the data. One additional significant theme emerged from the data analysis that was not relevant to the scope of the research questions but may be relevant to understanding the phenomenon of self-concealment as well as have potential implications for future research. The theme of doing your own work in counseling and supervision related to self-concealment of affectional orientation is discussed later in this chapter and in chapter 5. Every participant in the individual interviews and the focus group also
specifically mentioned disclosure. The researcher specifically avoided mentioning disclosure in the interviews to ensure that the answers participants shared were about concealment experiences. Despite this, all participants spoke about disclosure, and this is explored later in this chapter and in chapter 5.

**Case-by-Case Analysis**

This section presents a case-by-case narrative exploration of each participant’s experiences related to the six themes discussed in the previous section. The cases are presented in the order in which the interviews occurred followed by the focus group. Each participant is referenced in this section using their chosen pseudonym. Participants were asked to select their own pseudonym to allow their narratives to be represented accurately by a name that they felt fit with their culture and identities. The researcher also wanted each participant to be able to identify their narrative in the final report. Additionally, given the nature of the phenomenon being studied, the researcher chose to use pseudonyms as opposed to just participant ID numbers so participant identities remained confidential and to allow the narratives to not be concealed behind a number. The researcher felt this was important to allow the voices of the participants to show through in the research.

**Individual Interview 1: Jasper (He/Him)**

Jasper was a 31-year-old gay individual. Jasper was a licensed counselor in the rural South with six years of experience. Jasper held a master’s in counseling and guidance and was in the process of completing his PhD in counselor education and supervision. Jasper’s primary setting was in a school system and his primary population was children ages 8-11. Jasper was the first person to respond to the call for participants and reported being excited about participation and having similar research interests being a doctoral student himself. Jasper described how he
made decisions about self-concealment, what motivated him to self-conceal in, the behaviors he used to self-conceal, and how he felt self-concealment affected himself and his work as a counselor. Included in this section are some of the salient experiences that Jasper described as well as quotations that spoke to his lived experience.

The interview began with allowing Jasper to ask questions about the study and a review of informed consent and his rights during the study. Prior to scheduling the interview, Jasper had completed a consent form and returned it electronically to the researcher via email. The researcher reminded Jasper that he could withdraw from the study at any time and his data would be excluded from the data analysis and final report. Jasper confirmed his understanding of the consent to participate in the study. The researcher then shared his identity as a queer person with Jasper and discussed the process of reflexivity that he was using throughout the research to ensure credibility of the findings. The researcher shared with Jasper that as part of using Hycner’s (1985) steps he would receive via email a summary of the themes from his interview, and he would have the chance to review the themes for accuracy and provide revisions to the researcher if necessary. Jasper confirmed his understanding of this, and the researcher began recording the interview.

The researcher began the interview by asking Jasper what internal experiences led him to engage in self-concealment in the workplace. “Mainly anxiety” was the first experience Jasper identified. Jasper shared that he was not “completely out” within the school he worked in and that he felt based on the area he lived in, not everyone would be accepting. Jasper described having to “listen for like safe words, that kind of let me know like, okay, they’re on our team.” Jasper shared that he did this during the 2020 election season, and he knew “who was safe and who wasn’t” based on which candidates people talked about. Jasper reiterated “it’s a lot of
anxiety, it’s a lot of fear. Because up until recently, at least in Louisiana, it wasn’t on the books that you couldn’t be terminated, based on like, it wasn’t protected.” Jasper also felt that working with children presented challenges because of how parents felt about gay people working with their children.

The researcher asked Jasper to talk about some of the “safe words” that he looked for. Jasper looked for “talking about friends that are in same sex relationships” or people talking about “a more liberal candidate or even a movement that’s associated with, I guess, a more progressive agenda.” Jasper also described words that caused him to “be more guarded” with people as follows:

“Words that I guess, cause me to be more guarded are people expressing very conservative beliefs, the hypocritical part people talking about going to church, what they did in church on Sunday, sometimes just given the nature of this region and my own experiences, that's not always, they haven't been the most affirming. So even I'm very hesitant around anybody that I perceive as being incredibly religious. It doesn't even have to be words, if you're wearing a cross necklace. Sometimes, if I see that, I'm going to be more hesitant with you. And I'm going to act more butch with you.”

The researcher asked Jasper to clarify what acting “more butch” looked like for him. Jasper described what “butching it up” looked like:

“I'm a big hand talker just in general, and I have to kind of put that on lock. Obviously, I have a southern drawl, which you can tell, and this is my normal voice, butching it up takes this into the backwoods, even worse. I won't talk about certain interests. If it’s, musical interest or TV shows stuff like that, where it could be perceived. I'm not going to talk about the last episode of ‘Drag Race’ or something like that.”
The researcher later reflected on “butching it up” in his journal because he had also used bodily changes to conceal his queer identity from others. Jasper attempted to make himself appear more masculine to keep others in the workplace from suspecting that he might be gay. Jasper expressed guilt about concealing because “I teach the kids, or I try to instill in them the value of just that it’s okay to be themselves and I’m not being completely myself. There’s a hypocritical factor there.”

Jasper continued talking about his school environment and described a time when he had safe space poster made and “I had some extras, I offered them to other counselors in the district to put in their office and not one counselor took one.” However, a few weeks prior to the interview, a student came to Jasper and shared that she had a girlfriend. The supportive poster allowed Jasper to be a supportive person. “She knew I didn’t care but at the same point, she had no idea about me,” he added. Jasper shared that he experienced “cognitive dissonance” because he self-concealed while advocating for queer students. Jasper felt that the advocacy he did was “falling on deaf ears.” Jasper felt there was no support for his efforts in the district, and he was preparing to move so they would the lose advocacy work he was doing.

Jasper described prominent attitudes in his local community that lead him to self-conceal as follows:

“Anything about sex is so taboo around here. And when they hear anything about sexual orientation, affectional orientation, they automatically go to sex. And because it's an elementary school environment, they're like, they don't even know what that is. They have no business knowing what that is. That's inappropriate for that age group.”
The attitudes in the community in which Jasper lived and worked were predominately stigmatizing of LGBQ+ identity. Jasper used these past experiences and the overall attitudes as a guide for when he needed to self-conceal.

Jasper also thought of a recent experience in which he chose not to conceal with a coworker specifically because he and his husband were moving to another city. The teacher asked why Jasper was moving and he paused, asking himself “am I gonna do this?” Jasper said, “my husband got transferred.” He noticed “her eyes got big” but she responded nicely, and he shared that he “kind of felt good.” The researcher asked if there were other factors that helped Jasper decide not to conceal with his coworkers. Jasper reiterated that he cared less because of his upcoming move, then with a laugh said, “sometimes for shock value, especially if they’re just being a jerk.” Jasper added that “it’s not really given a lot of forethought” and “it’s very contextual, it’s based on how I’m feeling in the moment.” Jasper shared another recent experience in which he heard a cafeteria worker use safe words when another teacher said, “I don’t approve of that, I don’t agree with that lifestyle.” When Jasper heard the teacher talk about disagreeing with lesbian “lifestyle” he wanted to confront the teacher but decided that not concealing in that moment “wasn’t worth it.” In that moment, Jasper chose not to self-conceal with the cafeteria worker after the teacher had left, however he felt guilty about self-concealing in front of the teacher. Jasper felt that he should have advocated in that moment, but it was not worth the potential risks.

The researcher asked Jasper if he had ever decided not to self-conceal with any students or clients. Jasper immediately responded “zero.” He continued, “I’ve had a transgender client, like I’ve worked with, probably in the course of five years, probably about 20 students who identify as LGBTQ+, and I never had. I regret that.” Jasper reflected on having limited queer
representation when he was young saying “I never saw a queer person like, in my circle of influence, who was living a happy and healthy life as an adult.” Jasper knew what it was like to not have positive representation and he regretted not being able to provide this representation to students and clients over the years.

The researcher then asked Jasper about his degree of outness. Jasper shared that his supervisor knew he was gay, and that most of the department knew, but not because he chose to disclose. Jasper described a prior experience in which he was “inadvertently outed” to the entire department as follows:

“A school psychologist asked me, just in front of everybody, ‘Are you married?’ And I said, yes. Thinking back that could be the end of it and I wouldn't have to lie. And she said something along the lines of like, ‘Oh, my God, what is your wife's name?’ Because people always jump to those conclusions.”

Jasper froze, almost at attention, as he said, “and I froze.” He continued, “I couldn’t like in the moment, but I also didn’t say it, and I like, deflected.” Jasper’s deflection of the question and his noticeable discomfort gave everyone the answer. Jasper had attempted to self-conceal through deflection of the question, but the deflection itself in a sense outed him to everyone.

Jasper reflected on the teacher’s use of the word lifestyle from his previous story. “That’s one of those buzz words that I’m kind of like, you’re not a safe person,” he added. Buzz words like lifestyle caused Jasper to self-conceal, which made him feel more “comfortable” and “guilty.” Self-concealment was a complex experience for him because it protected Jasper from potential discrimination, but he experienced emotional labor through guilt of not being able to not self-conceal. Jasper then recalled an experience where he overheard teachers talking about
him and the previously mentioned lesbian counselor. He described the experience, and the aftermath as follows:

“I was sitting in the office, I had the door closed, and I was eating my lunch. And I wasn't trying to eavesdrop. They were talking loudly. And I heard this conversation, and I realized it was about me, and the lesbian counselor. And first they kind of degraded counseling overall, and it's ineffectiveness. And these are people in positions of power. And in a conversation about, basically, who deserves to keep their jobs and who can we expend in order to cut the budget. They started making something along, I think he is more like a she or she is more like a he and I heard they ran off to one of those states where it's legal to get married. And this is after same sex marriage had passed, they were just that ignorant. And I was furious, almost busted out the door. But these are people in positions of power, and I'm scared to.”

Here, the researcher noted that Jasper had mentioned twice the effect of these teachers being people in positions of power, which kept him from confronting them. Jasper waited until the teachers had left before driving to his supervisor’s office in another school building and sharing the incident with her. Jasper had to meet with the superintendent, where he was told that the school district accepted everyone, “even people with [his] lifestyle.” During the meeting, Jasper shared the following with the district leadership:

“I showed him my hand, and I was like, this is what it feels like in this district. I was like, I'm married, do you see a ring? And they were like, no. And I was like, cause rings make people ask questions. I was like, I haven't felt comfortable wearing my wedding ring and no part about that is okay.”
Jasper tried to use the opportunity to advocate for a gay-straight alliance in the school, but the administrators still were not on board. Jasper said that this experience influenced he and his husband’s decision to move because “the same man that I overheard talking like, ‘they ran off to one of these states where they think that's okay,’ he's now superintendent.” Jasper added, “they aren’t about building an environment that would be affirmative for people like me.” Jasper’s experience indicated the people in positions of power strongly motivated self-concealment in the workplace.

The researcher then asked if there were differences in how Jasper self-concealed with LGBTQ+ coworkers versus heterosexual coworkers. Jasper had only worked with one LGBTQ coworker and he never self-concealed with her because they knew each other through a personal connection outside of school. Jasper knew that there were more LGBTQ+ employees in the district and they all had an “unspoken code” that protected each other when they were in groups. “We weren’t going to jeopardize that space for each other,” he added. Jasper reflected on why he felt that queer people were so good at self-concealment, saying the following:

“I think it's just, we're family and we know how we can act in safe places. And we've been training for this our whole lives. I think it's something we learned before we got into the professional setting. Because even in a personal sphere, my queer friends, if or back when say I was in high school, and they weren’t completely out, we just kind of together will present a certain way in front of your parents, and we won't divulge certain information. So, I think that's just been ingrained in us. And we just continue to act that way. Because I mean, I know this is about concealing in the workplace. But your identity is not limited to the workplace, and you bring your whole self into that, you can never completely check your identity at the door. And we've at least down here, most of us
have been concealing our whole lives. So, it's already what we know. And we're pretty
damn good at it. So, it's the default.”

The researcher later reflected on this quote in his journal because he saw himself
reflected in Jasper’s words. Jasper had been able to form a sense of community with other
LGBQ+ employees in the district, meaning that despite self-concealment they were able to cope
through their shared experience.

The researcher then asked Jasper how self-concealment might affect his work as a
counselor. Jasper felt that self-concealment made him “not as helpful as I could be” and “more
effective” in some ways. Jasper felt less helpful “because I feel like if I could share that part of
myself with my students, it would be helpful to have the representation.” Self-concealment
caused Jasper to question his self-efficacy as a counselor in some ways. The researcher reflected
extensively in his journal about what Jasper shared next because the researcher had always
assumed that there would be more negatives than positives when looking at self-concealment in
counseling work. Jasper also shared that self-concealing made him more effective because it
allowed him to connect with clients who experienced similar struggles. He described these
connections as follows:

“Even if I'm not disclosing, this part of my identity really allows me to understand and to
empathize with you in a very personal way. I really understand what they're going
through and how hard and challenging that is. I know what it's like to be scared and
to not know if somebody is going to be safe or not. So, I think it's kind of heightened that
and not only, is another kind of I think it extends beyond queer students, queer clients is I
fully wanna acknowledge my privilege as a cisgender white male, is 100% there. But as a
gay man in the south, I do still know what it's like to feel somewhat marginalized, which
enables me somewhat, because everybody's experience, every group’s experience is different, and everybody within that group, their experiences different. But I am able to draw upon that aspect of marginalization in my identity, to help people who may not identify as queer, but may feel marginalized in other ways. I can empathize with the outsider.”

The researcher asked Jasper to expand upon how he came to realize he could use self-concealment to connect with his clients. Jasper shared that he had been wondering that himself and that “it kind of unfolded over time.” Jasper then described the contextual nature of self-concealment through his internal thoughts about authenticity:

“I have to tell myself almost as a way to assuage my own guilt, that I’m not being fake, that I’m just choosing which aspects of myself to identify. Just like I wouldn't act the same around my mom as I would my best friend. It doesn't mean I'm not completely being myself with both of them. But I have a different history with both of them. I act somewhat differently. And I don't think either way is inauthentic. They're both Jasper.”

Self-concealment has caused Jasper to question his self-efficacy and, in some ways, made him more effective. Jasper’s experience of self-concealment meant he could identify when his students might be self-concealing. Jasper used these moments to connect with his students while still self-concealing. The researcher asked if there were any other ways that self-concealment affected Jasper’s work that we had not talked about. Jasper continued to reflect on how self-concealment has allowed him to connect with and understand his clients. He shared the following:

“I think it's heightened my sensitivity to language. Because I know the truth, that kind of the techniques. I know the deflection. And I know it's okay to express to a student that
I'm an accepting person, when I notice things like when they refer to their boyfriend or girlfriend, or they'll say things like my crush. Like they'll say things that are very gender neutral. And that's not lost on me. And I think, it’s that whole just pain knows pain. I'm not one of those counselors that thinks that you have to have gone through everything somebody has gone through for you to be able to help them, that's not the case. I think I can help somebody who lost her mother, my mother's still living. But loss is a pretty universal feeling. We've all experienced loss that we can draw upon. And I think my experiences, my negative experiences especially with queer youth that are hurting and feel unaccepted that I'm, I'm able to draw upon that. And it kind of just creates kind of heart-to-heart connection. Even though I'm concealing.”

Jasper then spoke about the uncertainty that led him to self-conceal. He questioned himself saying:

“It could all be in my head, to be completely honest with you. I could let everybody know tomorrow, and there’s a possibility that absolutely nothing would change, but I don’t know that. Because there’s still a possibility that things could get bad. And I’m just not up for that risk. Mainly for the kids, like I said.”

The researcher asked Jasper if he could talk more about what things getting “bad” would look like for him. Jasper shared that a librarian in the town where he works had received so much backlash for including children’s books “with two dads or two moms, or stuff like that” in the library that the board of directors forced her to resign. “I see that, and I’m like, oh, let’s stay quiet, not worth the notoriety,” he added. Jasper advocated strongly for queer issues in his school despite fearing this type of reaction. He thought because of his vocal advocacy, some people likely assumed that he was gay. Jasper said he would rather “sit with that uncertainty” of not
knowing what people think, than to “figure out that they’re assholes.” Jasper reflected that counselors have to learn to sit with “uncertainty and ambiguity,” but that queer counselors might be more used to uncertainty because of “past experiences that we carry around with us.” He described the following experience:

“Like walking across a crosswalk in college and having faggot screamed at you and stuff like that. It's little things like that you kind of learn like, okay, what was I doing in that moment? And I decided that, oh, they could tell because of the type of bag I was carrying, and I changed the kind of bag I was carrying. It's little things that you pick up on. Because in that environment in the college environment, it wasn't just can I be fired, it's will they beat the shit out of me? Which was even more incentive to stay concealed.”

The researcher specifically noted a vicarious experience in the field notes at this point in the interview, and later reflected on it with his committee chair and in his journal. Jasper’s experience changing the type of bag he carried was shared by the researcher. The researcher reflected on this experience in chapter 3 because it was one of the experiences that led him to pursue this inquiry. When the researcher noticed himself having the vicarious experience, he remained silent to allow Jasper to continue talking. Following the interview, the researcher debriefed with Jasper about the experience.

Jasper shared that he had gone to college in the same town where he worked, and that before the interview he never considered a possible connection between feeling unsafe in college, and feeling that “the town in general, isn’t safe.” He then added “I’m working at a site that I did my internship at.” Jasper elaborated on the complex relationship he had with the South, saying “there are a bunch of self-righteous close-minded bigots” and “there’s some wonderful people down here.” He further described his experiences as follows:
“So, I always told myself, the South is never going to be accepting until they see us here, until we have the courage, which apparently, I'm not doing, of being out living our lives completely in the open and they're forced to not run us back into the closet. Only then through exposure, are things going to change and get better. I've maintained that for so long, and I'm just tired. And Arkansas is still the south, but Little Rock is a blue city in a red state. So, kind of the same as New Orleans. So, it was a little bit different. But that is a salient, salient, I guess the thing for me is to conceal oneself so much so often, and for so long is fucking exhausting. And I think even if they may be the most accepting people in the world, you start to resent the place because it exhausts you.”

With slight hesitation, Jasper shared that he also resented himself because he felt he could not “be genuine on his own terms.” Jasper added that he would not self-conceal more often if he felt that his physical safety and professional safety, as well as the relationships with his students would not be jeopardized. “There’s probably more in the pro column for just being completely out than there is in the con, to be completely honest with you, but the probably three or four things in that con category just seem so damn insurmountable,” he said with an exasperated sigh. Despite the possible benefits for not self-concealing, the concerns that motivated Jasper to continue self-concealing outweighed the benefits. Jasper also felt that if certain coworkers knew he was gay, it would destroy their relationships. “I have come to develop some good relationships with coworkers that I’ve never been able to figure out if they were safe or not,” he said. Jasper felt that if he found out that one of these coworkers was not safe, “the whole relationship is gone.” He added, “it would break my heart to find out that they were a bigot, so I prefer not to know.”
The researcher asked Jasper if there were protective factors associated with self-concealment in his counseling work. “Yeah, 100%, yeah. Concealment is a protective factor,” he responded. Self-concealment protected Jasper from the uncertainty of other people’s reactions because not self-concealing, or “taking off the mask” was an unknown risk. Self-concealment protected Jasper from uncertainty in personal relationships, as he previously described. Self-concealment was “armor,” he added. “When you go out in the rural south, concealment is your armor because you are in essence going into battle,” Jasper said. Jasper added that the school he worked in could not be “separated from the community in which it’s situated.” He knew what it was like to feel like he was “going into battle” and he felt guilty for “not being as authentic as [he] would like to be.” He could not provide representation in the school to protect himself, so he shared that he advocated strongly for his students “to feel like I’m doing something to further the acceptance of the queer community.”

Jasper discussed recent and current events that have increased his feelings of fear and uncertainty. Jasper reflected on when he proposed to his husband, same-sex marriage had not been federally legalized, and they were not sure if it ever would be legal. “2016 to now shoved me way back, that strengthened the armor, that’s like, let’s put on more” he said about Donald Trump’s time in office. Jasper said when the Pulse nightclub shooting happened, he felt “like, holy shit, now we need to get in the tank.” Jasper added that just when things started to look safe, we’re always “waiting for the next pin to drop, what’s gonna happen next that causes us to say, mm, we’re still not there?”

Jasper recalled interviewing for internship sites in his master’s program and he found himself in a religious based agency with crosses on the wall. “In a moment of boldness, because they just, like come like hot flashes sometimes, I was like, I’m gay, is that going to be problem?”
he asked. The person who interviewed Jasper said, “as long you don’t impose your values, this lifestyle, this way of thinking onto the clients, no.” Jasper was not offered the internship, and he does not know why, but he also did not have a way to confirm that it didn’t have something to do with his affectional orientation. Even in counseling spaces, particularly those with religious affiliations, he still had to self-conceal despite the perception that counseling was supposed to be an accepting profession.

Jasper then referred to an earlier point in the interview when we had talked about safe words. “Um men, I’m going to be much more guarded around men than women,” Jasper said. Jasper said he was more cautious around older people and “more guarded around people who have more authority.” Jasper described “testing the waters” with people around whom he was more guarded as his way of looking for safe words and seeing who was a safe person. Jasper further described how he tested for safety:

“Just like I can catch on to the student who talks about their crush. I can throw out my spouse. And how do they react to that? Do they pick up on it too? Do they immediately go ‘wife,’ or do they use the same word, and they say ‘oh, your spouse? What is their name?’ And it starts to open the armor a little bit, you both are starting to realize, okay. We're feeling each other out until we realize like, okay, you're safe.”

Jasper also felt that he “tested the wasters” more with other minority colleagues. He looked for visible signs of support including “car stickers and decals.” Anything about conservative politics or the “government taking your guns” meant that people were likely not safe, because these views were associated with being homophobic.

The researcher then asked if there was anything about Jasper’s self-concealment experiences that we had not covered. He said, “I think my own takeaway is that concealment is
heavy…the armor is very heavy. Keeping with my metaphor. But I don’t know how heavy the consequences would be if I took off my armor.” Jasper meant that the uncertainty of what would happen if he didn’t self-conceal made keeping the armor on worth it to remain safe. Finally, the researcher asked Jasper about his experience of talking about self-concealment with him. “There were points that were a little bit difficult, which I expected,” he said. Jasper added the following reflection of the interview:

“I feel like I wasn't really able to give you concrete answers to all your questions, which I mean, nothing in life is concrete, because I don't know that I fully understand it myself. I think sometimes we do what feels safe, even when our rational brain tells us like it's not worth it anymore. We still kind of go with our gut and we go with what we know. And sometimes emotion, it can overrule reason. And fear is a strong one, and it's a primal one.”

The researcher thanked Jasper again for his participation and said he would be in touch via email with a summary of the themes from his interview. Jasper reviewed the summary and responded “everything is correct and representative. No corrections on my end!” No revisions were required. Table 2 provides a visual representation of the significant quotations from Jasper’s interview that came up in relation to the themes that emerged from the data.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Category</th>
<th>Quotations of Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Concealment Decision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressed Beliefs of Others</td>
<td>“People expressing very conservative beliefs”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Talking about going to church, what they did in church on Sunday”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Negative Views of Others</td>
<td>“Back in election season, when you get to hear people talking about their preferred candidates”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“So even I'm very hesitant around anybody that I perceive as being incredibly religious. It doesn't even have to be words, if you're wearing a cross necklace. Sometimes, if I see that, I'm going to be more hesitant with you.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Stuff about the government taking your guns.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“It doesn't even have to be words, it's little things that you pick up on.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Just based on that, that's one of those buzz words that I'm kind of like, you're not a safe person”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I'm going to be much more guarded around men than women. Professionally, and just in my general life, I'd rather see a female dentist, I'd rather see a female doctor.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“So, men, older people, which I've been proven wrong. But in general, I'm more guarded around people that are a little older. I'm more guarded around people that have more authority. Who can make those calls of, does he get promoted?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“How am I going to react in this, it's very contextual”</td>
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| Deciding Not to Conceal |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Perceived Support       | “Can be really indicative of whether or not you're a safe person or whether I need to keep my guard up with you” |
|                         | “Buzz words, listen for like safe words” |
|                         | “We're feeling each other out until we realize like, okay, you're safe” |
|                         | “Just like I can catch on to the student who talks about their crush. I can throw out my spouse. And how do they react to that? Do they pick up on it too? Do they immediately go wife, or do they use the same word and they say oh, your spouse? What is their name?” |
“She had used one of those, she gave the indication that she was a safe person”

“I can hear them talking about friends that are in same sex relationships, like they’ll be like, oh, my friend and her wife or something like that. Like I said, political type stuff. Usually anybody referencing a more liberal candidate or even a movement that's more associated with, I guess, a more progressive agenda. If I hear Black Lives Matter, generally, I'm like, you're a more safe person.”

“I check a lot for your car stickers and decals that you have on your car, So like the HRC equal sign”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Professional Relationships</th>
<th>“I probably test the waters more with colleagues.”</th>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+ Clients</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coworkers with Marginalized identities</td>
<td>“I’m more likely to start to feel out a little bit”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“The minority colleagues, like black or Latinx females”</td>
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Concealment Motivation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fear</th>
<th>“Eventually, the board of directors forced her to resign based on public backlash to her being so supportive. That's what bad could look like, like I see that. And I'm like, oh, let's stay quiet. Not worth the notoriety.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>“And if my safety, whether that was physical safety or whether it's professional safety, if I knew that that wouldn't be jeopardized”</td>
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“it's will they beat the shit out of me? Which was even more incentive to stay concealed.”

“I think just when I start to feel like, because 2016 to now shoved me way back, that strengthened the armor, that's like, let's put on one more. And then when pulse happened, that was like, holy shit, now we need to get inside the tank.”
“I think sometimes we do what feels safe, even when our rational brain tells us like it's not worth it anymore. We still kind of go with our gut and we go with what we know.”

“Because it wasn't up until recently, at least in Louisiana, it wasn't on the books that you couldn't be terminated, based on like, it wasn't protected”

**Uncertainty**

“That my relationship with my kids, my students wouldn't be jeopardized, you know, then I would.”

“I've met some really, really great people. And it would break my heart to find out that they were a bigot. So, I prefer not to know”

“I have come to develop some good relationships with coworkers that I've never been able to figure out if they were safe or not. And if they’re not, that whole relationship is gone. And my whole perception of what the relationship was, and how important it was, I feel like in hindsight, is going to be colored very badly.”

“But I couldn't even tell my mom because I didn't want to hurt our relationship despite how close we were. And these are people, I'm not as close to so I wasn't even comfortable sharing that with my mom. Why would I share that with you?”

“Concealment is a protective factor. Taking off the mask is a risk factor. Because it's uncertain. It's unknown. That's the ambiguity that I'm not comfortable tolerating.”

“So, it's like, anytime we feel like it's okay It's just waiting for the next pin to drop. What's gonna happen next that causes us to say, mm, we’re still not there.”

“But I don't know how heavy the consequences would be if I took off my armor”
“It’s a double-edged sword.”

“I could let everybody know tomorrow, and there’s a possibility that absolutely nothing would change. But I don’t know that. Because there’s still that possibility that things could get bad. And I’m just not up for that risk.”

“I couldn’t trust her not to tell people. Or maybe I could have, I don’t know that she would have done that.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Needs “This isn’t about me”</th>
<th>“I’m there first and foremost, for the wellbeing of the kids and I don’t want to do anything to jeopardize my ability to work.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Relationship Dynamics</td>
<td>“Another teacher that she was trying to talk to about was like, ‘Oh, I just don't approve of that. I don't agree with that kind of lifestyle.’ Well, we'll get to the word lifestyle. Was like, ‘I just don't agree with that.’ And I almost spoke up, and I was like, ‘tell me exactly what you don't agree with, because what I'm hearing is you don't agree with my lifestyle. What is a lifestyle for you?’ And getting this whole conversation? I was like, it's not worth it. I told myself, it wasn't worth it.”</td>
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<td>“Like, I wonder if anybody else is gonna put in that kind of effort into accepting me? Are they worth my time? Is anybody a lost cause? Like, are you so ingrained in that way of thinking, can I even change your mind? Because you're going to try to change mine”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“These are people in positions of power.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“But these are people in positions of power, and I'm scared to”</td>
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<td>“The same man that I overheard talking like, they ran off to one of these states where they think that's okay, he's now superintendent. And I'm not about that life”</td>
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<td>“I'm more guarded around people that have more authority. Who can make those calls of, does he get promoted? Do we give him this”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions of the Local Area/Town/Region</td>
<td>“When you go out into the rural south, concealment is your armor because you are, in essence going into battle.”</td>
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<td>“And they very much in the region that I live in, probably would not be that accepting.”</td>
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<td>“Given the nature of this region and my own experiences it's not the most accepting area”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“There are a bunch of self-righteous, close-minded bigots down here.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I always told myself, the South is never going to be accepting until they see us here, until we have the courage”</td>
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<td>“Anything about sex is so taboo around here”</td>
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<td>“And it's not even just the queer thing that, I'm also an atheist. I'm not in but that's not out. That could never ever be out. That's worse than being gay that's a worse taboo. Like that, not even the parents know.”</td>
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<td>“They could handle the gay and maybe some at school can handle the gay. But the gay atheist combo. I don't think so. Yeah, that would be too much, that would pitchforks”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Previous Negative Experiences</th>
<th>“I had a safe space poster in my room, and I offered, so I had some extras, I offered them to other counselors in the district to put in their office and not one counselor took me up on it.”</th>
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<td>“And not seeing in my real life, any sort of representation. And this is even my mom's brother's gay, and I didn't know until I was 14, we didn't talk about it. It was unspoken of. And even after they told me, it wasn't discussed again after that. And he never talked about it. He wasn't comfortable with it. So, I never saw a queer person like, in my circle of influence, who was living a happy and healthy life as an adult.”</td>
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“And we've been training for this our whole lives. I think it's something we learned before we got into the professional setting. Because even in a personal sphere, my queer friends, if or back when say I was in high school, and they weren’t completely out, we just kind of together will present a certain way in front of your parents, and we won't divulge certain information. So, I think that's just been ingrained in us. And we just continue to act that way. Because I mean, I know this is about concealing in the workplace. But your identity is not limited to the workplace, and you bring your whole self into that, you can never completely check your identity at the door. And we've at least down here, most of us have been concealing our whole lives. So, it's already what we know. And we're pretty damn good at it. So, it's the default.”

“Now that you bring that up, that's actually something I've never thought about. I'm working in the same town that all that shitty stuff happened. I'm sure that I have some kind of connection, some sort of association with just the town in general, isn't safe. It's actually at this, I'm working on a site that I did an internship at.”

“And in a conversation about, basically, who deserves to keep their jobs and who can we expend in order to cut the budget. They started making something along, I think he is more like a she or she is more like a he and I heard they ran off to one of those states where it's legal to get married. And this is after same sex marriage had passed, they were just that ignorant. And I was furious, almost busted out the door. But these are people in positions of power, and I'm scared to.”

“I was kind of blindsided I showed him my hand, and I was like, this is what it feels like in this district. I was like, I'm married, do you see a ring? And they were like, no. And I was like,
cause rings make people ask questions. I was like, I haven't felt comfortable wearing my wedding ring and no part about that is okay.”

“And they’re like, as long as you don't impose your values, this lifestyle, this way of thinking onto the clients? No, I don't think it would be an issue. But I do want to let you know, we frequently pray with our clients and this kind of stuff. I didn't get the internship. I can't say that's why, I don't know why, but probably played a role”

“Just based on past experiences that we carry around with us, like walking across a crosswalk in college and having faggot screamed at you and stuff like that. It's little things like that you kind of learn like, okay, what was I doing in that moment?”

“And it sucks because I spent however many years of my life like hating myself and pray the gay away type stuff.”

“I know how hard it was to learn to accept myself.”

“I was kind of inadvertently outed a couple of years ago. A school psychologist asked me, just in front of everybody, ‘Are you married?’ And I said, yes. Thinking back that could be the end of it and I wouldn't have to lie. And she said something along the lines of like, ‘Oh, my God, what is your wife's name?’ Because people always jump to those conclusions.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>n/a</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concealment is Protective</td>
<td>“Concealment is a protective factor. Taking off the mask is a risk factor.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s armor”</td>
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<td>“I see that, and I’m like, oh, let’s stay quiet, not worth the notoriety.”</td>
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<td>“It would break my heart to find out that they were a bigot, so I prefer not to know.”</td>
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Specifics When Working with Children

“Mr. Jasper told me, he has a husband and they're like, oh, no, you don't need to be talking to this Mr. Jasper anymore”

“I'm working with kids and because that the parents will see that or hear about that and think, oh, that's not the type of person I want working with my kid.”

“It's just a different working environment, they still they see a lot of my identity. But not that.”

“When they hear anything about sexual orientation, affectional orientation, they automatically go to sex. And because it's an elementary school environment, they're like, they don't even know what that is. They have no business knowing what that is. That's inappropriate for that age group”

“a school is not. It can't be separated from the community in which it's situated.”

“I posted a video where students meet like a transgender person, and they get to talk to them and ask questions. And a teacher showed it to their students, a kid went home and told their parents and it turned into a whole big thing about it being inappropriate.”

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<tr>
<th>Concealment Behavior</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bodily Changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I'm going to act more butch with you.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I'm a big hand talker just in general, and I have to kind of put that on lock”</td>
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<td>“Butching it up takes this into the backwoods”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I changed the kind of bag I was carrying.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filtering</td>
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<tr>
<td>“And I froze. And I couldn't lie in that moment. But I also didn't say it, and I like, deflected”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The fact that I deflected the question, kind of everybody kind of clued in”</td>
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<td>“Deflect, deflect, deflect”</td>
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“I won't talk about certain interests. If it’s musical interest or TV shows stuff like that, where it could be perceived. I'm not going to talk about the last episode of "Drag Race" or something like that.”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concealment Affects the Counseling Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Counseling Relationship</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>“And not seeing in my real life, any sort of representation.”</td>
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<td>“Now there's queer representation in a lot of media, but back then there wasn't.”</td>
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<td>I don't know if these kids see that. I mean, they see more of it in media that I don't know what they're exposed to in their real life”</td>
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<td>“It would be helpful for them to have that representation.”</td>
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<td>“I've had a transgender client, like I've worked with, probably in the course of five years, probably about 20 students who identify as LGBTQ+, and I never had. I regret that.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>“I think that's one of the reasons I do things like I slide in those videos about transgender people and stuff like that, it is to advocate, very much to advocate. But it's also because of the guilt of not being as authentic as I would like to be. I have to compensate. I have to feel like I'm doing something to further acceptance of the queer community.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection Points</td>
<td>“I think it's heightened my sensitivity to language.”</td>
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<td>“I also feel like it makes me more effective. In other ways, because even if I'm not disclosing, this part of my identity really allows me to understand and to empathize with you in a very personal way.”</td>
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</table>
| | “Because I know the truth, that kind of the techniques. I know the deflection. And I know it's okay to express to a student that I'm an
accepting person, when I notice things like when they refer to their boyfriend or girlfriend, or they'll say things like my crush. Like they'll say things that are very gender neutral. And that's not lost on me.”

“Just, pain knows pain.”

“But loss is a pretty universal feeling. We've all experienced loss that we can draw upon. And I think my experiences, my negative experiences especially with queer youth that are hurting and feel unaccepted that I'm, I'm able to draw upon that. And it kind of just creates kind of heart-to-heart connection. Even though I'm concealing.”

“I really understand what they're going through and how hard and challenging that that is. I know what it's like to be scared and to not know if somebody is going to be safe or not. So I think it's kind of heightened that and not only, is another kind of, I think it extends beyond queer students, queer clients”

“As a gay man in the south, I do still know what it's like to feel somewhat marginalized, I am able to draw upon that aspect of marginalization in my identity, to help people who may not identify as queer, but may feel marginalized in other ways. I can empathize with the outsider.”

**Concealment Negatively Affects the Counselor**

**Authenticity and Genuineness**

“Which sucks because like I value, I teach the kids, or I try to instill in them the value of just that it's okay to be themselves and I'm not being completely myself. So, there's kind of a hypocritical factor there.”

“But I have to tell myself almost as a way to assuage my own guilt, that I'm not being fake, that I'm just choosing which aspects of myself to identify. It doesn't mean I'm not completely being myself with both of them. But I have a different history with both of them. I act somewhat differently. And I don't think either way is inauthentic.”
“Because I want to be able to be genuine on my own terms”

“The guilt of not being as authentic as I would like to be. I have to compensate”

“It doesn't mean I'm not being authentic…and I could be at every march, and I still know, I would never feel like I was doing enough, I don't know that I could do enough.”

“Authenticity, and that's one that I struggle with. That's why I have to tell myself, I'm not being inauthentic. I'm just drawing upon, these different facets of myself.”

Self-Efficacy

“I feel like I am not as helpful as I could be sometimes, because I feel like if I could share that part of myself with my students”

Emotional Labor

“I felt guilty for like three days.”

“I feel like concealment makes me cowardly”

“Mainly anxiety, It's a lot of fear”

“In effort to feel more comfortable, I keep myself concealed, but then I feel guilty for that”

“I mean, there's probably some, I think I resent myself to a certain degree”

“I've maintained that for so long, and I'm just tired.”

“But that is a salient, salient, I guess the thing for me is to conceal oneself so much so often, and for so long is fucking exhausting”

“So, it's kind of hard to shake off, that role when I do it so much.”

“There’s probably more in the pro column for just being completely out than there is in the con, to be completely honest with you, but the probably three or four things in that con category just seem so damn insurmountable,”
“I think even if they may be the most accepting people in the world, you start to resent the place because it exhausts you.”

“I think my own takeaway is that it is, concealment is a heavy...The armor is very heavy.”

“So, there's a lot of cognitive dissonance that goes along with that.”

**Individual Interview 2: Katherine (She/They)**

Katherine was a 27-year-old bisexual individual. Katherine was a licensed counselor in a rural area in a southeastern state with four years of experience. Katherine held a master’s in clinical mental health counseling and had recently completed her PhD in counselor education and supervision. Katherine worked in a college counseling center and a community mental health setting primarily seeing LGBTQ+ and gender expansive clients. Katherine described her experience of self-concealment, some of the internal motivation she had to continue self-concealing, the behaviors she felt she used to self-conceal, and how self-concealment affected herself and her work as a counselor. Included in this section is a summary of her salient experiences as well as quotes that spoke to the themes that emerged from the data.

The interview began with allowing Katherine to ask questions about the study and a review of informed consent and her rights during the study. Prior to scheduling the interview, Katherine had completed a consent form and returned it electronically to the researcher via email. The researcher reminded Katherine that she could withdraw from the study at any time and her data would be excluded from the data analysis and final report. Katherine confirmed her understanding of the consent to participate in the study. The researcher then shared his identity as a queer person with Katherine and discussed the process of reflexivity that he was using throughout the research to ensure credibility of the findings. The researcher shared with
Katherine that as part of using Hycner’s (1985) steps to analyze the data she would receive via email a summary of the themes from her interview, and she would have the chance to review the themes for accuracy and provide revisions to the researcher if necessary. Katherine confirmed her understanding of this and the researcher began recording the interview.

The researcher asked Katherine what internal experiences she noticed that would lead her self-conceal her identity in her counseling work. Katherine described an “internal battle” that “feels like a pull.” Katherine shared that she primarily marketed herself “for people in the LGBTQ community so that I don’t have to self-conceal.” She experienced the “internal battle” when she worked with clients who “don’t Identify similarly.” Katherine described the battle saying:

“there's an internal battle between is this a part of my identity that I share? Is this a part of my identity that I don't share? And unfortunately, a lot of times it comes off of the assumption when I first kind of meet the client. It's like, ‘Okay, how safe is it?’ For me as a clinician to share that part of me, would it be helpful for this person? Would it be not helpful for this person to know? Would they not come to counseling again if I shared my identity? And so, I think that all of those questions kind of come up in my head. And sometimes if I felt comfortable that comes out pretty fast about my identity. A lot of times, if I feel that's not going to be received well, then it'll never come out.

Katherine expressed uncertainty about whether to self-conceal based on her perceptions of safety with the client. Katherine also questioned the appropriateness of a disclosure which could prompt her to self-conceal. Katherine shared that concealment affected her ability to feel genuine in her counseling work, saying “that feels really ingenuine, but also, it's not for me. So, I
think there's this push and pull of like, how do I be my genuine self in the counseling room while also concealing this part of me? That's a huge part of my identity.”

The researcher then asked Katherine if there were differences in self-concealment between her LGBTQ+ clients and assumed heterosexual clients. Katherine said, “for people who are in the LGBT population, I mean, right from the jump, it's usually something they ask.” Katherine did not typically conceal with clients in the LGBTQ+ population because clients often asked for a provider who had experience with the community. In these cases, Katherine said she did not conceal and was “honest and up front when it’s asked. If it’s not asked, I’ll just say that I have experience with the population.”

Katherine added that there were times when she had asked straight clients about their identity and was met with “almost an offensive type of ‘why are you asking me that?’” Katherine said she typically responded with a general statement like “it’s okay, this is something I ask everybody. I just want to know what identities are in the room because we both share identities. That’s important to talk about.” Katherine shared that these experiences have prompted her to self-conceal. “After I get that reaction, there’s internally, I’m like, ‘got it, this is part of me that we’re not going to talk about or that’s where they stand on this issue’” she said. Katherine added that this may be a geographical issue saying, “I think it’s really hard too, because living in the bible belt, that is something that comes up in community mental health quite a bit.” Katherine meant that in the area where she lived, there were prevailing stigmatizing attitudes and beliefs which motivated her to self-conceal.

The researcher then asked Katherine about possible differences in how she might conceal with clients versus colleagues and supervisors. Katherine shared that she was generally open about her identity with other counselors, particularly because she specialized in working with the
LGBTQ+ communities. “So, I think there is a general understanding for me, I guess I feel more open with counselors of like, ‘Well, you're a counselor, you should be competent, you should be understanding.’” Katherine also shared her experience of meeting a counselor who was not as open and affirming of queer people as she would have expected. She described this experience here:

“I think it's always hard when you do meet a counselor that's not as open. And you're like, ‘Oh, okay. And you're seeing students, and that is scary to me knowing that I am a queer individual, and you could have a queer individual like me sitting in your office and you don't understand or you're not open.’ Yeah. So, I like to be positive and say that most counselors I would hope are open.”

Katherine had the expectation that counselors would be open and affirming, and that when she met someone who was not, she considered self-concealing. The researcher later reflected on this experience in his journal because he had experienced other counseling professionals who were not LGBTQ+ affirming which had prompted him to make a concealment decision. The researcher explored Katherine’s experience further and asked her what indicators would tell her that a counselor was “not as open?” Katherine shared experiences from her work that have made her consider self-concealing including a counselor “asking a lot of questions, like I am the dictionary for the LGBT population.” Katherine also described having a “vibe” about some counselors based on her past personal experiences. “It’s never directly I would say malice in a way towards me, but it’s kind of this, indirect microaggressions” she added. Katherine shared that she knew which colleagues had negative views based on them not consulting with her despite being “very well known as the queer and trans counselor.”
The researcher asked Katherine to expand upon the “vibe” that tells her other colleagues might not be as open. She described noticing the following:

“I think as far as body language, visible uncomfortability when a queer or trans issue comes into place in a consultation meeting, or if there is a question about, ‘Hey, I have a student who's queer or trans and I want to know your input’ and they stumble around their words, you can visibly see they're kind of uncomfortable to talk about it. Or yeah, I think the direct avoidance of me as a person. Thankfully, it doesn't happen a lot, but I have been in situations where it's like, ‘Oh yeah, I've worked here for four years, and I think I've spoken to that person twice.’”

Katherine continued elaborating by describing how the things she noticed made her feel. Katherine said she picked up on energy from others that made her ask “why am I uncomfortable? I'm literally just in the break room getting coffee. I don't understand why I'm so uncomfortable.” Katherine clarified that she felt this discomfort when she perceived that someone in the workplace didn’t like her or didn’t understand her. She added “it feels almost unsafe even if it's not.”

The researcher continued the interview asking Katherine if there were any other active steps that she took to self-conceal her identity that we had not already talked about. Katherine answered the question with how she experienced feeling the need to self-conceal. Katherine described making a concealment decision as “almost a fight or flight response in a way. It’s like, ‘oh I need to go. I need to leave the situation.’” Katherine added that when she felt like she had to make a concealment decision, if she was feeling “really on top of it that day” she would confront the other person, but it felt like having to “legitimize” her identity. Katherine’s
concealment decisions were motivated by the pressure she felt to self-conceal when others made her feel unsafe.

The researcher asked Katherine if there was anything else that influenced her decision to not self-conceal. Katherine initially shared that she concealed with clients who came to counseling because they were “questioning their identity.” She added “I purposely don’t share my identities because I don’t want to come across like ‘I’m swaying you a certain way.’ Or ‘here is my belief system. This is who I am as person.’” For Katherine, self-concealment with clients was based on their individual needs and therapeutic relevance. Katherine said she learned from an experience where she had shared her identity with a client who thought they might be bisexual and when they realized they weren’t, they shared with Katherine they felt guilty for not also being bisexual. Katherine continued saying “if they ask my experience, I will share it. But that's not something that I just kind of readily kind of give out for them because I don't want my identity to confuse them, to question their own identities or to influence them in any way, because it's their own journey.”

The researcher reiterated the question making sure to acknowledge that Katherine said she was relatively open, but that the narrative she shared suggested that she had made concealment decisions. Katherine began by saying “going back to the vibe” and describing previous experiences she had in the workplace. Katherine shared that her concealment decisions were based on questions of safety. Katherine often felt unsafe due to being uncertain about how others would react if they knew she was bisexual. Katherine chose not to self-conceal if the felt safe to do so and if it was therapeutically relevant with her clients. Katherine felt safe if she perceived support in the workplace through cues such as talking about going to pride events or colleagues talking positively about queer friends or clients.
The researcher then asked Katherine about her degree of outness. Katherine again shared that she was open about her identity with personal friends, her supervisors, and most of her clients. She added “in my family unit, I think that’s where most the most concealment happens for me.” Katherine recently finished her PhD and stated that when she went into interviews for counselor education jobs she did not self-conceal. “This is my identity, take it or leave it” she said. In her clinical work, Katherine did not conceal with supervisors and colleagues because she viewed her identity as something that could “help other people who are in marginalized populations.”

The researcher then asked specifically about Katherine’s level of self-concealment when she started her current clinical positions. Katherine recalled that she had initially concealed her identity in her job as a college counselor because she knew she identified within the queer community, but she was not sure of her identity. “I feel in that moment, I didn’t’ feel confident enough to express that” she said. Katherine added that she had done her own personal work and “a lot of self-exploration” between then and when she went into a community mental health role as well. In her role as a community-based counselor, Katherine did use her identity as means of reaching marginalized clients, particularly in small rural areas. Katherine noted that she was able to use her identity in this role partially because the place where she and her partner now live was “a lot more open.” The researcher took note of this in the field notes and later reflected in his journal about the highly contextualized nature of the experiences Katherine had just described.

The researcher then directed the conversation back to the question about active steps to self-conceal. Katherine thought for a moment and said, “I think in counseling it’s a bit easier because it’s not about me.” She described using boundary setting as a natural part of counseling to shift the conversation away from her personal identity with clients. Katherine added that she
would say “this isn’t about me. This is about you. And I’ll share what I think would be helpful for you, but this is your space.” Setting boundaries has allowed Katherine to conceal by limiting what information her clients received about her identity as bisexual. “In the professional realm, I would say I don’t bring up personal stuff such as my partnership, relationships, unless it’s explicitly asked of me, or I’ll use the word partner” she added. Katherine also self-concealed using gender-neutral terminology across many professional settings. Katherine then referenced the researcher’s previous question about deciding not to conceal. She described how using gender-neutral language was a way to determine who is safe:

“You get to see in that way too, who is in the know, because if you use the word ‘they’ and then the coworker or the person, the client says, ‘Oh yeah, your partner, they did it.’ And they don’t assume it's a male. They don't assume it's like, ‘Oh yeah, you and your husband or you and your boyfriend’ or whoever it may be. Yeah, there's no assumption it's taking my word for it, for whatever pronouns I use.”

Next, the researcher asked Katherine how self-concealing her identity affected her work as a counselor. She began by telling a story about a “cishet, white male, Republican” client about whom she had to seek supervision. “When we got into their parts of their identity, I immediately had a reaction, I was like, “Oh shit,” she said. Katherine’s perception of this client’s identities was that he ascribed to a certain belief system, and she thought “oh I can’t work with this person” and “I hope they don’t find out about me.” Katherine’s personal experience with this belief system had motivated her to feel like she needed to self-conceal. Katherine believed that if the client found out she was bisexual, “it could ruin everything.” She shared that she already felt like her fear of the client finding out about her identity could ruin the counseling relationship. Katherine was not certain that this client would come back to counseling because she was
bisexual “and that was really hard for me to sit with.” Katherine elaborated on her feelings about the uncertainty of a client not returning to counseling by saying:

“I'm sad that there's such a stigma, but certain people won't come to me because of my identity. So, I feel like in ways that's how it is. And then also there's anger. If my client brings up anti LGBT stuff and they don't know my identity, there's this internal struggle of being extremely pissed and angry. And then also being like, ‘Okay, this is their thing. This is their problems that they're having.’ So, I feel it can be a really internal battle.”

The researcher asked Katherine to elaborate on her feelings, particularly the anger she described. Katherine shared thoughts on which she had previously reflected:

“So, I think I've had a thought that's like, ‘How dare this person have so much hate when I am the one who's helping them?’ And as a queer person, ‘I helped you get out of a really bad spot, and I am here for you. I'm doing this emotional labor for you and with you.’ And there's this just blatant hate I think for individuals for no reason. And yeah, I think that's where that comes from, in the back of my head, I was like, ‘I could not help you.’ Even though I want to, and I'm a helper, it's like there's this ‘F you’ mentality in the back of my head sometimes. That's like, ‘Why am I putting out this emotional labor for someone who doesn't appreciate me and my identity?’”

Katherine reflected that the experience of possibly being rejected by a client because of her identity felt “familiar in a lot of ways.” She added “I would assume a lot of queer people have that experience of being rejected or bullied or having people around you who are misinformed or blatantly homophobic, especially where I live.” Katherine’s experiences felt familiar, and she likened them to a collective queer experience because of the broader systemic stigmatization that affected queer people in all aspects of their lives. The counseling workplace,
despite the perception that it was supposed to be affirming, was affected by systemic heteronormativity and heterosexism.

The researcher asked what risks she felt were associated with self-concealment in her counseling work. Katherine re-emphasized the importance of making sure the client’s needs were met “and unfortunately, sometimes the best way to do that is concealing who I am.”

Katherine described the emotional risks associated with self-concealment:

“I mean, sometimes it is a lot of anger, frustration, asking myself, ‘Do I really want to be a counselor on a weekly basis,’ when that comes up and questioning my counseling abilities because they teach like, ‘Yes, this is completely for the other person. And don't project anything.’ And I'm sitting there like, ‘Well, I'm getting really mad right now. Maybe I'm a horrible counselor.’”

Katherine identified “imposter syndrome” as a potential risk related to the self-efficacy risks, she had previously mentioned. She also spoke again about possibly “being fired by a client” as a risk that made her want to self-conceal. Katherine stated this had never happened to her before, but she felt it was a possible outcome of deciding not to self-conceal because she knew other counselors who had this experience. Katherine’s experiences felt like emotional labor because she dealt with imposter syndrome, anger, and frustration to get her job done. The counseling work was not about her, so these feelings were just part of what she had to deal with.

The researcher asked if there were ways that concealment might be protective for Katherine. Katherine reiterated that concealment protected her from potentially losing income and that she felt her self-concealing protected the client in some ways. She further shared “it’s definitely not protective for me as a client or as a counselor.” Katherine then shared that she
often questioned if it was worth it to self-conceal. She explained the “internal battle” of questioning saying:

“There is a lot of internal struggle that makes me question is it worth concealing? Because if I conceal, then yes, I'm helping this client and everything like that, but am I truly being genuine? Am I truly being there 100% for this person if there is an internal battle because I'm angry? And so that's something I oftentimes question is like, is it worth it to conceal? Or can I just be honest? And if you don't like me, there are other providers who align with you. And yeah, I feel that's a struggle that I've had to really work through it. It's client dependent, I think.”

The researcher asked Katherine if she could talk more about how she determined whether a client was safe enough or hateful enough. Katherine described being aware of her “somatic response” and “internally gauging ‘do I feel safe?’” Katherine mentioned again “understanding is my fight or flight system activated to the point where I can’t be in the room with this person?” She stressed the importance of this awareness because she felt that if she did not feel safe, she was not able to be herself with the client and that could “potentially harm them.”

At this point, the researcher asked Katherine if there was anything about her experience with self-concealing in counseling that they had not discussed. Katherine shared that she felt there was a difference in experiences of self-concealment among bisexual and pansexual individuals because they experienced discrimination from within the queer community and from heterosexual people. The researcher asked Katherine how it had been for her to discuss self-concealment experiences with him, and she responded with the following:

“I think there was a lot of different emotions I think that were coming up for me. And a lot of realization of guilt that I still held on to that I wasn't aware of. So, I appreciated
having this conversation because I feel it was really validating for me, because this is something that's not talked about. I feel it's a known thing for queer counselors. You just conceal, that's what you do, but no one talks about it. And so, it's not normalized, and I've never had this conversation with another queer identified counselor. And yet it's something I know we all do. So that was really…Yeah, I think validating that someone was taking the time to understand that. And it definitely opened my eyes to a lot of the emotions underneath that for me like the anger and the guilt and I think the sadness too, of realizing like, ‘This is something that we have to do.’ What feels like we need to do is conceal parts of our identity to be a good counselor. Yeah. So, I think all of that was happening at the same time for me.”

Self-concealment was isolating despite Katherine knowing that other LGBQ+ counselors engaged in self-concealment in the workplace. Katherine’s experience stressed the need for more experiences of LGBQ+ counselors to be reflected in the counseling literature and for the profession to have a greater understanding of their experiences.

The researcher thanked Katherine again for her participation and said he would be in touch via email with a summary of the themes from her interview. Katherine reviewed the summary and said, “I think you definitely represented what I said,” and no revisions were necessary. Table 3 provides a visual representation of the significant quotations from Sakura’s interview that came up in relation to the themes that emerged from the data.

Table 3

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<tr>
<th>Participant 2: Katherine Phrases of Significance</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Analytic Category</strong></td>
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<td>The Concealment Decision</td>
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<td>Expressed Beliefs of Others</td>
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going to talk about or that's where they stand on this issue.”

Perceived Negative Views of Others

“Yeah, I think as far as body language, visible uncomfortability when a queer or trans issue comes into place in a consultation meeting, or if there is a question about, ‘Hey, I have a student who's queer or trans and I want to know your input’ and they stumble around their words, you can visibly see they're kind of uncomfortable to talk about it. Or yeah, I think the direct avoidance of me as a person. Thankfully, it doesn't happen a lot, but I have been in situations where it's like, ‘Oh yeah, I've worked here for four years, and I think I've spoken to that person twice.’ And you just notice certain things.”

“At my center, I was at a center with 50 plus counselors and I mean, I was very well known as the queer and trans counselor. That was me. And you'll know who doesn't consult with you, doesn't really talk with you about things, will go out of their way to talk to another individual to consult with.”

“It's never directly I would say malice in any way towards me, but it's kind of this indirect micro-aggressions that you'll see where usually older white counselors are the ones who are kind of, I don't know, plague me out. They're like, ‘Okay, we're not going to interact a lot with her.’ I think that's some things that I've seen.”

“Yeah. You can feel. Yeah. It's like if I'm around that person, I then feel uncomfortable because I pick up on energy a lot and I'm just like, ‘Why am I uncomfortable? I'm literally just in the break room getting coffee. I don't understand why I'm so uncomfortable.’ And I'm like, ‘Oh, this person who I perceive doesn't like me or doesn't understand me is now in this space with me.’”

“I like feel it's weird you can tell from a vibe”

Deciding Not to Conceal
Perceived Support

“For example, I had a coworker who I was trying to decide should I share my identity with or something that. And they shared that they were going to pride this weekend or this one weekend and as an ally and it was like, ‘Oh, okay, well, this is a safe person.’”

“Getting to know my coworkers on an individual level makes me feel safe to share that, very almost experiential with each person”

“You get to see in that way too, who is in the know, because if you use the word they and then the coworker or the person, the client says, ‘Oh yeah, your partner, they did it.’ And they don't assume it's a male. They don't assume it's like, ‘Oh yeah, you and your husband or you and your boyfriend’ or whoever it may be. Yeah, there's no assumption it's taking my word for it, for whatever pronouns I use”

“Okay I trust you. Yes, exactly. Yeah, once they reuse what I say, I'm like, ‘Okay, you're a safe person.’”

“They're in a consult group and talk about their queer students or something like that”

Professional Relationships

“So, I am a little bit more open of like, "Hey, these are my identities." With supervisors and everything like that, I've never hidden a part of my identity.”

“So, my friends, my supervisors, I would say 90% of my clients on my caseload.”

“I think there is a general understanding for me, I guess I feel more open with counselors of like, ‘Well, you're a counselor, you should be competent, you should be understanding.’ So that's not something that I usually hide in the workplace”

LGBTQ+ Clients

“That's been something that I've tried to utilize for specializing in certain populations and everything like that.”
“But I also don't hide it, if that makes sense. If they come for it great, but I'm not going to be like, ‘I am the queer counselor here,’ unless it's asked or somebody kind of shares that information.”

“If they ask my experience, I will share it.”

“This is something that I can help other people who are in marginalized populations. I'm not going to hide this about myself because I think this could be really helpful.”

| Coworkers with Marginalized Identities | “So, unless I feel safe because they have brought up that part of their identity” |
| Concealment Motivation               |                                                                                   |

**Fear**

“I immediately had a reaction, I was like, ‘Oh, shit’, type of reaction. And it wasn't just like, ‘Oh, I can't work with this person.’ It was, ‘Oh, I hope they don't find out about me.’”

“And I had a big fear. I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, they're going to put me on psychology today. They're going to find my website and there's this queer stuff everywhere’”

“so, there was a fear for me of like, this client might not come back for counseling because of who I am.”

“it's something that I fear, and I think about”

**Safety**

“So, unless I feel safe because they have brought up that part of their identity or they're in a consult group and talk about their queer students or something like that, it's not something that I openly share”

“And it feels almost unsafe even if it's not.”

“Okay, how safe is it?”

“If there was something that a client was very hateful, and I was feeling unsafe”

“So, I think my gauge would be internally gauging, Do I feel safe?”
Uncertainty

“And sometimes if I felt comfortable that comes out pretty fast about my identity. A lot of times, if I feel that's not going to be received well then, it'll never come out.”

“So, I think there's this push and pull”

“It's client dependent I think”

“I'm sad that there's such a stigma, but certain people won't come to me because of my identity.”

“So, I feel like in ways that's how it is. Unfortunately, risks of being fired by a client. That’s never happened to me before, but I have known individuals who that has happened to, and the client has found out about their identity and they're not okay with it.”

“Would they not come to counseling again if I shared my identity? And so, I think that all of those questions kind of come up in my head.”

“I think that’s a huge risk, is money involved too, losing that income”

Client Needs “This isn’t about me”

“For me as a clinician to share that part of me, would it be helpful for this person?”

“Like you want to make sure your experience isn't clouding what they're trying to get through”

“Well, I think in counseling, it's a little bit easier because it's not about me. So, if there is a client who want to know a lot of personal information or something you can set a boundary with that of like, ‘Well, this isn't about me. This is about you. And I'll share what I think would be helpful for you, but this is your space, and you can kind of move the conversation away from identity and your personal identity.’”

“I really just want to make sure that that client gets what they need. And unfortunately,
sometimes the best way to do that is concealing who I am.”

“If there is a client who is questioning their identity, who is starting out, maybe they're coming into counseling because they're questioning sexual identity, gender identity, whatever it may be, I purposely don't share my identities because I don't want that to come across as like, ‘I'm swaying you a certain way.’ Or ‘Here is my belief system. This is who I am as a person.’”

“If they ask my experience, I will share it. But that's not something that I just kind of readily kind of give out for them because I don't want my identity to confuse them, to question their own identities or to influence them in any way, because it's their own journey.”

"Yes, this is completely for the other person. And don't project anything."

Professional Relationship Dynamics

“I think it's always hard when you do meet a counselor that's not as open. And you're like, ‘Oh, okay. And you're seeing students, and that is scary to me knowing that I am a queer individual, and you could have a queer individual like me sitting in your office and you don't understand or you're not open.’”

Perceptions of the Local Area/Town/Region

“Living in the Bible belt”

“My partner and I come from very rural North Carolina, the Bible says, ‘You're wrong, so you're wrong mentally.’ So, I think, yeah, that definitely comes into play.”

“I would assume a lot of queer people have that experience of being rejected or bullied or having people around you who are misinformed or blatantly homophobic, especially where I live.”

Previous Negative Experiences

“In my family unit, I think that's where the most concealment happens for me.”
“But I have been in places where there's the assumption of my partner's identity in all of the different ways.”

“I think it feels familiar in a lot of ways, I would assume a lot of queer people have that experience”

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<th>Culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concealment is Protective</td>
<td>“also, it feels like it's protective for them in a way.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I think income and the client primarily”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“It’s definitely not protective for me as a client, or as a counselor. Except for monetary value potentially.”</td>
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| Specifics When Working with Children | “And they're like, ‘Well, no.’ It's usually kind of parents of children. They're like, ‘No, you're not allowed to see my child.’ And that's scary” |

| Concealment Behavior |
|---|---|
| Bodily Changes | n/a |
| Filtering | “In the professional realm, I would say I don't bring up personal stuff such as my partnership, relationships unless it's explicitly asked of me” |
| | “I'll use the word partner and gender-neutral terms for my partner. And I try to use that in a lot of other settings too, gender neutrality in a lot of different things. But I think specifically I become more aware of using like, ‘they’ and ‘my partner’, and ‘we did this thing this weekend.’” |
| | “Well, I think in counseling, it's a little bit easier because it's not about me. So, if there is a client who want to know a lot of personal information or something you can set a boundary with that of like, ‘Well, this isn't about me. This is about you. And I'll share what I think would be helpful for you, but this is your space’ and you can kind of move the conversation away from identity and your personal identity.” |
| Passing | n/a |
| Concealment Affects the Counseling Work |
| The Counseling Relationship | “Then that client, I could potentially harm them. I mean, I could say something that was completely harmful, or they could take it the wrong way.”
| “This ruins the counseling relationship”
| Representation | n/a |
| Advocacy | n/a |
| Connection Points | n/a |

Concealment Negatively Affects the Counselor

| Authenticity and Genuineness | “At the end of the day if I’m not feeling safe, I'm not going to be 100% me”
| “And that feels really ingenuine, but also it’s not for me”
| “How do I be my genuine self in the counseling room while also concealing this part of me? That's a huge part of my identity”
| “And it's really bad to think about. For me, and how I was trained, it's like you're trying to just kind of accept everybody and be there for everybody. But at the same time, it's like, I can't be a genuine counselor and do that, I don't think.”
| “But am I truly being genuine? Am I truly being there 100% for this person if there is an internal battle because I'm angry?”

| Self-Efficacy | “Do I really want to be a counselor on a weekly basis, when that comes up and questioning my counseling abilities because they teach like, ‘Yes, this is completely for the other person. And don't project anything.’ And I'm sitting there like, ‘Well, I'm getting really mad right now. Maybe I'm a horrible counselor.’”
| “I think the risk of imposter syndrome”

| Emotional Labor | “And that was really hard for me to sit with”
| “Feeling rejected.”
| “There is an internal battle because I'm angry”

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“there's an internal battle between is this a part of my identity that I share? Is this a part of my identity that I don't share?”

“it's almost a fight or flight response in a way. It's like, oh, I need to go. I need to leave the situation.”

“Understanding is my fight or flight system activated to the point where I can't be in this room with this person?”

“There is a lot of internal struggle that makes me question is it worth concealing?”

“As far as risk emotionally, yeah. I mean, sometimes it is a lot of anger, frustration”

“I feel that's a struggle that I've had to really work through”

“‘I'm doing this emotional labor for you and with you.’ And there's this just blatant hate I think for individuals for no reason. And yeah, I think that's where that comes from, in the back of my head, I was like, ‘I could not help you.’ Even though I want to, and I'm a helper, it's like there's this F you mentality in the back of my head sometimes. That's like, ‘Why am I putting out this emotional labor for someone who doesn't appreciate me and my identity?’”

“Is it worth it to conceal? Or can I just be honest?”

“Emotional risks involved”

“And then also there's anger. If my client brings up anti LGBT stuff and they don't know my identity, there's this internal struggle of being extremely pissed and angry. And then also being like, ‘Okay, this is their thing. This is their problem that they're having.’ So, I feel it can be a really internal battle.”
“Sharing my anger of like, ‘This person doesn't agree with my identity, and it's just really hard to sit in this space.’”

“Sometimes it is a lot of anger, frustration, asking myself, ‘Do I really want to be a counselor?’ on a weekly basis”

“Definitely, there is a lot of guilt”

“It definitely opened my eyes to a lot of the emotions underneath that for me like the anger and the guilt and I think the sadness too, of realizing like, ‘This is something that we have to do.’ What feels like we need to do is conceal parts of our identity to be a good counselor.”

**Individual Interview 3: Ana (She/Her)**

Ana was a 28-year-old bisexual individual. Ana was a licensed counselor in a southern state with four years of experience. Ana held a master’s in counseling and was in the process of completing her PhD in counselor education and supervision. Ana worked in a community mental health setting and a private practice and primarily worked with clients of all ages from a predominantly white affluent suburban area. Ana described the experiences that prompted her to self-conceal, her motivation to self-conceal, the concealment behaviors she used, and how self-concealment affected her and her work as a counselor. Included in this section are her salient experiences supported by quotations of significance.

The interview began with allowing Ana to ask questions about the study and a review of informed consent and her rights during the study. Prior to scheduling the interview, Ana had completed a consent form and returned it electronically to the researcher via email. The researcher reminded Katherine that she could withdraw from the study at any time and her data would be excluded from the data analysis and final report. Ana confirmed her understanding of the consent to participate in the study. The researcher then shared his identity as a queer person
with Ana and discussed the process of reflexivity that he was using throughout the research to ensure credibility of the findings. The researcher shared with Ana that as part of using Hycner’s (1985) steps to analyze the data she would receive via email a summary of the themes from her interview, and she would have the chance to review the themes for accuracy and provide revisions to the researcher if necessary. Ana confirmed her understanding of this and the researcher began recording the interview.

The researcher asked Ana what internal experiences have led her to self-conceal her identity in her counseling work. Ana first shared that she was a “bisexual person in a straight-passing relationship” because her husband was a man. Due to heteronormative assumptions “it’s kind of one of those, you’ll only know if I tell you sort of things,” she added. Ana continued saying, “there are certain clients, if I’m really thinking through it, there are certain clients’ parents that I typically feel almost like I lose credibility with, if they know I identify with the community at all.” The researcher asked Ana to talk more about how credibility concerns motivated her to self-conceal. Ana perceived that clients’ parents would see her as less credible because they said things like “I support her but she should tell nobody. I don’t want her telling anybody in case it’s a phase.” In addition to fearing that parents would question her credibility, Ana feared that there would be concerns that she had influenced a child to explore their identity because she was bisexual. Ana described a particular type of parent that she encountered often in the suburbs saying, “I live in Texas. I would be remiss to not point out that super right-leaning parents are not typically fans of anyone within the community, certainly less so people who have presumed authority over their child, like a therapist may.”

The researcher then asked Ana about her degree of outness. Ana thought briefly and then shared that her supervisor knew “in part because it comes up in a lot of these same conversations,
and just how to navigate conversations with clients and things like that.” Ana was out to many of her professional connections “because as a member of the community a lot of my professional connections are also within the community, It’s more chummy.” She added that she was not out to many of her coworkers. The researcher asked Ana how she decided not to conceal with the professional connections with whom she was out. Ana started by saying “I think if there’s an easy obvious avenue that feels natural.” Ana added that sometimes she felt “very weird” sharing her bisexual identity because she was married to a cisgender male and “there is a lot of privilege within that.” Professionally, Ana has done many presentations about working with bisexual clients, and she did not conceal in those spaces. Ana reiterated “I guess if an easy opportunity presents itself and I feel like that person is somebody I already know to be a safe person for other reasons” she might choose to not conceal.

The researcher asked how Ana knew who was a “safe person for other reasons.” Ana shared that she felt safer with people who she knew were within the LGBTQ+ community, had spoken about things she “align[ed] with ideologically,” and younger folks. When she was deciding whether to self-conceal, Ana said “there’s a certain set of boxes that if you tick enough boxes, okay, you’re a person that’s okay to say something to.” The researcher asked Ana to talk about what boxes needed to be ticked for her to feel safe. Ana added that if a person was an “active ally” she felt safe to not self-conceal. She described characteristics that did not make her feel safe as follows:

“Something that's a mark against a person would be, to generalize, religious affiliation. Obviously that's more flexible, because I have friends who are religious who are fine, but I think that puts up a wall for me a lot more. Political affiliation is obviously a big one. Are you anti-gay-marriage? We are not friends. Any of those items. Let me think of what
other boxes. Are you discriminatory towards other groups that are minority groups?

Because I don't discuss the LGBTQ community with everybody, but if we've discussed
other minority groups or other marginalized populations and you're derogatory towards
them in some capacity, I'm going to assume that's just all-encompassing. Maybe it's not,
but for safety purposes, I'm going to assume that it is. I would say those are my bigger
boxes.”

The researcher followed up by asking if Ana ever chose not to conceal with any of her
clients. She shared her thought process saying the following:

“Hmm. I would say I don't feel like I go out of my way one way or the other, typically.
Again, because I think it's information I would have to actively supply. I have little stuff
around my office. I've got a flag. I've got a little rainbow sticker on my computer. You
know, things like this, that I have had clients pick up on, as small symbols of ‘oh, okay,
safe space and things.’ Also, because I work with younger kids, I, A, want to
communicate a safe space, but also, B, personally and professionally struggle to not
create a biased space. Like if I have a client who is kind of going back and forth ‘am I
straight, am I not straight,’ as a bisexual person, I feel like that's just an ongoing, forever,
am I gay enough, am I straight enough? I don't want to bring my personal experience to
that exploration. I think it's a very delicate balance to strike, of this is absolutely a
conversation we can have together, without ‘here's my experience with that conversation"
every time, if that makes sense.”

Concealment decisions with clients were always based on the client’s needs at the time
for Ana. Ana clarified by saying “that’s a very hard balance to strike, certainly so when we share
experiences or identities with our clients. I wouldn’t say I’m typically overt with it, with my clients, but I’m not intentionally hiding either.”

The researcher then asked Ana how she self-concealed her identity in her counseling work. Ana spoke specifically about her experience being in a straight-passing marriage saying, “it kind of comes with its own concealment labels.” Ana added that her marriage and talking about her husband’s pronouns did not “communicate anything to them that I feel would expose me in any kind of way” because her marriage was assumed to be heterosexual. Ana mentioned again taking a “blank slate approach,” but with coworkers, “particularly if they are new coworkers.” “I self-conceal by just not mentioning it,” she added. Ana also said “it’s the outing that feels intentional” which stuck out to the researcher. Ana’s marriage met socialized expectations for what a heterosexual marriage looked like so she self-concealed by letting others believe what they wanted to believe about her marriage. The researcher later noted in his journal the differences in passive self-concealment and choosing to self-disclose described by Ana.

The researcher asked Ana if there were differences in self-concealment between LGBTQ+ and assumed heterosexual coworkers. “With people who are not within the community, I feel like it’s very ‘I let them make their own assumptions’” she said. Ana then described “concealing in a different way” with coworkers within the community as follows:

“It's particularly the fact that I identify as bisexual. I don't identify as pansexual. I don't identify as omnisexual, what have you. Bisexual is my term. It's the one I've always used. To me, that's not a discriminatory term. I am very aware that some people within the community are like, ‘Bi excludes trans, bi excludes non-binary, et cetera, et cetera.’ Not my vibe, but I'm aware that that prejudice exists. I'm very acutely aware of which of my colleagues are members of the community who hold that opinion.”
The researcher then asked the same question, this time asking about differences in how she might self-conceal between LGBTQ+ and assumed heterosexual clients. Ana shared that she was “less worried about concealment” with LGBTQ+ clients because of the “therapeutic relationship that we have.” Ana described the relationship more in depth:

“I’m a lot more open with my LGBTQ clients than I am with my LGBTQ colleagues, because we have that connection. I know that that connection is good and grounded. I also feel that, I guess in some ways, I trust our relationship enough to…I don't know. Now that I'm thinking about it, I've never really thought a client was going to feel any kind of way about it. Again, it's not typically something that I lead with, but I think if it's not what you're coming for, I'm not going to make it into some total why you come to therapy.”

The researcher made note of Ana’s realization that she had never been worried about a client’s negative reaction and that this uncertainty was experienced more with colleagues. Ana added that “concealment with LGBTQ clients, it feels less necessary I guess, now that I think about it.” Ana referenced back to her concerns about being rejected by a coworker from within the community because they felt like the term bisexual was exclusionary. Ana referenced back to her approach to counseling and putting the client’s needs first saying, “I will say bisexual every day of the week, but if it’s going to bother you, it’s more important to me to create a safer space.” Ana did not appear bothered, adding “it’s not that important to me, so I would probably just shift the word that I use with that client.” Ana also described self-concealment with heterosexual clients as “shifting” away from the topic of identity. Heteronormative assumptions from her wearing a wedding ring, she just allowed clients to believe what they wanted to believe about her identity.
The researcher asked Ana if “shifting” felt like concealment. Ana shared that “shifting” was concealment “because it just feels incongruent.” She added that “it feels inauthentic, and I feel that authenticity is very important, certainly so in the counseling room.” Ana said that “shifting” feels like making herself “more palatable” to others. Ana also shared that she felt the need to be “more palatable” because of other pieces of her identity. Ana was Hispanic, and the daughter of an immigrant, but white-passing. She shared she has made herself “fake white” to make a client more comfortable who was ranting about immigration. Ana also concealed that she was Atheist because of her experience that clients in Texas were much more comfortable with a religious counselor. She had past negative experiences which had motivated her to self-conceal which she brought into counseling spaces with her. Ana’s motivation to be “more palatable” was the question “would we have the same relationship if you knew me as a person?” The researcher was struck by Ana saying, “more palatable,” and later reflected on his own experiences with feeling like he changed parts of himself to make others more comfortable in the counseling workplace.

The researcher then asked Ana how the experiences of self-concealment she had described affected her work as a counselor. Ana began with a positive aspect of self-concealment which was being able to connect with clients about feeling inauthentic. “It’s very nice to be able to pull from, ‘okay, here are the places where I felt like I can’t be this person,’” she said. Ana said she used these connection points often with teenagers and college age clients who were experiencing similar issues. Ana then described how concealment emotionally affected her as related to the counseling work:

“It's frustrating. It's tiring. I think just because personally, really professionally, anytime I feel like I have to be inauthentic, I feel very off-center. I don't know, man. Anytime it
comes up, it's just a downer. I would like a better feeling word for you than that, but it is.
It's a downer. I think it's a reminder of spaces I don't feel allowed. In the counseling
room, you kind of get everybody. I have ‘LGBTQ affirming therapist’ on our website,
but that doesn't mean everybody I get is within the community. I get kind of everybody.
With that, as a counselor, I think everybody that comes into my room, I'm like, ‘We're
going to connect, and it's going to be great.’ You know? I look forward to that. I really
enjoy the relationship-building aspect of therapy. It's very disheartening to kind of hit
stopping points of, ‘Oh, okay. Let me pivot. Let me adjust course and find out who you
need to be and who I need not to be in this space.’”

The researcher asked a clarifying question about feeling unable to connect with clients.
Ana added the following:

“It feels like a false connection. Can I connect with you? Sure. Do I feel like it's an
uncomplicated connection? No. I feel like there are aspects of it that, again, if you knew
me personally, we wouldn't have this relationship. And that sucks because I really like
my clients. I want to feel like we're 100% on the same team, and so it's hard when we're
not.”

The researcher noted that Ana had talked about feeling very “off-center,” in reference to
being inauthentic, and asked if she could share what that meant. Ana shared that she grew up in
small town and felt it was always difficult to be authentic in a small town, so she was familiar
with feelings of being inauthentic. These familiar feelings were experienced when she had to
self-conceal in her counseling work. Ana described a willingness, and a need to be inauthentic
because “if you want to connect with anybody, you have to compromise somewhere.” Ana
brought the conversation back to the counseling relationship saying she always felt “jilted”
because “it’s not really you, it’s you; it’s just you with a couple toggles switched.” Ana reiterated that being “inauthentic” or “off-center” got in the way of connecting with clients because “that relationship can be good and solid and whatever, but it doesn’t feel as real.” Feelings of inauthenticity reminded her of times when she had previously felt inauthentic, and she almost left the moment or presence with the client as if reacting to past experiences.

The researcher asked her about the risks associated self-concealing in counseling. Ana stated, “I worry that I'm missing out on certain opportunities with clients and certain conversations that I want to have.” Ana elaborated by providing a client example:

“I had a client, for example, who was really struggling with, ‘I think I'm bisexual, but I'm not really sure.’ I mean, she was like my third client. I'm talking like my last semester of my master's program. I hadn't seen anybody else who was bisexual before. I spent so much time in supervision, just going, ‘How do I navigate that? I want her to know, hey dude, me too. Me too. I'm with you, and I get it,’ without steering that. I don't want her to, ‘Oh, because Ana is bisexual, she'll feel more comfortable if I identify as bisexual, too.’ I don't want to push you. I just want you to know that I understand. I can relate to that back-and-forth struggle.”

Ana worried about these moments because they were missed connection points and missed opportunities to provide positive representation. “When I was a young kid, it would have been very important to me to have examples of people that I feel like represent me, represent my identities, and are thriving, happy, successful members of society,” she said.

Ana shared the potential risks she saw that caused her to self-conceal. Ana expressed uncertainty saying, “I worry about people feeling that I am corrupting their children.” Ana further elaborated on the uncertainty she experienced when working with children by saying:
“Particularly the religious people, because I don't know where they stand. A lot of the time I don't know where they stand on things, and if that's something that your kid is exploring, or even if it's something that your kid is not exploring, even if your kid is straight as can be as far as you know, and I'm just being me, I would feel very stressed, and this is probably something I should talk to somebody about. I would feel very stressed if a kid who was presumed straight came out while in therapy with me, if their parents knew that I belonged to the community as well. I'm not trying to bias your child or change your child. We can coexist and be very happy people, you know? But I'm aware that that bias still exists, of if you hang out with the gay kids, you turn gay. You know, that kind of thing. So, I worry about that.”

Ana added that she did not want to have her credibility as a counselor challenged because a parent had negative opinions about the LGBTQ+ community. Ana further explained that fear and uncertainty were present even if parents were less likely to never find out about her identity. She described her internal process as follows:

“Even if there's no way for you to find out, what if you do? I don't know. What if you assume? I have a sticker on my phone that's just a little rainbow heart. Did you see it? Did you, as the parent, notice it? Did you clock it? Did you feel some kind of way about it? It's even the subtle stuff, that's just to communicate to people who care that I'm a safe space. Are you taking that and twisting it into something ugly?”

The researcher asked Ana if there were protective factors associated with self-concealment in her counseling work. Ana thought for a moment and said, “I just come back to the avoidance of judgement.” Ana shared that due to being perceived as heterosexual she was
protected from lots of the judgement that she feared, particularly questioning her credibility. “I think that’s really the only benefit, is people don’t question you as much,” she added.

The researcher asked Ana if there was anything else about her experience of self-concealment we had not covered during the interview. Ana shared that she had previous negative experiences with a supervisor and coworkers saying negative things about LGBTQ+ clients during case consultations. Ana described the tone of the conversations as follows:

“I've had conversations with colleagues before, where they're very, ‘People should conceal LGBTQ identities because what if they grow out of it? If you don't have to tell somebody, why would you? You're only inviting trouble,’ basically, is sort of the narrative I've come up against. ‘You're only making things harder for yourself, by putting that out there.’ I see different colleagues bring that into counseling sessions to clients who are within the community, and I hate it.”

Ana then reflected on her experience of witnessing these conversations saying, “I have to conceal my identity in certain spaces, I know how damaging denying an identity can be, just intrapsychically, interpersonally, what have you. That inauthenticity can be quite damaging, self-esteem wise, self-worth wise.” Hearing her colleagues talk about her community in this manner caused Ana to question whether they were safe people, prompting her to self-conceal. However, self-concealment prevented Ana from being able to advocate for the clients that her colleagues were talking about. Ana felt like she had to come out to her colleagues, despite feeling unsafe, “to advocate for those clients because I feel like you’re doing a disservice to those clients, and I’m not about to let you.” Ana then worried that if she came out to her colleagues, they would use her identity “almost like ammunition” to hurt her in some way. Ana concluded that she
would “feel 80% more inauthentic” than she already felt while self-concealing if she chose not to come out to advocate for those clients.

Finally, the researcher asked Ana if she could talk about her experience of talking about self-concealment with him. Ana shared that she initially felt discomfort talking to another person within the community who was not bisexual or pansexual, because of biphobia. She added that thinking about self-concealment, she felt privileged, “but in a way that almost feels invalidating.” Ana also said she experienced discomfort from talking about self-concealment, but it was how she thought she would feel as a bisexual person involved in LGBTQ research. The researcher thanked Ana again for her participation and said he would be in touch via email with a summary of the themes from her interview. Table 4 provides a visual representation of the significant quotations from Ana’s interview that came up in relation to the themes that emerged from the data.

Table 4

*Participant 3: Ana Phrases of Significance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Category</th>
<th>Quotations of Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Concealment Decision</td>
<td>“Something that's a mark against a person would be, to generalize, religious affiliation.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Political affiliation is obviously a big one. Are you anti-gay-marriage? We are not friends.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“because in your mind, everybody who's gay should just shut up about it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“That's typically more the profile that I see, that I'm like, ‘Oh, okay. We're not going to be super aligned on any of these topics.’”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“super right-leaning parents are not typically fans of anyone within the community”</td>
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“I am very aware that some people within the community are like, ‘Bi excludes trans, bi excludes non-binary, et cetera, et cetera.’”

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<tr>
<th>Perceived Negative Views of Others</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Are you discriminatory towards other groups that are minority groups? Because I don't discuss the LGBTQ community with everybody, but if we've discussed other minority groups or other marginalized populations and you're derogatory towards them in some capacity, I'm going to assume that's just all-encompassing.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I come back to credibility. I don't want to feel like assumptions are being made about me because they hold X, Y, and Z opinions about the community at large.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“If my concern with a particular client or with a particular parent is based on threats to my credibility as a professional, as a counselor”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“They're like, ‘Ana has gay friends, and so she's very passionate about it.’ That's it. That's my credibility to these people”</td>
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<td>“that I typically feel almost like I lose credibility with, if they know I identify within the community at all.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I'm not religious, but I grew up religious. I do use that with some of my clients. I see that making me more credible to them I guess”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Deciding Not to Conceal</th>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>“there's a certain set of boxes that if you tick enough of these boxes, okay, you're a person that's okay to say something to.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“It is my supervisor, it is people from school, because those are the people I'm connected with professionally”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I guess if an easy opportunity presents itself and I feel like that person is somebody I already know to be a safe person for other reasons”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
“Have I heard you speak on things that I also align with ideologically? Cool.”

“it's typically younger people”

“Are you an active ally? I think that that's a big piece of it, too. I don't think you need to be somebody who's within the community.”

Professional Relationships

“It is my supervisor, it is people from school, because those are the people I'm connected with professionally”

“Most of the people who know me in a professional capacity, now that I think about it.”

“My supervisor does, in part because it comes up in a lot of these same conversations, and just how to navigate conversations with clients and things like that”

LGBTQ+ Clients

“I have ‘LGBTQ affirming therapist’ on our website”

“If I feel like you are harming a client by waving your garbage opinions, I will not”

“I might, through roundabout means. I wouldn't, in that moment, ‘Oh hey, me too.'”

“I think concealment with LGBTQ clients, it feels less necessary I guess, now that I think about it”

“if they're not exploring an LGBTQ identity and already have one, we're buddies and it's fine. I think that that's an easy way to build rapport”

“with LGBTQ clients, I am less worried about concealment, typically speaking. I think that that's in large part because I'm aware of the therapeutic relationship that we have”

“I'm a lot more open with my LGBTQ clients than I am with my LGBTQ colleagues, because we have that connection”
| Coworkers with Marginalized identities | “because as a member of the community a lot of my professional connections are also within the community, it's more chummy”

“I think if there's an easy obvious avenue that feels very natural Are you somebody within the community? Cool.” |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Concealment Motivation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
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| Safety                 | “With a heterosexual client, I'm trying to think if I would ever come out to a heterosexual client. I think I would just be intentional about shifting self-disclosure.”

“If I'm not out to a heterosexual client, I probably won't.”

“but for safety purposes, I'm going to assume that it is” |
| Uncertainty            | “Particularly the religious people, because I don't know where they stand.”

“I try to be a little more blank slate with it, with people, just, A, because if I don't know how they identify, I don't know how they feel about it”

“It's just hard to navigate”

“even if there's no way for you to find out, what if you do? I don't know. What if you assume? I have a sticker on my phone that's just a little rainbow heart. Did you see it? Did you, as the parent, notice it? Did you clock it? Did you feel some kind of way about it? It's even the subtle stuff, that's just to communicate to people who care that I'm a safe space. Are you taking that and twisting it into something ugly?”

“Now I don't know how to navigate those spaces with you, professional to professional” |
“How do I navigate that? I want her to know, 'hey dude, me too. Me too. I'm with you, and I get it’”

“Now, are you a safe person to come out to? How do I come out to you?”

“I am a little more intentional with certain coworkers of mine, or colleagues, what have you, who are within the community, of concealing it in a different way.”

“We just don't talk to them about it. It's kind of one of those. That concealment, it exists, it just takes different forms, I feel.”

**Client Needs “This isn’t about me”**

“I think a lot of it does come back to sort of the blank slate approach”

“If it's going to bother you, it's more important to me to create a safer space”

“I personally and professionally struggle to not create a biased space. Like if I have a client who's kind of going back and forth "am I straight, am I not straight," as a bisexual person, I feel like that's just an ongoing, forever, am I gay enough, am I straight enough? I don't want to bring my personal experience to that exploration.”

“I think that that's in large part how I personally operate as a counselor, is kind of like a 'whatever you need me to be in this moment, I'll be that thing for you.’”

“I can tap into those things, if that's what works best for you”

“What I come back to is the counseling session is not about me it's about meeting the needs of my client”

“At the end of the day, I live and die by client first.”
If I need to put on this hat, or look this kind of way, okay. If that's what's going to help you grow and see progress, okay. It doesn't feel great personally, but sure, professionally, if that's what you need.

**Professional Relationship Dynamics**

“my coworkers, particularly if they're new coworkers.”

**Perceptions of the Local Area/Town/Region**

“Also, I live in Texas.”

Then also, religious affiliation. I identify as atheist, but I live in Texas. I try not to tell people I'm atheist unless I need to for some reason.”

“Oh, you know. Practicing in the South, it's good fun.”

“I guess culturally in a way. It's very ‘I have my 2.3 kids and my white picket fence, and everything's great.’”

**Previous Negative Experiences**

“I grew up in a really small town. We had like 3,000 people in the whole town. I graduated with the same 50 people I went to school with second grade onward.”

“I've had conversations with colleagues before, where they're very, ‘People should conceal LGBTQ identities because what if they grow out of it? If you don't have to tell somebody, why would you? You're only inviting trouble.’”

“the narrative I've come up against. ‘You're only making things harder for yourself, by putting that out there.’ I see different colleagues bring that into counseling sessions to clients who are within the community, and I hate it.”

“there are people in my personal life that I'm not out to, that I probably will never come out to because I don't perceive them as people that are safe to come out to.”

**Culture**

n/a

**Concealment is Protective**

“I guess I just come back to avoidance of judgment. I don't know if that's too much within my answer to the last question. If my concern with a particular client or with a particular
parent is based on threats to my credibility as a professional, as a counselor, what have you. I am protected from that by not mentioning it. Again, if I wear a wedding ring, people tend to assume I'm straight anyway. If you let them have it, nobody questions it. I think that's really the only real benefit to it, is people don't question you as much. There are absolutely benefits to being part of the majority, for being perceived to be part of the majority. So yeah, I don't know. Hidden identity privilege, I guess."

Specifics When Working with Children

“"When I have conversations with parents where stuff like this comes up, it's very ‘I don't want the family to know. I don't want grandma to know. What's grandma going to think?’ Things like this.”

“I would be remiss to not point out that the super right-leaning parents are not typically fans of anyone within the community, certainly less so people who have presumed authority over their child, like a therapist may.”

“It depends on the parents of the client, in a lot of cases.”

“particularly with my younger kids, who if they already have supportive spaces and they're just exploring, I don't always disclose to them”

“but I worry about people feeling that I am corrupting their children.”

“There's often a twinge of "the kids are doing too much these days.”

“so if you know that I identify somewhere within the community, am I also doing too much? Or also, are you worried I'm going to encourage your child in a way that you think is maladaptive?”

“A lot of the time I don't know where they stand on things, and if that's something that your kid is exploring, or even if it's something that your kid is not exploring, even if your kid
is straight as can be as far as you know, and I'm just being me, I would feel very stressed and 'this is probably something I should talk to somebody about.' I would feel very stressed if a kid who was presumed straight came out while in therapy with me, if their parents knew that I belonged to the community as well. I'm not trying to bias your child or change your child. We can coexist and be very happy people, you know? But I'm aware that that bias still exists, of if you hang out with the gay kids, you turn gay. You know, that kind of thing. So, I worry about that.”

Concealment Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bodily Changes</th>
<th>n/a</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Filtering      | "if I had a trans client, part of me wonders if I'd lie, actually, now that I'm thinking through it. I think in part because I don't have an issue with the term pansexual. It's just not my word, you know? But if that's the word I can use to communicate that we're good ... I wouldn't want to use a term that makes a client feel uncomfortable, so if I'm really thinking about it, some part of me wonders if I would just switch the word that I used for that client, just as an act of intentional "we're good here," kind of way, even though that's not really the word that I personally align with."
|                 | “It's not that important to me, so I would probably just shift the word that I used with a client.” |
| Passing        | "Also, if I wear a wedding ring, most people just assume I'm straight anyway, because heteronormative blah, blah, blahs”
|                 | “With people who are not within the community, I feel like it's very ‘I let them make their own assumptions and we're fine.'”
|                 | “I am bisexual but I'm in a straight-passing relationship, shall we say. Therefore, it is easier for me to conceal that piece. It's kind of one of those you'll only know if I tell you, sort of things.” |
“I’m married to a cisgender male, and so I understand that there is a lot of privilege within that.”

“It’s very much an identity that’s easier to hide. In that way, I don't have to go through the struggle of figuring out, ‘Okay, is it risky to use my husband's pronouns?’ No, it's not. It doesn't communicate anything to them that I feel would expose me in any kind of way. I think the concealment comes naturally.”

“I self-conceal by just not mentioning it”

“Yes, because, again, unless I told you, you wouldn't know”

“It kind of comes with its own concealment labels”

I am protected from that by not mentioning it. Again, if I wear a wedding ring, people tend to assume I'm straight anyway. If you let them have it, nobody questions it.”

Concealment Affects the Counseling Work

The Counseling Relationship

“It feels like a false connection”

“Yeah. I don't know. It's, I hesitate to say tainted because that feels a little too strong for it, but it's colored in some kind of way that I'm like, ‘Ugh.’”

“It feels very “would we have the same relationship if you knew me as a person?’”

“Can I connect with you? Sure. Do I feel like it's an uncomplicated connection? No. I feel like there are aspects of it that, again, if you knew me personally, we wouldn't have this relationship. And that sucks because I really like my clients. I want to feel like we're 100% on the same team, and so it's hard when we're not.”
“We're not building a true, uncomplicated, spirit-to-spirit kind of connection. It's colored differently. It's tinted weird”

“Because that relationship can be good and solid and whatever, but it doesn't feel as real.”

I would say the risks to me choosing to conceal, because that's I think the more obvious answer to me, is I worry that I'm missing out on certain opportunities with clients and certain conversations that I want to have with you”

“I worry about it, because I think it's important”

“I think that's the risk to concealing for me, is just missing those connection points.”

| Representation | “When I was a young kid, it would have been very important to me to have examples of people that I feel like represent me, represent my identities, and are thriving, happy, successful members of society” |
| Advocacy | “I don’t want to push you. I just want you to know that I understand. I can relate to that back-and-forth struggle. I worry about those opportunities anytime I choose not to disclose to a client.” |
| Connection Points | “It's hard to navigate not concealing to advocate against suggesting that other people conceal their stuff.” |
| | “I guess then I feel the need to come out to you, to advocate for those clients because I feel like you're doing a disservice to those clients, and I'm not about to let you.” |
| | “I would feel 80% more inauthentic in that space, if I weren't coming to bat for those people.” |

“I work with a lot of teenagers who are going through different bouts of exploration of their own identities and what have you. It's very nice to be able to pull from, ‘Okay, here are the places where I feel like I can't be this person,’ and use that to connect with them. I have quite
a few kids who are in high school, and they’re like, ‘look, I can’t be out and proud in my high school. That’s not an okay space to be in.’ To be able to connect with them on how much it sucks to not be able to be you and be authentic and whatever and know that that person is going to be universally accepted, because that's not reality.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concealment Negatively Affects the Counselor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authenticity and Genuineness</strong></td>
<td>“It's always you feel jilted in that relationship somehow because it's not really you. It's you; it's just you with a couple toggles switched.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It feels inauthentic”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“That is inauthenticity in a way that makes me feel icky”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“anytime I feel like I have to be inauthentic, I feel very off-center”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I feel like authenticity is very important, certainly so in the counseling room.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“It is impossible to be authentic with people in a small town, If you want to connect with anybody, you have to compromise somewhere”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I'm aware of how inauthentic I feel talking to them about anything to do with the gay community at all.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Efficacy</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Labor</strong></td>
<td>“It's uncomfortable to disclose in some of those spaces, but it would feel worse not to, just based on personal experience”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They're like, ‘Ana has gay friends, and so she's very passionate about it.’ That's it. That's my credibility to these people, and that feels so much worse.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                                           | “When I think about self-concealment, when I think about having conversations about self-concealment, I feel privileged in a way, but in a way that also almost feels invalidating. I don't
know. It's interesting to talk about, but then also I feel very uncomfortable, in some capacity”

“It's very disheartening to kind of hit stopping points of, ‘Oh, okay. Let me pivot. Let me adjust course and find out who you need to be and who I need not to be in this space.””

“I know how damaging denying an identity can be, just intrapsychically, interpersonally”

“It feels like making myself more palatable, you know?”

“It's concealment in a way because it just feels incongruent for me.”

“It's frustrating. It's tiring.”

“That inauthenticity can be quite damaging, self-esteem wise, self-worth wise”

“I think it's a reminder of spaces I don't feel allowed.”

**Individual Interview 4: Sakura (She/Her)**

Sakura was a 35-year-old pansexual individual. Sakura was a licensed counselor with six years of experience. Sakura held a master’s in clinical mental health counseling and a PhD in counseling. Sakura worked at a university counseling center and reported that she has previously worked at a non-profit organization as a family based in home counselor. Sakura reported that she primarily worked with LGBTQ+ clients, trauma survivors, and multicultural individuals including multi/biracial clients, international students, immigrants, refugees, and third culture kids. Sakura shared her experiences and initially endorsed that she did not self-conceal, but that had also never not self-concealed. Through her narrative Sakura did discuss how she made self-concealment decisions, what motivated her to self-conceal, and how self-concealment had potentially affected her and her work as a counselor.
The interview began with allowing Sakura to ask questions about the study and a review of informed consent and her rights during the study. Prior to scheduling the interview, Sakura had completed a consent form and returned it electronically to the researcher via email. The researcher reminded Sakura that she could withdraw from the study at any time and her data would be excluded from the data analysis and final report. Sakura confirmed her understanding of the consent to participate in the study. The researcher then shared his identity as a queer person with Ana and discussed the process of reflexivity that he was using throughout the research to ensure credibility of the findings. The researcher shared with Sakura that as part of using Hycner’s (1985) steps to analyze the data she would receive via email a summary of the themes from her interview, and she would have the chance to review the themes for accuracy and provide revisions to the researcher if necessary. Sakura confirmed her understanding of this and the researcher began recording the interview.

The researcher started by asking Sakura to discuss the internal experiences that lead her to engage in self-concealment of her identity as pansexual in the counseling workplace. The researcher clarified that “internal experiences” was left open to whatever meaning Sakura took from the phrasing. Sakura shared “that’s a little bit difficult. I never thought about. I have to think about it.” Sakura then began talking about the differences in settings that she has worked in from her current job in a university counseling center to her previous work as an in-home family counselor. Sakura sat quietly for a moment and then shared “I don’t know if it’s ever actually impacted me in terms of identity, of sexual orientation stuff.”

Sakura continued describing her current position where she worked primarily with LGBTQ+ clients and other marginalized clients. Sakura shared on her website she was listed as “LGBTQ focused” and that many clients came to her for those specific reasons. Sakura
discussed not often thinking about sexual orientation and not disclosing to these clients because “I don’t want them to think in that negative way that I understand their experience because I believe, and in my own experience too, even just because they’re LGBTQ everyone has the same experience.” While she might not have realized it, Sakura had engaged in self-concealment in her counseling work. Sakura continued talking about counseling not being about her as one of the main reasons she concealed her pansexual identity:

“I don't want my sexual orientation in any way to be interpreting, bothering their process in the counseling. So, I really don't do much of self-disclosure, and they don't really ask me. I don't think I’ve ever been asked, in any setting or any past experience working with LGBTQ younger generation either. Maybe it's not really big, important information for them to ask and clarify with me because they already know I'm specializing in this population, so they just want to talk about their experience, not really questioning what my degree or label is going to be.”

The researcher asked Sakura if she could talk about her level of outness. Sakura shared that only two people know about her identity, a close friend, and her partner. Sakura pointed to her level of outness as to why it might be difficult for her to “think about how people might react in response to [her] coming out.” Sakura continued sharing that she has been exploring her identity and “it's made me question what I actually am and I don't even know if pansexual is the right label for me, but that is the closest I could feel like, identifying me.” Sakura had previously tried to tell her mother that she thought she might be LGBTQ and her mother responded, “no you’re not.” Sakura connected these experiences to what was preventing her from exploring her identity and why she found it difficult to identify with self-concealment. Sakura eluded to the default for LGBTQ+ people being self-concealment because there was a need to stop self-
concealing through self-disclosure and she had previous negative experiences with self-disclosure.

While Sakura struggled to identify with the questions being asked about concealment, she began to talk about being in a straight passing relationship because her partner was a straight man. “This is a conflict I have because I can still pass and play as straight if they don’t know anything about me.” Sakura spoke of the emotional toll that passing took on her saying “by doing it we are killing another part of ourself because we don’t really give any air to the other part of me, that I don’t even allow myself to explore that area.” The researcher reflected on the negative experience of passing with Sakura and she shared “I feel like I’m lying to myself.” Sakura discussed her fear and uncertainty of what others might say if they knew she was pansexual. Sakura stated:

“And it’s so ironic because they’re supposed to be the family that I can really know, really cherish, and receive support from. But at the same time, I’m really worried what they’re going to say. So, it is like that gives me some relief that I can be passing in this way, because many of my clients don’t even have this luxury. But at the same time by doing it, I’m lying to myself and lying to my closest friends too. But if I talk about it like my partner the other day and may probably my mom and possibly some of my friends who also identify themselves as LGBTQ, they might still reject me”

The researcher reflected with Sakura about feeling trapped between having her identity not believed by some and not being perceived accurately because she can pass. Sakura stated “so it’s like what’s the point of even come out and tell the people like, hey, I am this. At the end of the day, they might not believe me” because she was in a straight passing relationship. With
defeat, Sakura shared “I just feel like there’s not much point to explain that in my struggle.” She also stated “it’s easier for me to pass in this society by just pretending to be straight.”

The researcher asked Sakura if she took active steps to conceal her identity and she responded, “not really, I don’t.” The researcher found this response interesting as Sakura used passing as a means of concealment. The researcher then asked Sakura if her experience of having to pass affected her counseling work in any way. Sakura first spoke about concealment by passing having a positive effect on her work as a counselor, which was a surprising response to the researcher because of his own presuppositions. Sakura shared:

“I think it probably affects in a positive way, not the negative way. The working environment in university, like where's more like, not conservative, school itself is not conservative, but the background of the school is conservative. So, many students like who come here might be from a certain religious group and they talk about their struggles and similar struggle like they can't come out to anyone and they're afraid to even join that LGBT community. Or obviously not one wanting to come out to the family, not going to say I totally understand their struggles, but I feel like there's some parts I can relate to it.”

Sakura’s personal struggle of having to conceal her identity and struggling to explore it because she had not experienced acceptance allowed her to connect with her clients who may be struggling with similar issues. Sakura shared with a questioning tone that concealment may affect her negatively saying:

“At the same time, maybe it's a little bit negatively is like, I also see myself having a similar frustration too. And as a counselor, it's not my job to tell them what to do, but I
also have like some countertransference in that process because I'm like, I hear you and I know I have this like frustration internally, but there's nothing I can do about it.”

The researcher asked if there were any other possible negative effects on the counseling work that Sakura could think of, and she acknowledged a fear of changing the relationship she had with her colleagues. Sakura believed that colleagues would not react negatively to her not self-concealing, but she was “afraid of harming or changing the relationship.” Sakura expressed uncertainty if she chose not to conceal because her colleagues “might treat me or see me differently.” Sakura was speaking to the idea that if she chose to no longer self-conceal she might be perceived as having violated her colleagues expectations of her as a heterosexual woman.

Sakura began to discuss the intersection of her identities as an LGBTQ Asian person and how this influenced her experience of concealment. Sakura acknowledged that “many clients from similar cultural background request me like as a counselor, because they feel like I understand their cultural struggles.” Sakura continued “but at the time in our culture East Asia and also South Asia, we have a very strong stigma still toward LGBTQ. So, by passing, I feel like I’m getting like easier way, not to be confronted.” Sakura expressed guilt for being able to pass and had previously discussed feelings of “abusing her privilege” by passing. In the same moment Sakura shared fear and uncertainty that “in any situation, if I come out to a client, I don’t know if the client is coming back to me.”

Sensing that culture had a possibly substantial effect on Sakura’s experience of concealment, the researcher asked Sakura to expand on this. Sakura continued saying:

“I always have my internal conflict terms of the identity because identity is very much Western concept. In other cultures, especially collective culture, I don't feel like we have
the similar concept of identity because we are not allowed to claim what we are. It's based on what other people in society label you. So, my identity is very fluid and maybe that is a reason it took me for such a long time to realize my sexual orientation, because my identity was based on what society allowed me to explore in longest time. But I have like a little bit courage to explore more and thought about it. And they were like, oh wow, like I opened a different door and that's here's another part of, another self. And now trying to figure out how to have the relationship with another identity. But still, that is within this social context of like how much I can go and what other people see me through their lens.”

This quote stuck out to the researcher because it illuminated the reasons for which passing seemed to be Sakura’s primary concealment behavior. Sakura’s experience of intersecting cultures and identities was an experience of conflict and uncertainty. Sakura’s experience of Asian culture prompted self-concealment, but not in a negative way. Her understanding of her identity meant not “claiming” it which also meant concealing it to be viewed through the lens of others. Not “claiming” her identity as pansexual conflicted with her perception of how Western culture viewed identity. While these experiences were personal, Sakura shared that they influenced her work in counseling.

The researcher reflected with Sakura that when he asked the first interview question about internal experiences related to self-concealment, she acknowledged not thinking about it often. The researcher asked Sakura if our conversation had brought up any new thoughts about experiences of self-concealment. Sakura said “probably need to come back to it later again.” The researcher then asked if there was anything about her experience of self-concealment in the counseling workplace that we had not covered. Sakura said “I feel like you actually have covered
the main part and majority of parts. Yeah. I don’t feel like there’s anything missing.” The researcher then moved on to the final interview question.

The researcher asked Sakura how her experience had been having a conversation with him about self-concealment. “I think it raised some concerns, like anxiety” she said. She continued:

“Talking about this is, obviously, still... Because I'm passing as a heterosexual and I think it's ironic when I think about maybe thinking about self-concealing in the counseling, I wonder how much has done potential damage to my client, for me not being fully myself. I do understand their struggle and understand their fear, I would say. But at the same time, like me not really fully accepting myself, but not fully coming out. And I'm not saying that coming out is always the best thing to do either. But you know, if the clients want you to come out and struggle with it, how does it impact them having counselor like me who is not completely, haven't done that process yet.”

Sakura expressed concern that her personal struggle with self-concealment and other identity related struggles may have done damage to her relationships with clients of which she was previously unaware. She continued questioning herself saying “how much it might…if it’s ever negatively impacted the relationship or counseling. Maybe, you know when I think about it.” Sakura shared that she would have “a lot of things to think about where to go from here” following the interview. Sensing that the interview was coming to an end, the researchers asked Sakura if there was anything else she wanted to share. Sakura spoke about the conflict she experienced with clients questioning whether to disclose or conceal. Sakura shared that something that may influence her experience with concealment was a fear that “clients might even question my sexual orientation.”
The researcher checked again to see if there were any additional thoughts that Sakura wanted to share about her experience in the interview. Sakura shared “I don’t really talk about it with anyone, so it was very much new things to me, but I still very much enjoy and really appreciate that you listened to me.” The researcher thanked Sakura for her willingness to participate and to share personal and vulnerable experiences. Sakura responded “in the counseling field we do often talk about the rights and advocate for the LGBTQ, but sometimes I feel like it’s not enough. We really focus in a certain group or certain specific program, but we don’t really have much research exploring the experience of us.” This statement struck the researcher and he reflected later in his journal about this profound realization and the importance of research that examined how counselors experience counseling so that we can provide care ethically. Sakura’s final reflection was about the perception of the counseling workplace. She shared “we’re supposed to be this really accepting, welcoming environment and still we don’t do that, or we don’t feel safe to do that, even now.”

The researcher thanked Sakura again for her participation and said he would be in touch via email with a summary of the themes from her interview. Table 5 provides a visual representation of the significant quotations from Sakura’s interview that came up in relation to the themes that emerged from the data.

Table 5
Participant 4: Sakura Phrases of Significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Category</th>
<th>Quotations of Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Concealment Decision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressed Beliefs of Others</td>
<td>“The working environment in university, like where’s more like, not conservative, school itself is not conservative, but the background of the school is conservative.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Negative Views of Others</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deciding Not to Conceal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Support</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Relationships</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+ Clients</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers with Marginalized identities</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concealment Motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
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</table>

"But if I talk about it, like my partner the other day and maybe probably my mom and possibly some of my friends who also identify themselves be part of the LGBTQ, they might still reject me."

"In any situation, if I come out to the client, I don’t know if the client is coming back to me."

"And that will be making you feel like maybe as a pansexual, I'm afraid of being rejected from both communities, like from heterosexual society and also in LGBTQ society"

"They don't really see it and it feels like I'm not good enough for it to fit in either of these communities."

"So it's like what's the point you even come out and tell the people like, hey, I am this. At the end of the day, they might not believe me"

"I think it's just a little bit difficult for me to think about how people might react in response to my coming out. Maybe with my colleagues. Because I don't tell, I haven't told any of them and I'm not planning to, and I know same reason, probably they will take not really any negative way."

"Because I think this being in the middle, a lot the fact impact my this conflict and even gives me this conflict of should I come out or not to come out or about it with my client or not, because then the clients might even question my sexual orientation too."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Needs “This isn’t about me”</th>
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focused, they will sign up to have a counseling with me, I don't really disclose my sexual orientation to them.”

“Not really particular reasons, but also at the same time, I don't want them to think in that negative way that I understand their experience because I believe, and in my own experience too, everyone, even just because they're LGBTQ everyone has the same experience.”

“I don't want my sexual orientation in any way to be interpreting, bothering their process in the counseling. So I really don’t do much of self-disclosure, and they don't really ask me.”

“as a counselor, it's not my job to tell them what to do, but I also have like some countertransference in that process”

“Maybe it's not really big, important information for them to ask and clarify with me because they already know I'm specializing in this population, so they just want to talk about their experience, not really questioning what my degree or label is going to be”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Relationship Dynamics</th>
<th>“I'm just afraid of harming or changing the relationship because I don't really think it's going to harm the relations, but changing the relationship that we already have”</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of the Local Area/Town/Region</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Negative Experiences</td>
<td>“I only have told my partner, current partner, he really didn't take it well”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I told her at that time, maybe I'm one of them. I told her, ‘I think I have a tendency. I think I do actually identify myself being part of them.’ She was like, ‘No you're not.’”

“I feel like pansexual is I get a little bit rather very new label compared to others, like, you know, homosexuals, bisexual, or lesbian and
trans of course. And I feel I probably have the similar struggle as bisexual populations and in the LGBTQ community, I don't feel like I have that much of acceptance there yet.”

“I have two very, very close friends but I haven't told them because I'm so afraid that they would judge me. And it's so ironic because they're supposed to be the family that I can really know, really cherish, and receive the support from. But at the same time, I'm really worried at what they're going to say.”

“But at the same time by doing it, I'm lying to myself and lying to my closest friends too.”

“No question on her, ‘No you're not one of them.’ And I think that might be the reason preventing me from actively explore that area”

Culture

“But at the same time in our culture, East Asia and also South Asia, we have very strong stigma still toward LGBTQ.”

“So, when I hear, do you identify, can you truly be a Japanese person in the counseling sessions, I will say, hmm, maybe no”

“Especially collective culture, I don't feel like we have the similar concept of identity because we are not allowed to claim what we are. It's based on what other people in society label you.”

“So, my identity is very fluid and maybe that is a reason it took me for such a long time to realize my sexual orientation, because my identity was based on what society allowed me to explore in longest time.”

“But I have like a little bit courage to explore more and thought about it. And they were like, oh wow, like I opened a different door and that's here's another part of, another self.”
“So that's a struggle. So, on top of, obviously, my struggle and challenge and exploration process of sexual orientation I think it's very much, to me it's a process of my identity, all of them very much tied to that in society. What it's like and what we are, so how much we still expect that you act in certain ways, and regardless any community you go to.”

“But I always have my internal conflict terms of the identity, because identity is very much Western concept”

“And now trying to figure out how to have the relationship with another identity. But still that is within this social context of like how much I can go and what other people see me through their lens.”

Concealment is Protective

“so, it gives me some relief that I can be passing in this way”

“we can actually play the part of the heterosexual and have the people believe whatever they want to believe about ourselves.”

Specifics When Working with Children

“I don't think I’ve ever been asked, in any setting or any past experience working with LGBTQ younger generation either.”

Concealment Behavior

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Filtering</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Passing       | “But I think in a way there was some blog written about similar situations like me, like a pansexual, but she also practiced this heterosexual relations. She also said it's kind of like privilege that we have that we can actually play the part of the heterosexual and have the people believe whatever they want to believe about ourselves”

“In counseling setting by passing, I don't think that would, because I know that's why I feel like I'm abusing my privilege.”

So by passing, I feel like I'm just like getting like easier way, not to be confronted or harming that professional or therapeutic relationship.”
“Because of this a conflict I have because I can still play and pass as straight if they don't know anything about me.”

“also it's easier for me to pass in this society by just pretending I am like completely straight”

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<tr>
<th>Concealment Affects the Counseling Work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Counseling Relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Because I'm passing as a heterosexual and I think it's ironic when I think about maybe thinking about self-concealing in the counseling, I wonder how much is done potential damage to my client, for me not being fully to myself.”</td>
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</table>

“if it's ever negatively impacted the relationship or counseling. Maybe, you know, when I think about it. So that gives me a lot of things to think about where to go from here.”

“But you know, if the client wants you to come out and struggle with it, how does it impact them having counselor like me who is not completely, haven't done that process yet”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representation</th>
<th>n/a</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection Points</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“So, many students like who come here might be from a certain religious group and they talk about their struggles and similar struggle like they can't come out to anyone and they're afraid to even join that LGBT community. Or obviously not wanting to come out to the family, not going to say I totally understand their struggles, but I feel like there’s some parts I can relate to”</td>
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“I do understand their struggle and understand their fear”

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<tr>
<th>Concealment Negatively Affects the Counselor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity and Genuineness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I feel like I'm lying to myself”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I’m lying to myself and lying to my closest friends too”

| Self-Efficacy | n/a |
Emotional Labor

“we are killing another part of ourself because we don’t really give any air to the other part of me”

“that's why I feel like I'm abusing my privilege.”

“I think it definitely raised some concerns, like anxiety”

“That’s our struggle”

“we’re expected to be invisible”

“I think this being in the middle, a lot the fact impact this conflict, and even gives me this conflict of should I come out or not to come out or about it with my client or not”

“but they don’t get it. And I just feel like there's not much point to explain that in my struggle in general”

Individual Interview 5: Diego (He/Him)

Diego was a 39-year-old gay individual. Diego was a licensed counselor in a southwestern urban area with five years of experience. Diego held a master’s in counseling and was in the process of completing his PhD in counselor education and supervision. Diego worked in a community mental health setting as well as provided mental health services in a school district. Diego primarily worked with LGBTQ+ students, undocumented clients, and low-income medically underserved clients. Diego had initially agreed to participate in the focus group, but due to scheduling issues he agreed to participate in an individual interview. Diego spoke about his experiences with feeling pressured to self-conceal, what motivated him to self-conceal, the concealment behaviors he used, and how self-concealment affect him and his counseling work.

The interview began with allowing Diego to ask questions about the study and a review of informed consent and his rights during the study. Prior to scheduling the focus group, Diego
had completed a consent form and returned it electronically to the researcher via email. When Diego agreed to participate in an individual interview instead, he completed an individual interview consent form and returned it to the researcher electronically via email. The researcher reminded Diego that he could withdraw from the study at any time and his data would be excluded from the data analysis and final report. Diego confirmed his understanding of the consent to participate in the study. The researcher then shared his identity as a queer person with Diego and discussed the process of reflexivity that he was using throughout the research to ensure credibility of the findings. The researcher shared with Diego that as part of using Hycner’s (1985) steps he would receive via email a summary of the themes from his interview, and he would have the chance to review the themes for accuracy and provide revisions to the researcher if necessary. Diego confirmed his understanding of this, and the researcher began recording the interview.

The researcher first asked Diego about internal experiences that might lead him to self-conceal in counseling. The researcher said that the meaning of internal experiences was up to Diego’s interpretation. Diego began saying that a particular experience stood out to him that has happened with coworkers and clients. Diego stated that he experienced “a shriveling happening where I tense up and freeze up” when clients made assumptions about him being in a heterosexual marriage. He gave an example saying, “they asked me like, ‘Oh, I’m sure your wife thinks this.’” These experiences have motivated Diego to self-conceal. Diego added that these internal experiences made him want to avoid people, their questions, or conversations. “Wanting to shy away from those discussions” he added. Diego had been prompted to self-conceal when heteronormative assumptions were made about him.
The researcher then asked Diego about his degree of outness. Diego stated, “close family and friends and immediate coworkers.” The researcher asked Diego about what made him decide not to self-conceal with his “immediate coworkers.” Diego shared that he “took the role so that I wouldn’t have to conceal, where I could actually be.” Diego described how it was important for him not to self-conceal in this role so he could advocate for LGBTQ+ students. He also thought that because of his role in the school district working with marginalized students, his colleagues would assume his identity. Diego added that he felt like this job would be easier for him because he could share space with his LGBTQ clients and not have to conceal his identity.

The researcher asked Diego if he had felt the need to self-conceal in previous counseling jobs. Diego described an experience with a teacher while working as a school counselor as follows:

“So, one of the main feelings or thoughts that I had regarding having to conceal, so I work for school districts. So previously I worked as a counselor, and I would also... So, in that role I would help out obviously students, but then I would work directly with teachers too. So, they would come to me and I could recall specifically a teacher coming in, and somehow the teacher thinking that they could ask me about my wife or ask me certain things. And I think just hearing that, it made me feel like I had to conceal it or that they weren't open to it. And I would hear sometimes teachers say things like microaggressions against LGBTQ+ individuals and students. So that's another element of feeling the need to conceal.”

The researcher followed up by asking if there were clients or students that Diego had ever chosen not to conceal with. Diego noted that he only chose not to conceal with clients that asked specifically to work with an “LGBTQ+ counselor” or identified as LGBTQ+. “In those
situations, I don’t have to conceal,” he added. The researcher then asked Diego to talk about the steps he took to conceal or not conceal his identity. Diego described the active steps he took to convey support to clients when he decided not to conceal as follows:

“In those situations, there's different parts. So, there's a visible part that I know that I do. And I'm kind of very aware of it. With my badges that I have. So the visible, I put a rainbow sticker on it. Having one element that I do when I don't want to conceal. I can actually show you what I'm talking about.

Diego then turned his computer screen to show a different background that had LGBTQ+ supportive signs behind him. Diego continued:

“If I'm working with an LGBTQ+ client, I will have that as my background just so that they feel safe. I have a briefcase that I use for the visual component where it has the rainbow strap. So I do that for when I don't have to conceal and then just the verbal things that I do too when I feel like I don't have to conceal is saying my pronouns, using my pronouns. Trying to be more aware of saying like, ‘Partner,’ and those kinds of things.”

Diego further described cues that he looked for that would prompt him to self-conceal. Verbal cues related to heteronormative assumptions about Diego being married to a woman were the primary cues that prompted him to self-conceal. “You're married, you would understand. Sometimes wives are difficult” he said as an example. Diego felt that in these instances, if he did not self-conceal, his client would not feel comfortable to continue working with him.

The researcher further clarified that he was asking about specific steps that Diego would take to self-conceal. Diego affirmatively nodded and added that when he didn’t know individuals well or when their relationship was new, he used the neutral background as opposed to the background with supportive flyers. Diego did this to self-conceal his identity because he was
uncertain how people might react. Diego also shared that he had changed his supportive rainbow briefcase strap if he was “going to a different place where I’m not positive that it’s going to be open and accepting.” Additionally, Diego described changing his physical presence to meet more heteronormative masculine expectations:

“I'm very aware that in my past I would do it often, like change my voice or try to be more masculine and less feminine. I'm very aware that I used to strongly do that, especially in college because all of my roommates were straight guys. And so, I felt like I had to do that. And so, I often wonder about that too. If that stuck with me and if I still do it.”

The researcher then asked Diego what affect self-concealment may have had on his counseling work. Diego stated that if he was not fully transparent with his clients, that they would get a sense of “he’s hiding something. He’s not being fully genuine.” Diego added “I'm not showing my authentic self and I think clients could sense it.” Diego shared an example of a time a client asked about his wife and he “shrivel[ed] up.” Diego had previously described this “shriveling” where he received a cue that caused him to “tense up” and “freeze up.” These feelings led him to self-conceal. Diego added that he felt that self-concealing “could impact the relationship on some level.”

Diego then added that he has never noticed these concerns in the moment with the client, but he worried about affecting the relationship when he was reflecting and taking notes. Meaning he was concerned that self-concealing had unconsciously affected his ability to be present with the client. Diego shared further that he questioned himself asking “would that occur if I was just fully myself? Would that change the dynamic? Does it enhance it or not?” Diego then described an experience where he did question what a client was thinking in the moment:
“If a client asks me about my wife, which happens often, and I notice that I shy away from the question and then it happens in that moment, I shy away from the question and then it’s this sense of like, ‘Are they aware of it? Are they picking up on it? Am I giving some sort of visual cue to them or something?’”

The researcher probed further about how self-concealment emotionally affected Diego. Diego reflected that he felt “disappointed or sad” that he had to self-conceal in his counseling work. “This sadness is almost feeling like I’m going back in the closet which I worked so hard not to have to do” he added.

The researcher then asked Diego about the risks associated with self-concealment. Diego described the risk of emotional labor for himself and risk to the counseling work as follows:

“I think the risks of concealing could be those, for myself, could be those negative emotions of feeling sadness and the feeling like I'm not being my authentic self. And I know, well, as counselors, when you're not being your authentic self it makes you feel certain emotions that you don't necessarily want to feel. So, I think concealing would do that for me. And then when I think about the work too, I think about concealing when I'm concealing my own identity. And if there's a possibility that a client is coming to me because they want to open up or that they're struggling to come out. Those could be some of the risks of the counseling work to not allow them. If I'm not being my authentic self, then how can I expect the client to be their authentic self as well? So, the risk of that relationship and that bond too, with the client, and that's a risk that could impact that relationship and the rapport building component of that too, if I conceal.”

The researcher asked Diego if he felt there were protective factors associated with self-concealment. Diego shared that he worked with many clients of Mexican descent, and because of
his experience growing up in Mexican culture and the impact of “Machismo,” self-concealment protected him from being stigmatized. Diego added that self-concealment also protected him from certain clients not wanting to work with him because “if they knew that I was gay, they wouldn’t want to see a gay therapist in the community.” Diego expressed uncertainty saying, “I don't know if it's real or not real, but the imagined protection is that if I don't conceal, I won't face homophobia or I won't face negative reactions to it.”

The researcher asked if Diego had ever experienced a negative reaction when he chose not to self-conceal. Diego paused and thought for several minutes, then responded “I don’t think I have, no.” Diego clarified saying that he had never experienced negative reactions with a client but had previous negative experiences with coworkers. Diego added that these experiences were never directed at him, however they made him want to self-conceal, because coworkers had been homophobic around him. Diego described an experience where a teacher came to his office to talk about a student and “they said a derogatory term about someone in their class. It was almost like a slur. It could have been the F word.” Diego shared his reaction to the derogatory comment:

“I was kind of in shock that like, ‘You're a teacher, you're saying this about a student? How horrible is that?’ And I remember I froze because I was a new counselor, and I froze because that was happening. And I was just like, ‘Where are we? How is this happening? You're a teacher, how are you doing this?’ So it's that weird experience where I felt in that moment like I was that student even though I was the adult. So it was very jarring to me. That even though it wasn't about me, I just felt it. And I also became immobile. I couldn't do anything.”
Diego added that after this experience he chose to advocate more in his school, but he expressed guilt and disappointment about not being able to advocate in the moment because he had to self-conceal.

The researcher recognized that Diego’s experience had been difficult for him to talk about and thanked him for his willingness to share. The researcher then asked Diego if there was anything else about his experience with self-concealment in counseling that we had not talked about yet. Diego added that he was concerned and curious about how self-concealment affected “the relational bond between a client and therapist.” The researcher asked Diego to expand on this concern. Diego shared that he had always considered the effects of not-concealing to be negative, but the interview had helped him realize that he had never experienced a negative reaction. Diego described the potential for growth in the counselor-client relationship by not concealing as follows:

“So, if I'm working with a client and then I just say like, 'My husband, whatever.' And then I think about the ability for me and that individual to grow in our relationship more just because that is like, "Oh, I know a part of who you are," or "I've been wanting to talk about the fact that I have an attraction to someone of the same sex. I never thought I would be able to share this." So it just made me think of the potential growth of that versus automatically... Prior to us engaging in this conversation, I thought about it as very negative.”

The researcher asked Diego again if there was anything additional that he wanted to share about his experiences. Diego reflected that the “fear” of a negative reaction to not concealing caused him to self-conceal even though a negative experience “never has existed before, or never happened.” Diego shared that the interview caused him to think about the effect that childhood
traumatic experiences had on self-concealment in counseling. Diego described his thought process saying:

“When you're young being called the F-word and all of this stuff. Bullying is horrible when you're really young. And when you're a little kid and people know that you're gay, the kids are vicious. And it's making me think of how horrible it was when I was little and being called all of these things and having to hide and run and all of this stuff. It's making me think of that fear, it sticks with you and it almost attaches to certain situations even though it's completely different and you're an adult and you're safe. It's almost that fear of those things that happened when I was little might happen again. So I just wonder about that relationship too.”

Finally, the researcher asked Diego about his experience of talking about self-concealment during the interview. “I think it was really helpful for me even though it was difficult to think about,” he said. Diego added that this was the first time he had ever participated in a research study, but this study stuck out to him and he said, “I have to do this one.” This study stood out to Diego because he felt like he would get to speak to someone who understood his experiences. The researcher thanked Diego again for his participation and said he would be in touch via email with a summary of the themes from his interview. Table 6 provides a visual representation of the significant quotations from Diego’s interview that came up in relation to the themes that emerged from the data.

Table 6

**Participant 5: Diego Phrases of Significance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Category</th>
<th>Quotations of Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Concealment Decision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressed Beliefs of Others</td>
<td>“I mean, yeah, from coworkers and it's not, I guess, it's also not directly against me. It's just</td>
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</table>
what I experience is the homophobic things around me not necessarily to me about me”

“I would hear sometimes teachers say things like microaggressions against LGBTQ+ individuals and students”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Negative Views of Others</th>
<th>“And then I hear them say like, ‘wife,’ or like, ‘Husband or wife.’ And then when I get asked that same question”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“If they ask me, for example, about my wife”</td>
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<td>“like the example that they asked me like, ‘Oh, I'm sure your wife thinks this.’”</td>
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<td>“the example that I mean is saying like, ‘Oh, you're married.’ Because I'm married and I have a ring. And so when they say like, ‘You're married, you would understand.’ Sometimes wives are difficult or whatever.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“just hearing that, it made me feel like I had to conceal it or that they weren't open to it”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“When clients give me some sort of verbal cues”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“There are things that I look for.”</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Deciding Not to Conceal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+ Clients</td>
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</table>
Coworkers with Marginalized identities: “Or where they identify as LGBTQ+. In those situations, I don't have to conceal”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concealment Motivation</th>
<th>“Are they aware of it? Are they picking up on it? Am I giving some sort of visual cue to them or something?”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It's almost that fear of those things that happened when I was little might happen again.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“fear, like you're saying, and maybe I described, it's that fear that prevents you from doing it”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“but in that moment, you're just frozen. You blackout”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“It's making me think of that fear, it sticks with you and it almost attaches to certain situations even though it's completely different and you're an adult and you're safe.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>“I sense that if I don't conceal, they're not going to want to continue with counseling. And so in those situations I feel like I have to conceal, because if I don't then they're not going to, in my mind, I think they're not going to feel comfortable continuing.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I don't know if this is just me thinking or if it's real, but that if they knew that I was gay, they wouldn't want to see a gay therapist in the community. So that's an element of the risk associated with it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“If I'm going to a different place where I'm not positive that it's going to be open and accepting”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“in certain situations when I don't know the individuals, when I don't know them, when I feel like they might be new”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Client Needs “This isn’t about me”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Relationship Dynamics</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions of the Local Area/Town/Region</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous Negative Experiences</td>
<td>“those things that happened when I was little might happen again.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I remember I froze because I was a new counselor, and I froze because that was happening. And I was just like, ‘Where are we? How is this happening? You're a teacher, how are you doing this?’ So it was very jarring to me. That even though it wasn't about me, I just felt it. And I also became immobile. I couldn't do anything.”</td>
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<td>“because in that moment I felt powerless and I couldn't do anything”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I didn't know how that conversation just continued but then they said a derogatory term about someone in their class. It was almost like a slur. It could have been the F-word or it could have been”</td>
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<td>“especially in college because all of my roommates were straight guys. And so I felt like I had to do that. And so I often wonder about that too. If that stuck with me and if I still do it”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“they would come to me and I could recall specifically a teacher coming in, and somehow the teacher thinking that they could ask me about my wife or ask me certain things”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I would hear sometimes teachers say things like microaggressions against LGBTQ+ individuals and students”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I had a negative experience with coming out and all of my friends that were straight guys no longer wanting to associate with me”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“When you're young being called the F-word and all of this stuff. Bullying is horrible when you're really young. And when you're a little kid and people know that you're gay, the kids are vicious. And it's making me think of how horrible it was when I was little and being”</td>
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</table>
called all of these things and having to hide and run and all of this stuff.

**Culture**

“the Mexican community is also, I don't want to speak for the entire community, but because of machismo, being gay is really difficult to be and to open up about”

**Concealment is Protective**

“I don't know if it's real or not real, but the imagined protection is that if I conceal, I won't face homophobia or I won't face negative reactions to it. Yeah.”

**Specifics When Working with Children**

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<tr>
<th>Concealment Behavior</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bodily Changes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“I know that I have”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I'm very aware that in my past I would do it often like change my voice or try to be more masculine and less feminine I'm very aware that I used to strongly do that”</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Filtering</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>“wanting to avoid the person or the questions or the conversations. Wanting to shy away from those kinds of discussions happens for me. Feeling really introverted about it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“If a client asks me about my wife, which happens often and I notice that I shy away from the question and then it happens in that moment, I shy away from the question”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I might use this background as opposed to my normal background.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I can actually show you what I'm talking about. If I'm working with an LGBTQ+ client, I will have that as my background just so that they feel safe. I have a briefcase that I use for the visual component where it has the rainbow strap. So, I do that for when I don't have to conceal and then just the verbal things that I do too when I feel like I don't have to conceal is saying my pronouns, using my pronouns. Trying to be more aware of saying like, ‘Partner,’ and those kinds of things”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The other thing with my briefcase strap. If I'm going to a different place where I'm not positive”</td>
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</table>
that it's going to be open and accepting, I might not use that brief case also.”

Passing n/a

Concealment Affects the Counseling Work

The Counseling Relationship

“I think it could impact the relationship on some level.”

“Would that occur if I was just fully myself? Would that change the dynamic? Does it enhance it or not?”

“Then when I think about the work too, I think about concealing when I'm concealing my own identity. And if there's a possibility that a client is coming to me because they want to open up or that they're struggling to come out. Those could be some of the risks of the counseling work to not allow them.”

“So the risk of that relationship and that bond too, with the client, and that's a risk that could impact that relationship and the rapport building component of that too, if I conceal”

“I think just as a counselor, that part that I'm really curious about that either prevents me or allows me to conceal or not conceal is thinking about the element of the other person too because I feel like that's a really important part for counselors, why we do it. And so, I would want to know too about how it could affect the other person too. If I conceal or if I don't conceal and that, almost that interpersonal interaction.”

“And the relationship too, the relationship. I'm almost thinking of the relational bond between a client and therapist, or it could be a client and a coworker, but more the client-counselor relationship.”

Representation n/a

Advocacy

“one of the reasons I actually took the role was so that I wouldn't have to conceal, where I could actually be. So it was a huge component of why I took the job is knowing that the work itself would kind of allow me the opportunity to
not have to conceal because the work that I do, there's a component of it where I'm advocating and helping to support LGBTQ+ students”

“When you’re able to reflect on it after, I was like, ‘why didn’t I say something? I should have done something in that moment.’ I think very clearly what I should have, could have done and all that stuff, but in that moment, you’re just frozen. You blackout.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concealment Negatively Affects the Counselor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authenticity and Genuineness</td>
<td>“In that exact moment, I do feel less genuine”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“the feeling like I'm not being my authentic self”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“as counselors, when you're not being your authentic self it makes you feel certain emotions that you don't necessarily want to feel.”</td>
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<td>“I think about it often too. So, the way that I think it might affect it could be if I'm not being fully transparent too, I think clients might get a sense of like, ‘He's hiding something. He's not being fully genuine.’ Unconditional positive regard, like I'm not showing my authentic self and I think clients can sense it.”</td>
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<td>“If I'm not being my authentic self, then how can I expect the client to be their authentic self as well?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Labor</td>
<td>“It is like you kind of black out almost. It's like you're not really there”</td>
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<td>“You become disappointed afterwards because when you're able to reflect on it after, I was like, ‘Why didn't I say something? I should have done something in that moment.’ I think very clearly what I should have, could have done and all that stuff”</td>
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<tr>
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<td>“It makes me think feeling disappointed or sad that I even have to do that. It gives me a sense”</td>
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</table>
of sad, and this sadness is like almost feeling like I'm going back in the closet which I worked so hard to not have to do”

“could be those negative emotions of feeling sadness”

“Something internally inside me kind of, I don't know the best way to describe it, but it's like a shriveling happening where I tense up and I freeze up.”

“as counselors, when you're not being your authentic self it makes you feel certain emotions that you don't necessarily want to feel.”

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**Individual Interview 6: Leo (He/Him)**

Leo was a 37-year-old gay individual. Leo was a licensed counselor in a rural area with ten years of experience. Leo held a master’s in clinical mental health counseling and was in the process of completing his PhD in counselor education and supervision. Leo worked in private practice and had previously worked in other settings. Leo reported that he primarily worked with the substance use population. Leo discussed the experiences that prompted him to self-conceal, his motivation to self-conceal, the concealment behaviors in which he engaged, as well as how self-concealment affected him and his work as a counselor.

The interview began with allowing Leo to ask questions about the study and a review of informed consent and his rights during the study. Prior to scheduling the interview, Leo completed a consent form and returned it electronically to the researcher via email. The researcher reminded Leo that he could withdraw from the study at any time and his data would be excluded from the data analysis and final report. Leo confirmed his understanding of the consent to participate in the study. The researcher then shared his identity as a queer person with Leo and discussed the process of reflexivity that he was using throughout the research to ensure
credibility of the findings. The researcher shared with Leo that as part of using Hycner’s (1985) steps he would receive via email a summary of the themes from his interview, and he would have the chance to review the themes for accuracy and provide revisions to the researcher if necessary. Leo confirmed his understanding of this, and the researcher began recording the interview.

The researcher first asked Leo what internal experiences led him to engage in self-concealment, noting that internal experiences were up to his interpretation of what they meant for him. Leo answered “I base concealment on my comfortability with what I'm perceiving the other person may react if I share my sexual identity with them. So, it's really a perception on...basically on safety within the workplace.” The researcher then asked Leo about his level of general outness. Leo responded with “pretty much everyone in my personal life, in my work life, yes. People that I’m just meeting, no.” The researcher then asked Leo about how he made concealment decisions. Leo shared that he looked at “political views,” as well as “conversations that we’ve discussed.” Leo shared that with clients he looked at “experiences that they’ve had, if it’s an experience that [he has] had, it therapeutically could help them to know his orientation” so he might not conceal in those instances.

The researcher then asked specifically about concealment decisions with colleagues in the counseling workplace. Leo said “I openly share with colleagues pretty much 100% of the time. I don’t think there’s really any time that I wouldn’t unless it’s, again, just around safety around their...if they’ve made comments that I just would not feel safe.” The researcher asked if Leo could provide an example of a comment that prompted him to question his safety. Leo shared the following:

“There have been comments made just in general, not directed towards me, but about the community that would lead me to not feel safe with them knowing my orientation,
passive aggressive comments, comments about pride month, things like that that I would perceive as basically unsafe for me to have that judgment put on myself.”

The researcher then asked Leo if he experienced differences in self-concealment between LGBTQ+ clients and clients who were assumed to be straight. Leo first said “I do. I notice it within myself, but I choose to operate in the same way.” Leo noticed a difference between LGBTQ+ clients and straight clients but he made an active choice to be with each client in the same way. Leo went on to say, “I feel more comfortable, would feel more comfortable sharing if I know my client is of the community.” Leo again noted that “I don’t openly share that with them unless I feel like it’s therapeutic or if there’s some value therapeutically to the conversation that we’re having this session.” The researcher asked Leo if he could recall anything that he had previously deemed to have “value therapeutically.” Leo responded with:

“Yeah. So, it would have to be something that we've talked about for an extended period of time where I would share an experience where I then would disclose my orientation. I've also shared my orientation because the client specifically requested that they work with a therapist of the community. So, in that incidence, then I would share right away that I am so that they know, so that I…so they know that one of their requests was met.”

The researcher later reflected in his journal about Leo’s shared experience of not concealing because a client specifically asked for a queer counselor as he has also not concealed in these instances. The researcher asked Leo about how it felt to not conceal in these instances where his identity was known to the clients before he even met them. Leo spoke about his responsibility to advocate and provide representation to his community. Leo said:

“My experience is that if I'm in this field to provide support and help for someone, so I've taken upon my…as almost like a responsibility that I have as part of the community,
to offer this specific service to the community as a queer or as an openly gay man. And I've never really thought of it as being put in a position where I didn't have a choice, only because I think I went through the... I went through a process of self-reflection many years ago on what my... What I can offer to the community from a therapist perspective and what I can offer from the community as this role that I've taken on is my career.”

Leo also briefly spoke about his personal experiences in counseling and supervision that have helped him feel less affected by self-concealment. The researcher asked Leo if there were any active steps, he took to conceal his identity with clients noting that he did not conceal with colleagues. Leo shared that he filtered information by changing his language with clients. Leo said, “I do notice that I use the words like significant other instead of my partner, my boyfriend, or my husband.” The researcher probed how changing language made Leo feel. Leo felt that changing language and necessary to protect himself from possible discrimination but also from clients not wanting to work with him anymore. There was uncertainty in not changing in his language and not self-concealing.

The researcher sensed that the uncertainty Leo had described stemmed from his personal experiences. Leo continued with “I don’t think it comes from nowhere. I think it is based on experiences with not just in the workplace, clients, but just in personal life as well. That influence happens.” The researcher then asked Leo if there were other ways in which he felt affected emotionally by self-concealment. Leo was quiet at first, and then said, “I’m trying to think…I think it affects me emotionally, but not to the level that impairs functioning.” The researcher wrote in his notes and later in his journal about this moment because it was surprising. Leo was the first participant who had not endorsed some type of emotional effect of self-concealing in the counseling workplace. Leo continued “I think about it, and then I let it go.” Leo
then referenced his own personal work around his identity. “I’ve done a lot of work around my personal self I’m not going to allow that control to…that piece to control my responses. So yes, I feel it behaviorally, but not much happens after that.”

The researcher was curious about Leo’s experience, and because it had not been mentioned in the previous five interviews, he asked Leo how he allowed the impulse to conceal to not affect him. Leo shared the following about his experience with his own counselor:

“I went through many years of therapy myself, in my early 20s and through my mid 20s and I had an amazing therapist who identified as part of the community. And it was interesting because I knew I was going into this career, and I just had... I mean, I was just lucky to find this therapist that we actually ended up talking about some of this concealment stuff within therapy before. So, for me, it was, I'm not going to allow this to control whether I do this career or not. I'm not going to allow my identity to have these huge negative impacts on my life, because in the end I've learned that it's just someone's opinion. It's not fact, it's not that I can't provide these services because I'm of this orientation. So, I went through a big process like that during my, actually during my master's degree. But also, before that, because I started out in addiction counseling 10 years ago. So, while I was going through that, I also went through... That was where the majority of it started. About how do you present yourself and how does life experiences impact your career work? So, I was just fortunate, like I said, to find someone that wasn't also helping me personally, but also career wise and professionally at the same time.”

The researcher asked Leo if there are ever times when thinking about it and letting it go did not work for him and he wanted to self-conceal. Leo then described how counseling supervision has been helpful for him:
“I had an experience, as an addictions counselor, I had an experience with someone who identified very Catholic, and they could not work with me, and they just resisted to work with me. And that took some time to process through. And I was lucky enough to be in supervision at that time. So, I was able to use supervision and I had an amazing coworker too that was right across the hall that I found very supportive late nights after work. But it took me probably a couple months to realize that it is someone's opinion and it's almost like their loss that they can't work with me. So, I've come up with little things like, I've built my self-advocacy around my counseling, and I am a wonderful counselor and I've helped numerous people. And if that's a barrier for you, that's your barrier. That's not my barrier. It's how I've developed my own self-talk in terms of my orientation. And if it's a barrier, it's not a barrier for me, it's a barrier for them and that's their barrier to work through. Is what I came to in that and I've used that many times in my career.”

The researcher then asked Leo if there were any other ways that he had not already talked about in which self-concealment may have affected his counseling work. Leo shared an experience where he had been working with a parent who was struggling with their child being transgender and he felt the need to conceal because the client was struggling with their child’s identity. Leo also felt that he struggled to be empathetic and questioned his counseling skills. The researcher asked Leo how he worked through those feelings about this challenging client. Leo shared that he eventually chose to no longer conceal his identity with the client toward the end of their time together. Leo spoke about his motivation to conceal saying “it wasn’t until the end that I did that, because I think I was just too afraid to impact the therapeutic relationship. And that’s always my biggest thing is I don’t want to impact the therapeutic relationship that I have.” Leo also shared that in the end he believed not concealing “broke through some of their
perceptions of people in the community.” The researcher asked Leo what he worried might happen to the relationship if he chose not to conceal his orientation. Leo said “I was afraid of losing them as a patient. I am afraid of retaliation against me in terms of negative reviews, which would hurt my business. Which then could potentially hurt other patients if they see those reviews.”

Leo had previously discussed having different degrees of outness between his colleagues and clients. The researcher asked Leo if he experienced those relationships differently. Leo responded “Yes, with my coworkers I’m much more me, I guess I would say, in terms of less filter, I guess, I mean, I guess with clients, you’ll always have a little bit of a filter on.” Leo then shared an experience where he filtered the information he shared with a client:

“So I think, and I can even give an example, a couple of friends just recently got engaged over the weekend and I was part of the engagement piece of being there and surprising and with a client, I…They asked me what I was doing, and I was like, ‘Oh, my friends are getting engaged and they’…And I would conceal that it was a gay relationship. So, with clients I'll conceal bits and pieces of what I did over the weekend or how my week was going with not telling them, ‘Oh, yeah, I spent the weekend in this…a bunch of guys in a bunch of relationships, like a camping trip or something.’ Like, I won't…I'll conceal that piece.”

The researcher noticed that Leo concealed not only parts of his own identity, but also parts of his community as a means of not letting clients know that he might also be gay. The researcher asked Leo if concealing his community through filtering to his clients felt how self-concealment feels. Leo said “yes, because I feel like I’m a part of this community and it’s my responsibility to be open about that.” Leo then spoke about the need to conceal based on his
perceptions of the local area. Leo had recently moved from a major city to a rural area and felt the need to self-conceal more:

“just based on the community of where I’m physically located. And I never thought about that until now, but even when I was going on job interviews, I wouldn’t share that specialty of working with the community, because I felt like it wasn’t valued here. So, I concealed that piece.”

Leo continued talking about feeling the need to conceal where he lived because “it’s just the perception, it’s my perception because, I don’t know. I’m sure there’s gay people here, but not many people are out here. It’s very rural, it’s very, for lack of a better word, Trump land.” The prevailing attitudes in Leo’s new home were perceived as not accepting because they were primarily associated with supporting Donald Trump.

The researcher asked Leo if there was anything else about his experience with self-concealment in his counseling work that we had not talked about. Leo shared an experience that he had during his master’s program about concealment decisions in counselor education spaces:

“I also think though, in terms of education-wise concealment within classroom work as going through the counseling program, I know I would conceal during that time as well. And I think that's really when our counseling career started, is way back then. So, I think that's part of this is education and confronting, I mean, there's, but there's been times where I didn't conceal because I was personally offended by a question that was asked in a discussion post, where I was like, ‘As a gay man, I find this very harmful to our community.’ So, I think it's just a piece where if I feel like getting into a debate and a question, I'll disclose, but if I really don't want to engage in that, then I just sit back. But the incidence was where the discussion question was... It was talking about controversial
topics that come up in counseling and they listed people's culture, religion, sexual orientation. I'm like, ‘We need to stop.’ I talked to the director of the program and said, ‘We have to stop labeling someone's culture, gender as controversial because it's not.’

So, it ended up really well. It ended up... They changed the language of the question, they changed, and they involved me in that process, which I was thankful for.”

While not directly relevant to the research questions, the researcher made note of this experience in educational spaces in his journal as a possible area for further research. Concluding the interview, the researcher asked Leo how it had been to talk about self-concealment experiences with him. Leo reflected on how he had prepared for the interview and his experience with the researcher:

“I think it has me thinking about a lot of topics in terms of why I choose to and why I choose not to. I'll be honest, I was thinking about possibly some of these questions that were coming beforehand. Just this morning, I was like, ‘I wonder, well, how would I answer it?’ Because I knew the one question would be, how do you conceal? So, I thought about that before, and this has actually allowed me to really look at why I do and why I don't. And for talking, it's been very comfortable. I don't know how comfortable I would have been if it was a straight cisgender male. But my perception is that you're part of the community. And that's where... That's part of this research I think that is so interesting is that a lot of we have to think about is our own perceptions because a lot of times we don't know.”

Leo emphasized the broad uncertainty that caused him to consider self-concealment based on his perceptions of safety across personal and professional domains. What also stood out to the researcher was Leo’s feeling that he would not have been comfortable talking about this
topic if the researcher were a heterosexual male. For Leo, that presentation represented a potential threat to his safety, and talking about self-concealment to a heterosexual male would represent a challenge to the prevailing structure of heteronormativity. Leo continued reflecting about the effects of self-concealment:

“And I think sometimes we miss out on building a deeper relationship with what I would perceive as a straight cisgender male from rural Colorado. And I think that's how this has impact. I think that's the society part that I've experienced on the oppression of our community and how it impacts our work. And it's not me just not doing it. It's because I've actually had experiences of why I wouldn't want to disclose that to someone who I perceive as a quote unquote redneck. I hate saying that, but it's true. It's…I'm very real and it's true. We label our perceptions of who we have as safe or nonsafe.”

Leo’s final statement communicated the powerful effects that systemic oppression of LGBTQ+ people had on him as an individual, but the profession of counseling as a whole. The researcher thanked Leo again for his participation and said he would be in touch via email with a summary of the themes from his interview. Leo responded to the email and said “everything looks correct.” No revisions were necessary. Table 7 provides a visual representation of the significant quotations from Leo’s interview that came up in relation to the themes that emerged from the data.

Table 7

*Participant 6: Leo Phrases of Significance*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Category</th>
<th>Quotations of Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Concealment Decision</td>
<td>“I look at conversations that we've discussed.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressed Beliefs of Others</td>
<td>“It would be based on things that they've said”</td>
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</table>
“I look at political views.”

Perceived Negative Views of Others

“I base concealment on my comfortability with what I'm perceiving the other person may react if I share my sexual identity with them.”

Perceived Support

“I base concealment on my comfortability with what I'm perceiving the other person may react if I share my sexual identity with them.”

Professional Relationships

“With my coworkers, I'm much more me, I guess I would say, in terms of less filter”

“I openly share with other colleagues pretty much a 100% of the time. I don't think there's really any time that I wouldn't”

“But in terms of sexual orientation wise with my coworkers, I mean, I just talk freely about my partner and my life and what I do on this weekend and where I went and who I'm hanging with, but with clients I'm not”

LGBTQ+ Clients

“I've looked at experiences that they’ve had, if it’s an experience that I have had, it therapeutically could help them to know my orientation.”

“However, I don't openly share that with them, unless I feel like it's therapeutic or if there's some value therapeutically to the conversation that we're having this session I notice it within myself, but I choose to operate in the same way.”

“So, I would... Personally, I feel more comfortable, would feel more comfortable sharing if I know my client is of the community.”

“it would have to be something that we've talked about for an extended period of time where I would share an experience where I then would disclose my orientation.”

“I've also shared my orientation because the client specifically requested that they work with a therapist of the community. So, in that incidence, then I would share right away that I
am so that they know, so that I... So they know that one of their requests was met.”

“So, slowly... actually, it's interesting, I did disclose eventually, I did tell... Not fully conceal, but I did let them know I was an openly gay person, and it actually therapeutically worked all right, because I think it broke through some of their perceptions of people in the community, but it wasn't until the end”

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<tr>
<th>Coworkers with Marginalized identities</th>
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<td><strong>Concealment Motivation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>“I am afraid of retaliation against me in terms of negative reviews, which would hurt my business. Which then could potentially hurt other patients if they see those reviews.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>“So, it's really a perception on... Basically on safety within the workplace”</td>
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<td>“We label our perceptions of who we have as safe or nonsafe.”</td>
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<td>“unless it's, again, just around safety around their... If they've made comments that I just would not feel safe.”</td>
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<td>“There have been comments made just in general, not directed towards me, but about the community that would lead me to not feel safe them knowing my orientation, passive aggressive comments, comments about pride month, things like that that I would perceive as basically unsafe for me to have that judgment put on myself”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>“Obviously, I don't think it should matter whether my sexual orientation could influence the work I do with a patient, because that's my worry is that if I identify as part of the community, that the individual will then not want to see me as a therapist, will not want to continue sessions.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I was afraid of losing them as a patient.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Client Needs “This isn’t about me”</td>
<td>“I guess with clients, you'll always have a little bit of a filter on.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I concealed me working with them because they were really struggling with it”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Relationship Dynamics</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions of the Local Area/Town/Region</td>
<td>“I feel like I conceal way more here than I would in Minneapolis, just based on the community of where I'm physically located. And I never even think about that until now, but even when I was going on job interviews, I wouldn't share that specialty of working with the community, because I felt like it was not valued here. So, I concealed that piece.”</td>
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<td>“And it's interesting this goes even further because I was from Minnesota and I just moved to Colorado, rural Colorado, and working here, it's very different than working in downtown Minneapolis where I was working”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I conceal way more here than I would in previous places”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous Negative Experiences</td>
<td>“I don't think it comes from nowhere. I think it is based on experiences with not just in workplace, clients, but just in personal life as well. That influence happens.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>Concealment is Protective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specifics When Working with Children</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Concealment Behavior</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bodily Changes</td>
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| Filtering                         | “And I would conceal that it was a gay relationship. So, I... So, with clients I'll conceal bits and pieces of what I did over the weekend or how my week was going with not telling
them, ‘Oh, yeah, I spent the weekend in this... A bunch of guys in a bunch of relationships, like a camping trip or something.’ Like, I won't... I'll conceal that piece.”

“With clients specifically I do notice that I use the words like my significant other instead of my partner or say my boyfriend or my husband. I noticed I change that language, I change my language So, I think those are the two big things is adjusting my language that I use to conceal.”

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<th>Passing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concealment Affects the Counseling Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Counseling Relationship</td>
<td>“because I think I was just too afraid to impact that therapeutic relationship. And that's always my biggest thing is, I don't want to impact the therapeutic relationship that I have.”</td>
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<td>“Impact my work. I think I hesitate sometimes to fully challenge someone’s views”</td>
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<td>“I found myself questioning little bits and pieces of my questions, of my empathy, of my support for them, that I normally would just naturally give to somebody. And I think that piece was really challenging. That part of me, I just couldn’t fully provide the support for what they were saying, because it was very damaging to their son.”</td>
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<td>“I think sometimes we miss out on building a deeper relationship with what I would perceive is a straight cisgender male…I think that’s how this has impact.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>“What I can offer to the community from a therapist perspective and what I can offer from the community as this role that I've taken on is my career.”</td>
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<td>“Yes. Because I feel like I'm a part of this community and it's my responsibility to be open about that.”</td>
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<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>“My experience is that if I'm in this field to provide support and help for someone, so I've taken upon my... As almost like a responsibility that I have as part of the community, to offer...”</td>
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</table>
this specific service to the community as a queer or as an openly gay man.”

“I felt again it was my responsibility to do that I advertise in places where I feel that it would be safe to do so in terms of more clientele.”

“I've taken on that identity to where I... In big areas, like education, in workplaces, I will advocate for my community.”

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<tr>
<th>Connection Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concealment Negatively Affects the Counselor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authenticity and Genuineness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>“I found myself questioning little bits and pieces of my questions, of my empathy”</td>
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<td>Emotional Labor</td>
<td>“I think that piece to it was really challenging.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“And that piece, like I said, that was hard”</td>
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The Focus Group

The focus group consisted of four participants who were not previously known to each other. All prior communication with members had been kept confidential. Members were given the Zoom link and a password when they were invited to participate in the group. The researcher enabled the waiting room feature so that he could verify who would be coming into the room before allowing participants to meet each other. When the four participants were verified, the researcher allowed them to enter the Zoom room where the focus group would take place. The researcher then locked the room to prevent anyone else from entering to ensure the security and confidentiality of the participants.

The focus group began with allowing the participants to ask questions about the study and a review of informed consent and their rights during the study. Prior to scheduling the focus group, each participant completed a focus group consent form and returned it electronically to the researcher via email. The researcher reviewed the specific considerations for confidentiality in focus groups and ensured that he would keep participant information confidential to every
extent possible but could not guarantee that all participants would maintain this confidentiality after the conclusion of the focus group. The researcher reminded participants that by agreeing to participate in the focus group they were agreeing to keep the identities of, and information shared by other participants in the focus group confidential to every extent possible by not disclosing any information about other participants. The researcher reminded the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time and his data would be excluded from the data analysis and final report. All participants confirmed their understanding of the consent to participate in the study. The researcher then shared his identity as a queer person with the participants and discussed the process of reflexivity that he was using throughout the research to ensure credibility of the findings. The researcher shared with the participants that as part of using Hycner’s (1985) steps they would receive via email a summary of the themes from the focus group and would have the chance to review the themes for accuracy and provide revisions to the researcher if necessary. The participants confirmed their understanding of this. The researcher then asked each participant to introduce themselves sharing their name and their pronouns. The researcher also suggested adding pronouns next to each participant’s name on their Zoom window.

Participant 7, Lucy (She/Her), was a 35-year-old queer individual. She was a licensed counselor with five years of experience. Lucy held a PhD in counselor education and supervision. Lucy shared that she worked at a queer-affirming community mental health practice and saw clients from all populations, but with an emphasis on LGBTQIA+ individuals. Participant 8, Drew (They/Them), was a 28-year-old queer individual. They were a licensed counselor with two years of experience. Drew held a master’s in counseling with a concentration in college counseling and was in the process of completing their PhD in counselor education and
supervision. Drew worked in a community mental health setting primarily with queer and trans youth. Participant 9, Jake (He/Him), was a 32-year-old pansexual individual. Jake was a licensed counselor with five years of experience. Jake held a master’s in mental health counseling and was in the process of finishing his PhD in counselor education and supervision. Jake worked in private practice providing psychedelic-assisted therapy, and primarily worked with LGBTQ+ clients and survivors of trauma. Participant 10, Jeffery (He/Him), was a 37-year-old gay individual. Jeffery was in the process of becoming licensed as a counselor and had one year of experience. Jeffery recently completed his master’s in clinical mental health counseling and was in the process of getting his PhD in counselor education and supervision. Jeffery worked in private practice and an inpatient children’s hospital.

The researcher first asked the focus group about the internal experiences that led participants to engage in self-concealment of their affectional orientation in the workplace. Drew was the first participant to speak. They described their experience of working with children and fearing negative reactions from parents as follows:

“I'm in rural Ohio, in community mental health, and I mostly work with children and adolescents. So, a lot of the things that go through my mind about, do I disclose this? Do I tell people my actual pronouns? All of that stuff is very much oriented around, ‘Will this child's parents still trust me with their child?’

Drew spoke to the influence that the attitudes of parents as a reflection of larger societal anti-LGBTQ+ views had on their work. Drew was terrified that parents would find out they were queer and would accuse them of having influence over their child. Drew did not want the parents to think they were “part of the problem, or I am also part of the ‘trend.’”
Jake spoke next, saying that he had a very similar experience working in school-based mental health in rural Ohio. Jake was worried because “in a school setting, telling one is equitable to telling everyone,” and his identity could have been shared with parents. Jake added that he had worked in a youth drop-in center and when he disclosed his identity to one person, everyone knew the next day. “One of the things I wrote down here was evaluating cultural safety” Jake said of internal experiences that led him to conceal. Jake also felt that he evaluated the “therapeutic relationship” when making a concealment decision to ensure that not concealing would not cause “conflict.” Jake added that “community repercussions” were a factor in concealment decisions because he worked in a “small community.”

Lucy added that she lived in a conservative area. “It’s a delightfully accepting place. No, it isn’t, it’s terrible” she said with a laugh. Lucy’s current job was known as the “queer-affirming practice” in her area, so she felt “very comfortable being out” with everyone at work because of the population they served. However, Lucy had previously worked at a small private college where she had self-concealed more often because it would have “spread like wildfire” that she was queer. Lucy then acknowledged that she was queer and in a heterosexual marriage, saying “I think it was easy for me to conceal that.” Lucy further described her concerns as follows:

“It wasn't that I was really concerned or felt unsafe about people knowing. I think it was more just that most people would be okay with it, but there's at least a few people who would have some feelings about it because it was a Christian-based liberal arts college. Which again, wouldn't necessarily totally deter me. But I did have a fear of being tokenized, where suddenly all of the queer kids would be sent my way, and I didn't want to pigeonhole myself to that's my only role is I'm going to only provide support to the LGBTQ community, which I really enjoy doing. But I was worried that because we had
so few counselors that that was just going to become my only role, and that then it would become kind of an unbalanced caseload for the other counselor there.”

Jeffery spoke next, adding that he worked in a private practice where he marked himself “as a gay male working with that population” but also worked at a “Methodist Children’s Home.” Jeffery described his experience of being told to self-conceal by a supervisor as follows:

“I accepted the job, and I let them know when I went in for the interview that I'm passionate about working with the LGBTQ population. However, I recognized quickly that while a lot of the counselors there are accepting and had no issue, that it was upper management that had more of an issue, and that as soon as I recognized there was an issue with the kid who was dealing with his sexual identity, that when I started working with him, that I was roundabout informed that I should be self-concealing.”

Jeffery shared that while he and the supervisor did not get along, he chose to continue working at the children’s home. Jeffery felt that his choice to not conceal with that child had nothing to do with not using disclosure with any child as the supervisor had said, “I really feel that it’s the subject matter of the self-disclosure that’s the issue.” Jeffery had experienced other moments where he chose to self-conceal with children because he did not want to deal with “the drama that might result from me doing so.”

The experiences among the focus group participants indicated that the work context as well as who was in the work context mattered in terms of what prompted them to self-disclose. Supervisors had the power to dictate whether self-concealment was necessary based on their opinions about self-disclosure. Certain areas were also experienced as less accepting which translated to whether a workplace would be accepting. Religious and political beliefs or institutional beliefs could also motivate self-concealment.
During Jeffery’s story about the supervisor encouraging self-concealment and discouraging self-disclosure the researcher observed the other participants’ heads nodding. The researcher reflected this to the group and asked if Jeffery’s experience resonated with anyone. Lucy shared that she previously had a supervisor at the small private Christian college who was a “Catholic deacon.” She described a supervision session after she had chosen not to self-conceal with a client as follows:

“I'm just thinking about his look of horror when I talked about coming out to a client or disclosing to a client who was also struggling with their sexual orientation. And it felt to me like a very appropriate self-disclosure, in terms of it very much did not make the session about me. It just kind of opened things up a little bit and made that client more comfortable. But I think he had no idea what to do with that, and he looked very uncomfortable. He didn't come out and tell me that that was a bad idea, but his face said it was a bad idea.”

Lucy did not let the experience phase her too much saying, “fortunately, I felt good about it, and so I was able to kind of move on.”

Drew then spoke up and described their previous experiences with colleagues and supervisors who encouraged self-concealment by discouraging self-disclosure. They added the following to the conversation:

“I will say that I've had a number of different supervisors who had different perspectives on self-disclosure. I had one that was just very anti-self-disclosure. She didn't think it was a good thing, ever, at all, in any moment. And I tried to communicate like, ‘Hey, a part of my orientation as a therapist is feminist, and feminist theory encourages that in appropriate moments.’ Right? And I've integrated relational cultural therapy with
feminist therapy, is what I do. And she really cautioned me against it. And I think she was trying to protect me, because she herself was a lesbian, and we were in Eastern Tennessee. So, there's notable issues. It was a very unsafe place to be queer, even on campus. But I've definitely been given the feedback on multiple occasions, that maybe that's something you should play real close to the chest, by people and authority figures.”

Drew’s experience of being told to self-conceal directly conflicted with their approach to counseling. Although the guidance was meant to be protective, Drew felt that it affected their work as a counselor. Drew added that they identified with Lucy’s fear of being assigned all the queer clients if they chose not to conceal. Drew shared that they previously worked in a college counseling center at a university that was unsafe for LGBTQ+ people. “It’s just me having those experiences of a hostile campus inside the counseling center, outside the counseling center, inside my counseling program, while simultaneously seeing all of these freshman, sophomore queer kids who are experiencing all of the same things” Drew said. Drew chose to self-conceal for their own protection, and when they chose to disclose being queer to their supervisor, they were assigned all the queer clients. Drew had worked in multiple settings where they experienced the same pattern. “I think a lot of it is a lack of understanding inside the profession from the people that area already there, or an unwillingness to learn, so we just give it to the person who already knows,” Drew concluded.

Lucy responded to Drew’s experience saying, “I don’t know if this was your experience, but, I mean, hearing about that all day, every day, is pretty triggering, to constantly be processing people’s internalized homophobia or their experiences of having their gender or sexuality policed.” Lucy stressed the importance of doing her own work to prevent vicarious
traumatization and said that because of experiences like Drew’s, she intentionally looked for jobs that were “very queer friendly and knowledgeable.”

Drew agreed with Lucy saying, “that was the piece that was overwhelming for me, that these people are dealing with direct discrimination and microaggressions, and it’s causing an internal struggle.” Drew also said “everything was so personal, and it took so much space to keep it divided during those clinical hours.” Drew and Lucy’s experiences did not prompt them to self-conceal but were a consideration when making concealment decisions. Drew and Lucy feared that not self-concealing would put them in a position to be tokenized, while at the same time dealing with their own identity-based trauma and wanting to be resource for queer clients.

Jake added that because of his previous negative experiences getting no support in supervision for experiencing homophobia in counseling, he also tried to work in settings where self-concealment would not have to be a consideration. Jake said the following about the safety that certain settings offered him:

“I think that, to me, affords a really big degree of safety if somebody has picked me off of my website and on there I mentioned something about my husband or being queer, versus just kind of encountering somebody more through a community referral or something like that.”

The conversation around safety and protection prompted the researcher to skip to a question later in the protocol about protective factors associated with self-concealment. Drew described how concealment was simultaneously protective and harmful as follows:

“I think that that can be very true, especially for people who have been in places where they were not accepted, because I definitely had that experience growing up, and then it made me more hesitant when I got into professional spaces. But I also think that in my
mind, I frame it so much as like, ‘I'm protecting myself; I'm keeping myself safe.’ And I think a lot of that might be some internalized stuff. I think some of it has to do with trauma I experienced not growing up in a safe place. I'm Appalachian, so it's a lot there, but there's... It doesn't protect me in the way I want it to, and it leads me to be inauthentic in spaces, in a way that's inherently harmful because it hurts every time that I'm misgendered at work, even though they don't know what my pronouns are. It hurts when I can't talk about the things that I'm interested or the things that I enjoy because there's something that's stereotypically queer or my friend group.”

Drew added, “the inauthenticity eats away at you until you don't know what to do, because it hurts too much to feel it and you have to start coming out to someone or you're just so alone.” Drew described a dichotomous, almost impossible experience that was “simultaneously an effort at protection” and “making yourself increasingly vulnerable and trying to figure out what you can say and what you can’t say.”

Jeffery shared that he had experience a similar dilemma where self-concealment was protective, but he questioned whether he should use self-concealment for protection. Jeffery was working with a child in the children’s home who told a homophobic joke that “ended with rounding up all the gay people to put them in jail, essentially, but much more lively terminology.” Jeffery wanted to address the issue, not just because of his personal feelings, but to make a point about “appropriate jokes, and why it’s wrong on so many levels.” Jeffery described his concerns as follows:

“what if this conversation comes back around to me and it becomes an issue and then I have to explain all this all over again to the program director, and then whoever else is above me and I ended up letting it go in that moment, not addressing it and feeling
absolutely horrible about it, because I felt like there should be nothing wrong with me addressing it as an issue. But just because of the…I don't know if you would call it the politics of the hospital or what, but it was in that moment that it made me question whether or not I should or shouldn't really for my own protection in that sense of, do I want to put that drama on myself?”

Drew chimed in, saying, “I have a thought.” Drew questioned whether they should have been “as out” in their doctoral program as they were. “Everybody knows it’s what I do, and I’ve noticed that I don’t get the same opportunities as my peers,” Drew said. They described the uncertainty further, wondering “if I should have hidden it, if it’s something that they didn’t need to know.” Drew also questioned if they should list their pronouns or talk about their identity when applying for jobs because “I keep entering spaces, counseling spaces, and expecting to be treated like everyone else and I never get it when I’m out.”

Jeffery experienced uncertainty in his master’s program and at his current job because they both had religious affiliations. “I definitely feel the need to have to test the waters before I feel safe being able to do anything,” he said. When Jeffery applied for his job at the Methodist Children’s home, he self-concealed by saying he was “passionate about working with LGBTQ clients” instead of saying he was gay. Jeffery self-concealed in this instance to see if he could pick up on supportive of non-supportive cues, so that he could determine how safe the situation was. Jeffery felt this was necessary because “I don't want to come out and not feel safe in that coming out experience.”

Lucy also had negative experiences “with people who are affiliated with religion and specifically around Christianity.” Lucy said she was careful with anyone “who really identifies that their faith is very important to them” until she had a sense of where they were in terms of
acceptance. Lucy said that she would also “test the waters,” bringing up LGBTQ+ topics to see whether she should self-conceal, or how it would go if she did. Drew added the following thoughts:

“I am also just very wary of anyone who's got a lot of like Jesus stuff in their space. People who have crosses on their walls. People who wear cross necklaces or it's somehow prominently on a water bottle or something. I've never been at a university that's religiously affiliated. I avoided that on purpose. I have enough issues with God stuff from my own personal history, that I'm not willing to take anybody else's. So I tend to avoid that.”

Drew also noted that political views could be used as cues “to tell people’s level of acceptance.” Drew clarified that it was not specifically anti-LGBTQ+ politics, but any political view that was perceived to accompany anti-LGBTQ+ political views such as “the COVID-19 vaccine is a liberal hoax.” Drew said they “look for those cues” and “test the waters” to see if others will share their potentially negative views before they know about their identity. Lucy added “if there is any kind of conservatism that is being touted, it’s like, I’m out.” Lucy also shared that many clients over the past year had been processing “political trauma.”

Jake added that the conversation was “hard because we’re still in a profession that CACREP certifies religiously affiliated and institutions that ban homosexuality on campus.” Jake shared that he had done his own work in counseling to process his own “religious stuff,” but the fear remained “so up front and center.” Jake shared that a counselor he knew had been “challenged to consider the degree to which DSM-5 definitions of the mental health disorders were relevant to God’s word” in her master’s program. Jake described uncertainty within the profession of counseling as follows:
“I think that there's still, just even this evaluation, not only like concealing with clients, but also in the profession itself because it's not consistently a welcoming place. I've had conversations like this, pretty in-depth and frequently in the past and it always strikes me that the degree to which geographic location, culture and those sorts of things play into this.”

The researcher noted that the participants had talked about what motivated them to self-conceal, or question whether they should or should not self-conceal. The researcher then asked how the participants decided not to self-conceal. Jake first shared that “for a vast majority of clients, it’s rarely an issue of, do I conceal or not conceal?” Jake expressed that his personal work in counseling helped him reach the point where he didn’t feel that he was constantly wrestling with self-concealment, “until I get one of those indicators.” Jake felt that not-concealing was “at times, helpful in some ways to build rapport” and that he was at risk for being seen as “a safe person to talk to about certain things, because I have this identity instead of this other sexual identity.” Jake reflected that there were times when he was willing to disclose his identity “with somebody that is struggling in the process.” Jake added the following observation about how heterosexism and heteronormativity affected self-disclosure for queer people:

“I think that's one of the things that comes with when we disclose as queer people, because our sexual orientations are hyper-sexualized compared to heterosexual folks. And so it's often made too much about us when it's really not, I think, to external viewers. So, I'll disclose often when I think it'll help the client and then at times, when there's just really benign things going on, like if I'm going out of town with my husband for a weekend, and I can't schedule with somebody that week, I feel comfortable in doing that because I feel like that's something I see heterosexual people do frequently and
consistently and so, all right. That's all right for you, then it's fine for me. So really just trying to model some of that too.”

Drew added that there were many signs that they looked for to determine if someone was a safe person to not self-conceal with. Jokingly, Drew said, “I check people’s offices for those things like it’s my job, like I’m actually an undercover detective of queer people.” In Drew’s experience, people “who are affirming, work to make sure that the offices that they were in, the spaces they were in, had those little hints.” Drew described some of the hints they have looked for as follows:

“here's a rainbow flag or here's a pamphlet that's about like helping queer kids come out to their parents or resources for parents. I'm affiliated with this group, kind of little hints that could be hidden from people who aren't in the know, but the things that like, you'd see that and you'd be like, oh no, this is a cool person”

Drew further described the process of checking with other safe people to determine if a new colleague would be safe as follows:

“If I've never worked with someone before, I will send messages to peers around the university to see what their opinion of this person is. Do you know this person? Have you interacted with this person? I see folks who have safe zone stickers at the university, which I think are really important and valuable. You can't depend on them always, but they can be there. If someone's email signature includes their pronouns, I'm more likely to trust them, even if I've never met them before because I think that's generally an indicator of a safe person”

The researcher later reflected on Drew’s process in his journal because they described a similar process to what the researcher has done to determine who was safe across multiple
settings. Drew also disclosed to the researcher after the interview that they had used indicators in the researcher’s email signature to determine that it was safe to participate in the study. The researcher also reflected on this in his journal.

Next, the researcher asked about the active steps the participants had taken to self-conceal their affectional orientations. Jeffery shared a situation in which he had used passing to self-conceal while playing the game Life with children at work. Jeffery was nervous about disclosing in that moment if he picked a blue piece when he got married, so he allowed the children to select his partner for him. Jake shared that self-concealment was less of an active process, and more of a “physiological shift” for him. Jake described the experience as “being distracted from giving presence to the client because now part of my cognitive abilities are managing an identity.” Jake expressed concerns of “fidelity” related to self-concealment at this point during the focus group. Jake worried that if he self-concealed, and the client later found out that it was a “breach of trust” and a risk for “potential rupture” in the counseling relationship. Jake tried to avoid these situations when he could “by being a little bit more upfront” about his affectional orientation. This allowed Jake not to spend “cognitive real estate” managing the shift he experienced when he felt the need to self-conceal, because that was “detrimental to our work.”

Jeffery echoed Jake’s fidelity concerns, citing this as the reason he chose to allow the children to pick the color piece. “I feel like I’m lying to the client, and if at any point in the future that comes out, that could just ruin everything,” he added. Then, Drew described how feeling like we have betrayed the client’s trust affected queer people as follows:

“I have something to say, but I also feel like it's really important that we note that if we present in a heteronormative way, and then later they find out we're queer, we're assumed to be liars. We have somehow breached a trust, and that's not something that could be
said about our cisgender straight peers. No one perceives their relationships in that way, and I think that adds extra damage to how we process this and how we deal with this and the decisions that we make.”

Lucy reflected Jake’s previous statement that self-concealment was not as much an active behavior as it was “more of a felt sense of it’s a critical moment” and “it pulls you out of that moment with the client.” Lucy also shared concerns that the client would think she was lying, but for different reasons than the other participants. Lucy worried that if she disclosed her queer identity to her clients, and they saw her in public with her husband, they’d think “did my counselor just say that to connect with me?"

Jake quickly unmuted himself and said “I feel like I need to make a comment about just kind of one of the times that I was just the most riled up.” Jake described his experience of hearing Irvin Yalom talk about self-disclosure without recognizing how it might be different for queer counselors. He described the experiences as follows:

“he was talking about building rapport and then these things with clients and he mentioned, "Oh yeah, just kind of casually with somebody and they ask how many years I've been married. I always tell them because I don't see any harm in that." And I'm just like, well, isn't that nice that that's just like a Tuesday for you because you for me, it feels like there is more meaning in disclosing queerness than non queerness because it is different. And so, I don't know that there's necessarily a way around that.”

Jake felt that self-concealment might be influenced by the fact that “there’s always hyper-meaning attributed to disclosure” for queer people because it is “assumed that we should conceal or have historically concealed.”
Lucy added that she often used “gender-neutral language” like “spouse,” to self-conceal but she also questioned “what assumptions are being made because I’m very intentionally saying spouse?” Lucy questioned this because gender neutral language may have made clients more curious because she didn’t just say husband. Jake added “because I’ve got the ring,” he assumed that when he said “spouse” people continued to assume he was heterosexual. Jake would only use “gender neutral language” if he received a cue that prompted him to self-conceal “so that it’s not something that is brought up.” Drew added that they kept “passing” in their master’s program so they “got the gayest haircut [they] could get, and then they just couldn’t ignore it.” Drew shared their thoughts on passing saying, “I hate being perceived as a straight person. I hate it with my whole heart. It feels inauthentic. It feels ugly. It feels like they're trying to force me back into the closet.”

Drew then shared an experience with the group that the researcher later had to extensively reflect on, because at the time of the interview, he had the same concerns about his workplace. Drew shared the following experience that affected their motivation to self-conceal:

“It's this expectation to conform and frequently I meet that with, no, absolutely not. And I draw those boundaries, but I don't do that in the same way in professional spaces because I'm not invited to be in professional spaces. It is seen as unprofessional. And if I ever push back on that, I get the feedback of that's not professional. That's not what this space is for. Even in counseling conferences and stuff.”

When Drew refused to conform to heteronormative expectations, and was expected to pass, they were frequently told that their behavior was unprofessional, which meant that how they presented in the world was seen as unprofessional.

Lucy then shared her thoughts about how self-concealing by passing felt:
“It feels pretty gross. And now I think about it, that's probably why I very intentionally use words like spouse because then I'm really leaving it open that, please don't assume that I'm heterosexual because that really erases that whole part of my identity. And so yeah, it just feels bad. It kind of feels like a little bit othered at times. Like to be not quite queer enough to be part of the queer community sometimes, like somehow, I've made a choice to be on the other team. I don't know, it's real goofy. But I would agree. It's the similar yucky feeling to choosing to conceal, both don't feel authentic.”

Jake added that passing “is something that I kind of personally struggle with.” Jake had done academic writing about passing behavior, and in the article, he mentioned that he “assumed that people perceived him as straight, that I pass.” While Jake had no control over whether he passed as straight, he still experienced an internal struggle about authenticity. Jake described the internal process as follows:

“It becomes this constant struggle of, well, is this authentic? Or am I just resisting oppression or is resisting oppression what is authentic to me? I don't know. And so I think for me…I don't know. In some ways maybe I am able to take advantage of that and do. I don't entirely know what to do with that. I find some ways and times that I'm like, Hmm, I wish that I had a way to convey that I was queer a little bit more. Maybe I do need some of those pictures and things, but no, this is actually the look that I like and eight years or so after I got that feedback from journal article reviewers, I'm still wearing jeans, T-shirts, and typically pretty heteronormative clothes cause that's what I feel comfortable in.”
Jake also questioned his intention behind changing his presentation to not pass as straight to other people. “Is it to act as an advocate for the community or act as a role model if I’m coming out to a client? Or is it to promote awareness of queer people in certain spaces?”

Jeffery shared his agreement with Jake’s thoughts on passing. Jeffery felt that he was often perceived as straight and “there are times when I do wish I was a little bit more flamboyant in some ways then I wouldn’t come across that way, but I mean, this naturally who I am.” Jeffery echoed Jake, saying that he never felt like he was actively trying to pass but he never wanted to be assumed as straight. “It took me 20 years of my life before I finally came out to anybody, I guess it’s a very personal thing for me, that I lived that concealed life for so long that I don’t ever plan on going back to that.” Jeffery described passing as “that feeling of icky yucky.”

The researcher informed the group that they were getting toward the end of the questions. He reflected that they had all touched on this question before but asked them how self-concealment affected them emotionally. Drew described their experience of “emotional labor” as follows:

“there's a lot of emotional labor in that that I don't think a lot of like Cis Het people have to do. Of like, how will this mean I am perceived? Is this advocacy thing that I'm doing going to make this client think of me in a mother role? Cause that's not what I am. That's not what I'm here to do. And it creates a lot of internal existential crisis regularly. That's like a monthly thing for me. What am I doing? Why am I doing it? Is this me? Or is this who people want me to be? And it's very difficult to balance that, and I frequently gaslight myself and invalidate myself because it's the narrative that I receive from everyone else.”
Jeffery described his experience as “feel[ing] yourself being pulled away from the presence of being there with the client.” Jeffery felt pressured to decide whether to self-conceal in the moment with the client as quickly as possible to not “let it take away from the client, not let it distract me either.” Jake echoed Jeffery saying, “we have so little time to make that decision.” Jake added the following:

“In that moment where there's this like, all right, I feel the need to conceal, the next step is, all right, is this because this is something that would be like genuinely beneficial, or I don't know if it ever really... Is this something that needs to be done for the client, to withhold this information or is this my own internalized homophobia and trauma?”

Jake also discussed the internal battle he experienced when considering whether to self-conceal or self-disclose. Jake added that self-disclosure gave him the opportunity to “be a casual role model for a client” or represent that “queer people can exist in the community and have successful careers and lives too.” Self-concealment could prevent Jake from providing this type of representation when it was needed.

The researcher asked Jake and Jeffery to clarify if there were feelings associated with the experiences they had described of being pulled out of the moment. They thought for a minute and Jake said “exposed, like possibly, like it’s the threat of exposure.” Jeffery agreed with this word. Lucy added “sometimes there’s just like a certain fatigue that happens if I have enough people in a day where I’m like, do I conceal in this critical moment?” Lucy further described the experience of having to conceal frequently in the same day:

“If enough of those happen, I feel like I just really kind of can end up in my own head doing a lot of introspection, and self-assessment, and checking in with myself, which just takes emotional energy and trying to sneak that in between clients or trying to stay in the
moment and not get pulled out of it, in that like exposed kind of moment is pretty tricky.

So, I think it's just really fatiguing sometimes.”

Drew added “I was going to support fatigued and add exhausted just because it’s a constant struggle. There’s never enough days in the week. There’s never enough time off to get your head right, when this is the work you do.”

The researcher then asked if there were risks associated with self-concealment in their counseling work. Lucy referenced Jake’s previous comments saying, “I think self-concealment can definitely hurt, like just representation in general.” Lucy felt that self-concealment would not allow queer counselors to “represent that counselors can also be queer, and that it can be a safe, accepting place, and that queer people can be, I think Jake had said, like successful.” Jeffery also felt that self-concealment hurt representation, particularly for kids, there were no “LGBTQ role models to look up to.” Jeffery clarified that he was not necessarily a role model, but “just to have that presence in their life.” Jeffery felt that having to self-conceal didn’t give the kids he worked with the “opportunity to see that, oh, look, there’s this person that might be going through something similar and they’ve made it through.” Drew said, “I definitely want to second that.”

For drew self-concealment prevented them from being able to model to clients that you can “grow up and be happy and authentic.”

The researcher then asked if there was anything else about the participants’ experiences with self-concealment in their counseling work that we had not covered during our discussion. Jeffery shared an experience in which his supervisor was worried that a parent would sue the company if Jeffery worked with a client who was struggling with their sexual orientation. Lucy added the following about the role of power in professional relationships:
“I think a lot of the decisions I’ve made around concealment have really come back to people who hold the positions of power around me. So I think about in my doctoral program, I was able to be at a level of full disclosure because I was part of a very supportive program fortunately and I think about my job at that university, it was not as clear to me what the stance was, but in my current job, obviously my boss is very intentionally seeking out queer friendly practitioners. So, yeah. The people who hold the positions of power really can set a pretty clear tone for how things are going to go.”

The researcher then asked the final question of the focus group. He asked the participants to talk about their experiences discussing self-concealment in the group. Lucy shared that the focus group was “validating in some ways to hear that my experiences paralleled some of yours” but that she also became aware of how much acceptance varies by location. Jake reflected on the experience as follows:

“talking about these things in group experiences is helpful in, you get the sense of camaraderie normalization that this is a real thing that happens, but then there's just the kind of heaviness with, all right, well this is still that we are dealing with. It is 2021 and we are still worried about parents suing our organizations because we were undue influences on their small children and so that's really disheartening to me, at the same time as it is to be able to hear some people's experiences. But it's also just indicative of the work that's left to be done because these things are still happening and we've got a group of four people here and 50% of them are having, it sounds like, fairly negative experiences in their day-to-day life as practitioners because of that self-concealment process and so that's hard. So there's a lot of work still has to be done and I'm glad that we've got people like you that are doing this research to help move it forward.”
Jeffery shared that “this is the first time I’ve gotten to really have a good, in-depth conversation about these kinds of subjects with other LGBTQ counselors.” Jeffery felt that the conversation allowed him to reflect on how his private practice job gave him balance because he has had so many negative experiences in his work at the children’s home. Drew shared the following reflection of the experience:

“I think that this has actually been really good and helpful and affirming because sometimes it feels like I'm all alone in all of this because I'm the out queer person in my program and it feels like it's just me and maybe I'm a troublemaker somehow and having other people who are in counselor ed or have recently completed counselor ed or wherever anybody is, it's just nice to know that I might be the only one in my program, but I'm not the only one.”

The researcher thanked the participants again for their participation and said he would be in touch via email with a summary of the themes from the focus group. The researcher reminded the participants that the themes from the group would be summarized in aggregate. Drew reviewed the summary and said “I read through it all and I think it looks good! I don't have any concerns or revisions to request.” Table 8 provides a visual representation of the significant quotations from the focus group that came up in relation to the themes that emerged from the data.

Table 8

Focus Group Phrases of Significance

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<tr>
<th>Analytic Category</th>
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<td>The Concealment Decision</td>
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<td>Expressed Beliefs of Others</td>
<td>“those people where it says pronouns and something along the lines of, I have a name afterwards.”</td>
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</table>
“If there is any kind of conservativism that is being touted, it's like, I'm out.”

“I've also found that you can tend to tell people's level of acceptance based on their politics, because somehow my identity has become politics.”

**Perceived Negative Views of Others**

“There has to be either this kind of like orange flag that says like, Hey, this is maybe a thing that you actually should withhold”

“That's not a safe place and I look for those cues and I look very carefully, and I definitely test the waters sometimes, like other folks said, just to see if they're going to tell me before I find out and I'm disappointed”

“I see like Liberty University or some of these other places, and I'm already just a little wary of what my experience might be with that”

“I've had a lot of pretty negative experiences or my most negative experiences have been with people who are affiliated with religion and specifically around Christianity. So I think that any time I'm coming in contact with somebody who really identifies that their faith is very important to them, I tread pretty carefully until I really have a sense of like, okay, kind of where do you fall on that spectrum of Christianity in terms of acceptance?”

“I am also just very wary of anyone who's got a lot of like Jesus stuff in their space. People who have crosses on their walls. People who wear cross necklaces or it's somehow prominently on a water bottle or something. I've never been at a university that's religiously affiliated. I avoided that on purpose. I have enough issues with God stuff from my own personal history, that I'm not willing to take anybody else's. So I tend to avoid that. Sometimes you get really nice liberal Christians. It happens, but they generally make a point of letting you know that they're nice liberal Christians.”

Deciding Not to Conceal
Perceived Support

“But I am at least in a fairly liberal part of the state.”

“I still wasn't convinced and so I don't know, just that I knew enough people there that seemed to open and accepting, knowing that there were teachers that were, at the very least, accepting.”

“So I think that a lot of people I've worked with who are affirming, work to make sure that the offices that they were in, the spaces they were in, had those little hints of like, here's a rainbow flag or here's a pamphlet that's about like helping queer kids come out to their parents or resources for parents. I'm affiliated with this group, kind of little hints that could be hidden from people who aren't in the know, but the things that like, you'd see that and you'd be like, oh no, this is a cool person and I check people's offices for those things like it's my job”

“instead of just coming out saying that I'm gay, I said that I was very passionate working with LGBTQ clients and I guess that was kind of my way to kind of test the waters there as well, just to see how they would react to that”

“the testing the waters thing. That was the same phrase that came to my mind. I was like, kind of testing the waters with like bringing up something, maybe even pop culture, like Elliot Page. Just to get a sense of like how knowledgeable people are or how they react to that because I think that really gives me a good sense of like, how's this going to go if I say anything, or should I say anything? I don't know. That's my way of testing.”

Professional Relationships

“then at times, when there's just really benign things going on, like if I'm going out of town with my husband for a weekend, and I can't schedule with somebody that week, I feel comfortable in doing that there because I feel like that's something I see heterosexual people do frequently and consistently and so, all right. That's all right for you, then it's fine for me.”
“So, in that regard, I feel very comfortable being out with everybody at my workplace, because that's who we serve and that's what we do.”

| LGBTQ+ Clients | “I eventually came to realize that I was gay, and that was a very difficult thing for me to be able to come out and talk to people about that." And immediately, it just got him to open up.”

| Coworkers with Marginalized identities | n/a |

| Concealment Motivation | “So I think a lot of it kind of comes down to, especially if I'm working with somebody that is maybe like struggling in the process, then I'm maybe a little bit more willing to kind of self-disclose”

| Fear | “So, I'll disclose often when I think it'll help the client”

| Safety | “I did have a fear of being tokenized, where suddenly all of the queer kids would be sent my way, and I didn't want to pigeonhole myself to that's my only role is I'm going to only provide support to the LGBTQ community, which I really enjoy doing. But I was worried that because we had so few counselors that that was just going to become my only role, and that then it would become kind of an unbalanced caseload for the other counselor there.”

| “oh, all right, this is not maybe a safe thing to do”

| “or is this really a safe spot that I could do this”

| “I also think that in my mind, I frame it so much as like, ‘I'm protecting myself; I'm keeping myself safe.’”

| “I don't want to come out and not feel safe in that coming out experience.”

| “evaluating cultural safety to do that.”

| “I definitely feel the need to have to test the waters before I feel safe, being able to do”

| “evaluating cultural safety to do that.” |
anything. I don't want to come out and not feel safe in that coming out experience.”

Uncertainty

“It'll just spread like wildfire. It was a small campus, and it wasn't that I was really concerned or felt unsafe about people knowing. I think it was more just that most people would be okay with it, but there's at least a few people who would have some feelings about it”

“I think about my job at that university, it was not as clear to me what the stance was”

“in that moment where there's this like, all right, I feel the need to conceal, the next step is, all right, is this because this is something that would be like genuinely beneficial, or I don't know if it ever really... Is this something that needs to be done for the client, to withhold this information or is this my own internalized homophobia and trauma?”

“But we have the added sort of just layer of kind of this cultural thing and is this something that I'm refraining from doing for the cultural effects”

“But have had to tell myself, I don't know if I want to deal with the drama that might result from me doing so.”

“it did make me kind of question a lot about like, do I want to address certain topics around sexuality with some of the kids there, if it ever came up?”

“I want to address this, not like I had to like self-disclose or anything in that moment, but I just felt the need to talk about appropriate jokes and why it's just so wrong on so many levels. But then I also thought like, oh, what if this conversation comes back around to me and it becomes an issue and then I have to explain all this all over again to the program director, and then whoever else is above me and I ended up letting it go in that moment, not addressing it”
“And sometimes I have to ask myself, why are we doing something? Is this something that matters to me? Is this something that I value? Is this something that represents who I want to be and how I want to be perceived? how will this mean I am perceived? Is this advocacy thing that I'm doing going to make this client think of me in a mother role? Cause that's not what I am. That's not what I'm here to do.”

“I guess it's one of those things that intimidates me in the direction of disclosure of like, is this something I can share? Is this something that people are going to hold against me? Is someone going to hold up my research that's empirically proved, and very important, and say that it can't be true because of who I am? Does that mean I should hide? Does that mean I should change how I present myself to the world?”

“it just kind of continues and it's like simultaneously an effort at protection, while also making yourself increasingly vulnerable and trying to figure out what you can say and what you can't say”

“so I think that there's still, just even this evaluation, not only like concealing with clients, but also in the profession itself because it's not consistently a welcoming place.”

“If I've never worked with someone before, I will send messages to peers around the university to see what their opinion of this person is. Do you know this person? Have you interacted with this person?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Needs “This isn’t about me”</th>
<th>n/a</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Relationship Dynamics</td>
<td>“I think a lot of the decisions I've made around concealment have really come back to people who hold the positions of power around me”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

“The people who hold the positions of power really can set a pretty clear tone for how things are going to go.”
“I recognized pretty quickly that while a lot of the counselors there are accepting and had no issue, that it was upper management that had more of an issue, and that as soon as I recognized there was an issue with the kid who was dealing with his sexual identity”

“I tried to bring it up and explore it in supervision with my person there. And there wasn't a lot of support for when and how to navigate”

“I had one that was just very anti-self-disclosure. She didn't think it was a good thing, ever, at all, in any moment”

“me and the director, we kind of tolerate each other, I guess, is the best way to put it. She keeps a professional distance for me, I guess, is the best way to put it. But it definitely makes me question”

“He didn't come out and tell me that that was a bad idea, but his face said it was a bad idea.”

But I'm just thinking about his look of horror when I talked about coming out to a client or disclosing to a client who was also struggling with their sexual orientation.”

“I draw those boundaries, but I don't do that in the same way in professional spaces because I'm not invited to be in professional spaces. It is seen as unprofessional.”

“if I ever push back on that, I get the feedback of that's not professional. That's not what this space is for. Even in counseling conferences and stuff”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of the Local Area/Town/Region</th>
<th>“So, I am in North Dakota, which is a delightfully accepting place. No, it isn't, it's terrible.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don't know if it's maybe the area of the country I live in, but no one will ever ask me ever. Ever. And that they'll just continue with</td>
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an assumption of, well, usually that I'm straight.”

“I'm in rural Ohio, in community mental health”

Eastern Tennessee. So, there's notable issues. It was a very unsafe place to be queer, even on campus”

“I mean, community repercussions, too, right? So, I don't know what your practice is like in there, but I mean, if you're working in a small community and you're out, that travels quickly.”

“it always strikes me that the degree to which geographic location, culture and those sorts of things play into this”

“there are definitely areas of the country where safety is much more of a factor and so, I really appreciate everybody sharing your experiences because it's really a good reminder of how hard it is, outside of the nice bubble that I've created for myself”

Previous Negative Experiences “because we were in Eastern Tennessee, and the administration didn't want to give us an LGBT center, and everyone felt unsafe and uncomfortable. And the campus climate survey was a nightmare for queer folks. And so it's just me having those experiences of a hostile campus inside the counseling center, outside the counseling center, inside my counseling program it was just terrible. And there were so many microaggressions every day.”

“But it was just terrible. And there were so many microaggressions every day. When I was getting my new job in community mental health, I didn't disclose on purpose. I was like, ‘Yeah, let's...’ Because I was worried that the same thing would happen. And then, when I did finally disclose to my supervisor, I started getting all of the queer kids. It's a pattern that repeats itself everywhere. I've gone from
internal, I did inpatient alcohol and drug addiction treatment stuff, and then a college counseling center, and now community mental health. And it just keeps happening.”

“But I'm really hesitant because of my own experiences”

“It took me 20 years of my life before I finally came out to anybody.”

“That that can be very true, especially for people who have been in places where they were not accepted, because I definitely had that experience growing up, and then it made me more hesitant when I got into professional spaces”

“Think some of it has to do with trauma I experienced not growing up in a safe place. I'm Appalachian, so it's a lot there”

“It happens on a weekly basis that I learned that I don't get the support from faculty, that I'm not invited to projects, that I'm not told about conferences, that I'm not told about awards and things.”

“I'm in a session and he wanted to tell me a joke that he heard and the joke, it was this card that he wanted to show me, he put the cards down and essentially it ended with rounding up all the gay people to put them in jail”

“But my previous position was at a college, a private college. And so, there I was much more careful about coming out because, well, first I think it was very easy for me to conceal that, because I'm queer, but I'm in a heterosexual marriage. So, for me, I can conceal that forever if I wanted to. But the other thing I was concerned about was kind of what Jake mentioned. It'll just spread like wildfire. It was a small campus, and it wasn't that I was really concerned or felt unsafe about people knowing. I think it was more just that most people would
be okay with it, but there's at least a few people who would have some feelings about it because it was a Christian-based liberal arts college.”

“I keep entering spaces, counseling spaces, and expecting to be treated like everyone else and I never get it when I'm out.”

“one thing that bothers me is the fact that because I've been told, oh, not disclosing is best and that I feel that because there is this kind of heteronormative assumption”

“I have been discouraged before from doing research into queer topics and queer issues because I'm queer, and I'm too close to the issue, and it's too niche, and it's my niche and I'm just like, all research is personal”

“I've also been in a lot of professional spaces that were like, nope, you shouldn't do that. That's not something you get to do. You should trust a cisgender straight person to investigate trans issues and counseling and there are always moments where I wonder if these people didn't know who I was, and how I presented myself to the world, would they support this research?”

“So, there's always this sort of layer, because I think it is something that is maybe assumed that we should conceal or have historically concealed. And so there's always this hyper meaning attributed to disclosure, even when it's not necessarily relevant or actually there from our end.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concealment is Protective</td>
<td>“how much is just not wanting to have to deal with people looking at me funny”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It doesn't protect me in the way I want it to”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I frame it so much as like, ‘I'm protecting myself; I'm keeping myself safe.’ And I think a lot of that might be some internalized stuff. I think some of it has to do with trauma I experienced not growing up in a safe place.”</td>
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“So it just kind of continues and it's like simultaneously an effort at protection, while also making yourself increasingly vulnerable and trying to figure out what you can say and what you can't say”

Specifics When Working with Children

“I mostly work with children and adolescents. So, a lot of the things that go through my mind about, do I disclose this? Do I tell people my actual pronouns? All of that stuff is very much oriented around, ‘Will this child's parents still trust me with their child?’ Because a lot of the youth I see is, they're also queer, which I don't know if that's blind luck, or what, but I've got a lot of LGBTQ spectrum kids, and most of them don't have incredibly supportive parents. And I've heard so many of them say things like...The parents say things like, ‘Well, this is really popular right now. It's a trend.’ I've heard that from so many parents, and I am absolutely terrified if they find out that I am seeing their kids, and I am queer, that they are going to think that I'm influencing their child, or that I'm part of the problem, or I am also part of the ‘trend.’”

“it was kind of decided that if that kid ever needed to be seen and that counselor wasn't there, that they didn't want me to see that kid in any way, shape or form, because they were concerned that if it ever came out, that the mom would then maybe sue as a result, thinking that I somehow influenced a child in some way shape or form with, the child turned out to be gay at some point later and I was told that it wasn't that they believed that I would do that of course, but that they were more concerned that she would believe that and that she would then sue, it would be an issue”

“It is 2021 and we are still worried about parents suing our organizations because we were undue influences on their small children and so that's really disheartening to me”
“very much had that sense of, all right, well, if these kids were to find out about this and got word to their parents, that sort of thing”

“especially in that setting too, right? In a school setting, telling one is equitable to telling everyone.”

“So, she's a lesbian woman, so that already affords her some certain privileges, and kind of public perception around working with small children, over gay men. But for me, with some of the clients I was working with, they were at an age where garden-variety homophobia on the playground, it was things that would sometimes get you sent to my office, or I would hear about that.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concealment Behavior</th>
<th>Bodily Changes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Filtering</td>
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“I find myself often very intentionally using the word spouse so that I'm never gendering my spouse. Not never, but I try to avoid it. I try to just use very gender-neutral language in most areas if I can, but I do always have this thought of like, I wonder what assumptions are being made because I'm very intentionally saying spouse.”

“Yeah. I feel like spouse is like my way of not disclosing, but also, yeah. It's kind of an invisible identity too.”

“now I think about it, that's probably why I very intentionally use words like spouse because then I'm really leaving it open that”

“I will move to that gender neutral language so that it's not something that is brought up”

“instead of just coming out saying that I'm gay, I said that I was very passionate working with LGBTQ clients and I guess that was kind of my way to kind of test the waters there as well, just to see how they would react to that.”
“I was like, kind of testing the waters with like bringing up something, maybe even pop culture, like Elliot Page. Like, oh, let's talk about that or Caitlyn Jenner, let's talk... Just to get a sense of like how knowledgeable people are or how they react to that because I think that really gives me a good sense of like, how's this going to go if I say anything, or should I say anything? I don't know. That's my way of testing.”

Passing

“I am also in a heterosexual marriage. So, like my husband is cisgender and male. And so, it's very easy for me to self-conceal”

“first, I think it was very easy for me to conceal that, because I'm queer, but I'm in a heterosexual marriage. So, for me, I can conceal that forever if I wanted to”

“I mentioned that I assumed that people perceived me as straight, that I pass.”

“I'm not identifying myself in any way by picking a blue piece for my married partner. I just kind of let them choose. So yeah, that's kind of one way that I've kind of self-concealed.”

Concealment Affects the Counseling Work

The Counseling Relationship

“So I felt that all of a sudden disclosing that would maybe damage the relationship, undo some of the work that we'd done, those sorts of things”

“But I think there is this sort of, it's like that orange flag I mentioned earlier. There's always a little bit of, I just think cognitive real estate spent managing that after it occurs, and that can be detrimental to our work.”

“I think one of our professional values is fidelity. So being truthful with our clients and so if you do pick the heteronormative color pieces, and then a few months down the road, somebody finds out, then there's also that breach of trust.”
"is my counselor lying to me if they see me in public with him because I feel like I have to explain to people, well I identify as, but I am in a heterosexual marriage. I feel like that is always the second part of that statement for me because of that very reason. I don't ever want somebody to question, well, did my counselor just say that just to connect to me.”

“I feel like I'm lying to the client, and if at any point in the future that comes out, that could just ruin everything. As far as rapport building, I don't want to put myself in that position”

“I also feel like it's really important that we note that if we present in a heteronormative way, and then later they find out we're queer, we're assumed to be liars. We have somehow breached a trust, and that's not something that could be said about our cisgender straight peers. No one perceives their relationships in that way, and I think that adds extra damage to how we process this and how we deal with this and the decisions that we make”

“It's not helpful because one, I become like distracted from giving presence to the client”

“you feel yourself being pulled away from the presence of being there with the client. And you're having to almost split-second decision to decide how you're going to go forward with something”

Representation "just representation in general and maybe Jake, you just mentioned something about this too, but being able to represent that counselors can also be queer, and that it can be a safe, accepting place and that queer people can be, I think Jake had said, like successful. I think it's just good to have that representation and so, yeah. I guess that would be harmed by concealing.”

“having the ability to be a role model in that way is really, really helpful to provide them with a resource in that way. But I also... The
ones that don't have affirming parents, I can't be that resource.”

“I find some ways and times that I'm like, Hmm, I wish that I had a way to convey that I was queer a little bit more.”

“this could be an opportunity to either A) be casual role model for a client, show that like, Hey, queer people can exist in the community and have successful careers and lives too. So if I recognize that it is my own stuff, I'm much more inclined to be open about it”

“there's no LGBTQ role models to look up to, not saying that I have to be that role model, but just to have that presence in their life”

“They don't have anybody to look up to and just see, oh, this person has been through that”

“That concealment that conceals from them too and doesn't give them an opportunity to see that, oh, look, there's this person that might be going through something similar and they've made it through. They've done something with themselves. So just that environment, I guess, is what I noticed concealment can really effect for our clients.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advocacy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Connection Points</td>
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**Concealment Negatively Affects the Counselor**

**Authenticity and Genuineness**

“it leads me to be inauthentic in spaces, in a way that's inherently harmful because it hurts every time that I'm mis-gendered at work, even though they don't know what my pronouns are.”

“the inauthenticity eats away at you until you don't know what to do, because it hurts too much to feel it and you have to start coming out to someone or you're just so alone.”

“I don't know, it's real goofy. But I would agree. It's the similar yucky feeling to choosing to conceal, both don't feel authentic.”

| Self-Efficacy | n/a          |
| Emotional Labor | “If enough of those happen, I feel like I just really kind of can end up in my own head doing a lot of introspection, and self-assessment, and checking in with myself, which just takes emotional energy and trying to sneak that in between clients or trying to stay in the moment and not get pulled out of it, in that like exposed kind of moment is pretty tricky. So, I think it’s just really fatiguing sometimes.”

“There's always a little bit of, I just think cognitive real estate spent managing that after it occurs”

“I think that adds extra damage to how we process this and how we deal with this and the decisions that we make”

“I feel like I just really kind of can end up in my own head doing a lot of introspection, and self-assessment, and checking in with myself”

“which just takes emotional energy”

“there's a lot of emotional labor in that that I don't think a lot of like Cis Het people have to do”

“There's a lot of emotional labor and some days are really, really beautiful, and some days I rage cry, and it goes back and forth”

“but then there's just the kind of heaviness with, all right, well this is still that we are dealing with”

“it pulls you out of that moment with the client for a moment”

“my sexual orientation, if it does come up, there's an assumption in the moment how to handle it appropriately and not let it take away from the client, not let it distract me either. And to have to make that decision as quick as possible, so I can get back to focusing on why we're there.”

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“I support fatigued, and add exhausted just because it's a constant struggle”

“There's never enough days in a week. There's never enough time off to get your head right, when this is the work you do.”

“It hurts when I can't talk about the things that I'm interested or the things that I enjoy because there's something that's stereotypically queer”

“Exposed? Like possibly, like it's the threat of exposure”

“that feeling of icky yucky”

“It feels pretty gross”

“I hate being perceived as a straight person. I hate it with my whole heart. It feels inauthentic. It feels ugly. It feels like they're trying to force me back into the closet.”

“It kind of feels like a little bit othered at times.”

“please don't assume that I'm heterosexual because that really erases that whole part of my identity”

“I don't want to be assumed that way”

“it seems like something that is in a lot of situations, if you were just straight or cisgender, that you probably wouldn't come across a lot of those same issues or at least not nearly as often”

**Doing Your Own Work**

Several participants discussed having done their own work in counseling related to the effects of self-concealment. Two participants in particular, Leo and Jake, participants 6 and 9 respectively, spoke extensively about the work they have done in counseling that has allowed
self-concealment to have less of an effect on them and their counseling work. Leo said that he never felt like he didn’t have a choice when it came to self-concealment because “I went through a process of self-reflection many years ago.” Leo added that he had “done a lot of work around [his] personal self” and he was not going to allow his personal experiences to “control” his responses in counseling. Leo felt that because of his personal work in counseling and supervision, self-concealment affected him, “but not to the level that it impairs functioning” in the workplace.

Jake said the following about self-concealing his queer identity in counseling:

“it used to be an identity that I either had this sort of like early on and kind of my counseling development, it was this thing that I either, like I needed to do something with it and as I have been in the profession longer and worked in things, I would say for a vast majority of clients, it's rarely an issue of, do I conceal or not conceal?”

Jake also felt that “figuring out and doing our own work around these things” was really important to be able to discern between personal experiences of “internalized homophobia and trauma” and the needs of clients.

This theme was not discussed by every participant, and not relevant to the scope of the research questions but stood out to the researcher as possibly significant. The researcher did not want this theme to be lost in the narratives as it appeared to have important implications for the field of counseling, and LGBQ+ counselors. Self-concealment of affectional orientation was an under-researched and not well understood phenomenon, and this study contributed to the deepening of that understanding. This theme emerging from the data provided another direction for the research around this phenomenon, particularly how LGBQ+ counselors manage their own experiences and explore their own identity management processes in counseling and supervision.
Cross Case Analysis

The interview and focus group participants shared similar experiences and thoughts about self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. Phrases of significance that spoke to similar experiences and shared meaning were expressed across interviews and the focus group. Table 9 provides a cross case analysis that demonstrates the saturation of the phrases of significance associated with the subcategories between all individual interviews and the focus group.

Table 9

Cross Case Analysis of Master Themes and Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Categories</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Concealment Decision</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Deciding Not to Conceal</strong></td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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Concealment Affects the Counseling Work
Table 9 illustrated that all but one of the themes was endorsed by every participant and that there were individual differences among the sub-categories within each theme. All interviews contained discussion about making concealment decisions. Participants talked about “looking for hints” or “buzz words” that would prompt a decision to self-conceal, or not conceal. Self-concealment decisions were prompted by expressed negative views about LGBTQ+ people such as conservative religious or political views. Decisions were more often prompted by a participant’s perception that it was not safe for them to not self-conceal or that the views of others were discriminatory, homophobic, or heteronormative.

Decisions to not self-conceal were influenced by perceived support, professional relationships, working with LGBTQ+ clients, or other coworkers who had marginalized identities. You will notice that participant 4, Sakura, did not endorse the second main theme, deciding not to conceal. This theme was not endorsed by Sakura because at the time of the interview, she had never chosen not to self-conceal in counseling. Sakura spoke in her interview about not self-concealing in her personal life but continued self-concealing in her counseling work.

The theme of concealment motivation had the most sub-categories and the most individual variance among the sub-categories. The sub-category culture was endorsed by only two participants who identified with cultural groups that in their perception had negative views
about LGBTQ+ people. Participants 4 and 5, Sakura and Diego, both reported that their experiences with self-concealment were influenced by negative cultural attitudes. Concealment behavior, the theme that was least talked about in the interviews, included the sub-categories of bodily changes, filtering, and passing. Some participants spoke of changing their physical presence or something about how they presented to self-conceal. Participants who endorsed filtering spoke about changing their language, limiting information to others about their identity, or deflecting questions and suspicions. Participants who endorsed passing self-concealed their identity by allowing others to believe they were heterosexual or engaging in filtering to pass as heterosexual.

All interviews contained discussion about the effects of self-concealment on the counselor and the counseling work. Again, the individual effects differed across participants, supporting that individual and contextual motivations for concealment would have individual and contextual effects. Four sub-categories stood out to the researcher as particularly significant because they were the four sub-categories that every participant endorsed across all interviews. Expressed beliefs of others, uncertainty, previous negative experiences, and emotional labor are explored more in depth in chapter 5.

There were no substantial differences throughout the interview process or shared experiences that could be considered extreme data points. While several topics such as passing and culture were only discussed in a few interviews, the main themes, and experiences salient to the research questions were consistent between sessions. Differences among the sub-categories supported existing research which suggested that workplace identity management was highly contextualized (Lidderdale et al., 2007; Ragins et al., 2007). Additionally, LGBTQ+ self-concealment motivation and behavior was influenced by individual and contextual factors (Cain,
1991), which was reflected in the cross case analysis. The phrases of significance from the cross-case analysis were used to develop the central themes that emerged from the participant narratives and are discussed in depth in chapter 5.
Chapter Summary

This chapter demonstrated the process that the researcher used to explicate the narrative data gathered during the six individual interviews of and the focus group of the study. The chapter explored the researcher’s presuppositions about the phenomenon of self-concealment because the researcher himself has experienced this phenomenon as a queer counselor. The phrases of significance corresponding to the six analytic categories and subcategories were discussed in narrative form along with reflections from the researcher’s experience of conducting the study. The phrases of significance were also presented in several tables through the chapter to provide a visual representation of the evidence that supported each of the six major themes. The chapter concluded with a cross case analysis to demonstrate the saturation of the phrases of significance. The cross case analysis was also a visual representation of the many shared experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace and how self-concealment was a personal and highly contextualized experience.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

A review of the relevant counseling literature revealed a single study that examined the effects of self-concealment among LGB counselors in the workplace. The study by Jeffery and Tweed (2014) examined the experiences of self-disclosure of affectional orientation among LGB counselors, and the construct of self-concealment emerged as a result of this research. The findings of that study suggested that self-concealment negatively impacted the counselors, and at times negatively impacted counselor-client relationships. Jeffery and Tweed (2014) called for a study like this one, noting that the needs of clients were crucial, but the “wellbeing of the clinician should not be overlooked, and the powerful impact revealed here, warrant[ed] further exploration” (Jeffery & Tweed, 2014, p. 47).

The current study is believed to be the first to directly investigate the experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. The dearth of literature on this topic required the researcher to examine the problem through multiple lenses including identity development, identity management, outness, authenticity, and self-disclosure all within the context of counseling. The findings of this study speak to a self-concealment decision making process, self-concealment motivation, enacted self-concealment behaviors, and the effects that self-concealment had on LGBQ+ counselors and their counseling work. Six master themes that connected to these experiences emerged from the participant’s narratives, each with sub-categories that spoke to the individualized nature of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors. While the experiences of self-concealment among the participants were individual, and context dependent, four sub-categories were endorsed across all cases. Expressed beliefs of others as a factor in concealment decision-making, uncertainty and past negative experiences as
motivation to self-conceal, and emotional labor were the four experiences endorsed across all cases.

This chapter first discusses the six master themes that emerged from the data, which are organized around the three research questions and theoretical foundations of the study. Within each research question, a discussion of the implications of the meaning that was drawn from the participants lived experiences for the counseling field is provided. Due to the lack of literature around self-concealment in counseling, the implications are supported by research from the domains of identity development, identity management, outness, authenticity, self-disclosure, and self-concealment. The chapter concludes with an examination of the limitations of the study, an extensive list of questions generated by the study, and directions for further research on self-concealment.

**Discussion of the Findings**

Six master themes emerged that related to the questions posed for this study. This qualitative inquiry was directed by a semi-structured interview protocol which provided the framework for gathering the participants’ narratives (Appendix B). This section provides a discussion of each theme that emerged from the explication of the data relevant to the research questions posed for the study. The themes that emerged from the study illustrated the process of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors as well as the systemic forces that pressured counselors to self-conceal. The effects of the implications for counseling and LGBQ+ counselors who self-concealed in their counseling work are addressed within each research question.
Research Question #1

The first research question of the study was “What are the internal experiences that lead LGBQ+ counselors to engage in self-concealment of their affectional orientation in the workplace?” This question sought to gather information about the experience of making a concealment decision and what motivated the decision. This question was grounded within three of the study’s conceptual frameworks through which the data were examined. Hermeneutic phenomenology grounded this question in that it sought an essence of the common experiences (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 1997) among LGBQ+ counselors making decisions about self-concealment. This question was also grounded in queer theory as it embodied the three tenets of queer theory in qualitative research: examining queer lived experience, juxtaposition of that lived experience against the norm, and examining how queer lived experiences are othered (Dilley, 1999). The question was informed by minority stress theory because self-concealment has been shown to reduce the visibility of stigmatized identities, such as LGBQ+ affectional orientation (Meyer, 2003).

Question #1 unearthed experiences that spoke to the need to make a self-concealment decision, and the motivation that informed those decisions among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. Three master themes emerged from the participants’ experiences, each with their own relevant sub-categories. The sub-categories, particularly the large number of them within theme #3, spoke to the individual and highly contextualized nature of self-concealment. Additionally, they supported that identity management decisions were not discrete decisions, but an effort at ongoing maintenance and hypervigilance (Wells, 2019). In this section each theme is explored along with experiences that spoke to each sub-category. Implications for each theme are also discussed.
Theme #1. The Concealment Decision

The participants’ narratives unearthed two sub-categories which spoke to LGBQ+ counselors experiences that prompted them to decide to self-conceal. The experiences shared by participants spoke to what happened in the moments just before deciding to self-conceal. Participants decided to self-conceal because they experienced the expression of negative beliefs about LGBQ+ people from others in the workplace, or they perceived that they would receive a negative response if others in the workplace were to find out about their affectional orientation. This theme was closely related to theme #3, concealment motivation, and was initially difficult for the researcher to distinguish. However, what made this theme distinct is that participants did not speak about their internal motivation to self-conceal as will be discussed later in this chapter. Participants spoke about the experience of existing in a space and hearing, witnessing, or perceiving negative views, beliefs, or attitudes about LGBQ+ people. The participants’ narratives were consistent with existing workplace identity management literature. Chaudoir and Fisher (2010) found that LGBQ+ employees were uncertain of how their coworkers would react to finding out about their identity, so they attended to specific cues in workplace interactions to determine if the workplace was safe.

Expressed Beliefs of Others. Expressed conservative, Republican, and right-wing political beliefs were described as something that prompted participants to make a concealment decision. Participants had experienced others in the workplace make anti-LGBTQ comments. Participants also heard others in the workplace discussing policies that were harmful to LGBTQ people. Expressed religious beliefs, particularly religious beliefs that were conservative or associated with traditional values prompted participants to make concealment decisions. These experiences were most present for participants who lived in areas they perceived to be much
more religious such as rural areas and communities in the Southern United States. Religious affiliation of any kind prompted participants to make concealment decisions. Discussing religious activities or what someone else had done on Sunday also prompted participants to self-conceal. Expressed negative beliefs about LGBTQ+ people also prompted participants to make a self-concealment decision. Participants shared that colleagues said negative things about LGBTQ+ clients and expressed beliefs that LGBTQ+ clients should self-conceal because “what if they grow out of it.” The expressed beliefs and attitudes of others provided a level of certainty about how people in the workplace felt about LGBQ+ people, which prompted the participants to self-conceal. However, participants were also prompted to self-conceal because they perceived that others in the workplace had negatives views about them.

**Perceived Negative Views of Others.** Participants described perceiving negative views about LGBQ+ people associated with religious affiliation or beliefs that prompted them to make a self-concealment decision. While religion was often an indicator of negative views about LGBQ+ people, the participants shared that they were unsure how some of their religious colleagues felt about them or LGBQ+ people in general. The perception that a colleague or client might have negative views prompted participants to make a self-concealment decision. A focus group participant said the following about perceived religious beliefs prompting self-concealment:

“I am also just very wary of anyone who's got a lot of like Jesus stuff in their space. People who have crosses on their walls. People who wear cross necklaces or it's somehow prominently on a water bottle or something. I've never been at a university that's religiously affiliated. I avoided that on purpose.”
Participants shared that they would “tread lightly” or “test the waters” with these individuals to determine if they were safe to not conceal around, but that the default reaction was to self-conceal for safety purposes. Participants noted that they perceived a person’s religious beliefs not just from what they said, but also from what they wore, such as religious articles or jewelry.

The perception of negative views about LGBTQ+ people because of discrimination against other minority groups was also discussed by participants. Participants perceived that if a colleague or client made negative comments about another marginalized group, that the negative beliefs were encompassing of all marginalized identities. The perception of heteronormative beliefs or expectations also prompted participants to make a self-concealment decision. Participants perceived these beliefs when assumptions were made about the gender identity of their partners. When clients or colleagues assumed the gender or identity of a participant’s spouse, the participants interpreted this assumption as the person ascribing to traditional gender roles and expectations, which being LGBQ+ violated. “Just hearing that, it made me feel like I had to conceal it, or that they weren’t open to it,” said one participant. Violating expectations of masculinity was also discussed by some participants. These participants reported being guarded around male colleagues and clients because they perceived the men to ascribe to traditional conceptions of masculinity of which they were not aligned.

**Implications.** The participants’ experiences that spoke to the essence of theme #1 have deepened the understanding of LGBQ+ identity management in the workplace and supported existing identity management literature. The expressed or perceived beliefs of others prompting self-concealment decisions was consistent with the idea that LGB workers had high stigma consciousness and may have expected to be stigmatized in the workplace (Gates, 2014; Tatum et
al., 2017) which can lead to self-concealment (Clair et al., 2005). The expectation of being stigmatized that Gates (2014) discussed was the result of past negative experiences that also led to feeling the need to self-conceal. What was not currently represented in the literature was the moment of assessment described in theme #1.

Theme #1 illuminated a nuanced component of self-concealment that, to the researcher’s knowledge, was not represented in the self-concealment literature, and certainly not in the counseling literature, that suggested a direction for future research. Carroll and Gilroy (2000) asserted that when considering being out, queer individuals constantly assessed for risks associated with being out. The moment of assessment that emerged in this study came specifically when participants picked up on negative thoughts or perceptions of others that caused them to assess whether a concealment decision was necessary. Self-concealment has been conceptualized as containing motivation to conceal followed by a corresponding concealment behavior. This meant that there was a moment of assessment that came just prior to concealment motivation that forced LGBQ+ counselors to engage in concealment behavior. Spradlin (1998) found that self-concealment required “constant and careful attention by self-monitoring conversations and behaviors” (pp. 598-599). Theme #1 suggested that there was an additional piece to the monitoring process which was monitoring or assessing the workplace to decide if self-concealment was necessary. The need to assess each situation in the workplace was supported by LGBQ+ people entering the workplace with high stigma consciousness (Gates, 2014) because they expected some level of discrimination in the workplace due to experiencing discrimination outside of work (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Compton, 2016; Pickern & Costakis, 2017).
The moment of assessment that happened prior to concealment motivation has important implications for the understanding of self-concealment of LGBQ+ identity in the workplace. The moment of assessment appeared to activate pre-existing concealment motivation, which could lead to concealment behavior, or in the case of a moment of positive assessment, possibly lead to the use of self-disclosure. LGBQ+ counselors were not motivated to self-conceal just by experiencing the workplace, they assessed whether they needed to self-conceal, and the participants in this study assessed their workplaces for specific views, attitudes, and actions. Perceived or expressed negative views then prompted a self-concealment decision, and the decision itself was made based on the individual’s internalized self-concealment motivation. This meant that LGBQ+ counselors made decisions to self-conceal based on their experiences of others in the workplace. The expressed or perceived beliefs of others in the workplace pressured the LGBQ+ counselors into self-concealing to protect themselves.

The specific implications for the field of counseling are briefly discussed here, and further discussed within theme #6. The researcher reflected on this finding in his reflective journal because it spoke to his personal experience of engaging in self-concealment. The researcher wanted to ensure that the discovery of this nuanced experience reflected the participants’ narratives and ensure the bracketing of his own experience. When LGBQ+ counselors had to make a concealment decision, and engage in that moment of assessment, they struggled to be present and in the moment with the client. Participants described this moment as a “fight or flight response,” a “blackout,” “pull[ing] you out of the moment,” or “a shriveling.” The moment of assessment was characterized by an urgency to make a decision so that participants could refocus on the work they were doing in session. In that moment of assessment, LGBQ+ counselors almost left the present, or left their bodies briefly. This experience was
caused not just by what was happening in the present, but by all the previous times in their personal and professional lives that they had to self-conceal. A crucial component of self-concealment that emerged here was the internalization of past experiences prompting self-concealment in the present.

The discovery of the moment of assessment has implications for LGBQ+ counselors and their supervisors. LGBQ+ counselors must have an awareness of what they are assessing for in the workplace, if they have an expectation of being stigmatized, and how this can affect their ability to present and in the moment with their clients. Increased self-awareness of how these very individualized experiences happen will allow LGBQ+ counselors to engage in effective identity management in their counseling work while minimizing potential harm to their clients. Supervisors with LGBQ+ supervisees must have an awareness of this assessment process to be able to effectively supervise LGBQ+ counselors who engage in this process. Additionally, supervisors must understand the function of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors, which is protecting themselves from possible negative reactions. Meaning, self-concealment was used a coping mechanism for the negative views or beliefs of others in the workplace, so that LGBQ+ counselors could continue performing their job duties and functions. Self-concealment experiences were individualized to such a degree that it cannot be assumed that every LGBQ+ counselor will engage in the same assessment process. Directions for further research related to this topic are discussed later in the chapter.

**Theme #2. Deciding Not to Self-Conceal**

The participants’ narratives unearthed four sub-categories within the master theme that spoke to LGBQ+ counselors’ motivation behind deciding not to self-conceal. The responses shared by participants to this question spoke to the complex relationship between self-
concealment and self-disclosure that was discussed in chapter two. Self-concealment and self-disclosure were related, but distinctly separate constructs (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014) and were typically understood as being opposite ends of the spectrum of outness (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). The conceptualization of these two constructs as a spectrum was influenced by high levels of self-concealment leading to decreased self-disclosure and high levels of disclosure indicating decreased self-concealment (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). The complex relationship between self-concealment and self-disclosure was understandable because the constructs were related (Meidlinger & Hope, 2016; Riggle et al., 2017) and the differences between them were nuanced in behaviors, motivations, and consequences.

In this study self-concealment was defined as an active (Croteau et al., 2008) and conscious effort (Larson & Chastain, 1990) to conceal LGBQ+ identity. Self-concealment also involved attempts to prevent disclosure (Jackson & Mohr, 2016) and “a desire to prevent disclosure” (Schrimshaw et al., 2013, p. 142). This theme was endorsed by all but one participant. Additionally, every participant who described concealment motivation also described their motivation to self-disclose. The researcher found participants’ descriptions of self-disclosure interesting because through the entire data collection process, he was extremely careful not to mention the word “self-disclosure” to keep the focus of the questions clear. The participants’ responses are possibly explained by the existing literature that attempted to differentiate self-concealment and self-disclosure. Based on the previous definition, deciding not to self-conceal could also involve deciding to self-disclose, not just deciding to cease the use of self-concealment behaviors and no longer feeling motivated to self-conceal.

The participants’ experiences unearthed four subcategories within the master theme of deciding not to conceal. The important word in this theme was deciding. The participants made
an active choice to no longer self-conceal based on experiences that spoke to these four categories: perceived support, professional relationships, LGBTQ+ clients, and coworkers with marginalized identities. The participants also made decisions to self-disclose when they decided not to self-conceal in many cases. Deciding not to self-conceal was often motivated by how participants felt a disclosure would be received by others in the workplace.

**Perceptions of Support.** Participants decided not to self-conceal if they perceived that the people in their workplace were supportive or that the workplace in general was a supportive environment. Participants perceived support through hearing “safe words” or “buzz words” that suggested they would receive a positive response to not concealing or self-disclosing. Support was perceived when participants heard coworkers talking about “going to pride” or mentioning that they had other LGBTQ+ people in their lives. Similarly to how perceived negative views were assumed to be about all marginalized groups, hearing or witnessing others speak positively about liberal policies or other progressive movements made participant consider not self-concealing. When participants heard these progressive beliefs, they inferred that the individual supported LGBTQ+ people and communities.

People were perceived as safe by the participants if they reflected language that the participants used. This looked like participants using gender-neutral language such as “partner” or “spouse” and the other person not assuming the gender of the partner. Participants said they also perceived support through visible signs such as “car stickers and decals,” “a rainbow flag,” or “a pamphlet that’s about like helping queer kids come out to their parents.” Hearing colleagues speak positively about queer clients made participants feel that their colleagues would also respond positively if they chose not to self-conceal. Participants described actively looking
for these visible signs of support and “testing the waters,” which is explored in a later section, to see who would respond supportively.

**Professional Relationship Dynamics.** Participants also decided not to self-conceal based on professional relationship dynamics. This sub-category often involved greater openness or the use of self-disclosure with coworkers or supervisors. Participants expressed greater comfort with their coworkers which allowed them to feel like they did not need to self-conceal. A few participants worked in settings that were known for being queer affirming which made participants feel safe not to self-conceal. Participants also felt safe to not self-conceal with their colleagues because they had close relationships and they knew each other well. Supervisory relationship dynamics also played an important role in deciding not to conceal for the participants. Supervisory relationships were a unique context in which participants chose not to conceal because their identity sometimes came up in clinical discussions, such as when working with LGBTQ+ clients. Participants also chose not to conceal benign things with colleagues and supervisors, such as what they did over the weekend, just as their heterosexual peers would. The choice not to conceal benign aspects of their lives was particularly interesting because even things such as weekend or holiday plans could reveal aspects an individual’s identity.

**LGBTQ+ Clients.** The experiences in the sub-category LGBTQ+ clients always involved some type of disclosure whether directly to the client or by listing that they were an affirming counselor on their website. It is important to note, that the participants assumed that by labeling themselves as an LGBTQ+ affirming counselor, their clients inferred that they were within the community. Some participants also shared that they did not self-conceal with clients who specifically requested a counselor who was within the community because their identity was already shared with that client upon referral. Working with LGBTQ+ clients did not mean that
participants would immediately choose to self-conceal. Participants chose not to self-conceal if it was therapeutically relevant, but concealment felt less necessary with their LGBTQ+ clients.

**Coworkers With Marginalized Identities.** Several participants reported deciding not to conceal with their coworkers who were LGBTQ+ or had other marginalized identities because they perceived the relationships to be supportive. Participants reported having many professional connections who were also within the community which made self-concealment less necessary. Participants also felt safe to not self-conceal with colleagues who were in marginalized communities because of the perception of shared understanding of experiencing discrimination. One participant said they were more likely to not conceal with “minority colleagues, like Black or Latinx females.” A participant shared that they felt “safe” if their colleagues also brought up “part of their identity” in conversation. Overall, participants felt that they had shared space with marginalized colleagues and that they would be believed when they discussed their experiences of discrimination in the workplace.

**Implications.** This study had the potential to contribute to a clearer understanding of the differences between self-disclosure and self-concealment. While the results of the study suggest a more complex picture of these two closely related constructs, the study illuminated a deeper and richer understanding of how LGBQ+ counselor experience self-concealment and self-disclosure. The following exploration of this deeper understanding has implications beyond the counseling field, particularly in identity management of affectional orientation in the workplace.

Participants in this study were asked about how they decided not to self-conceal in the counseling workplace with coworkers and clients. Each participant had unique motivators for deciding not to self-conceal, and these motivators often overlapped with motivation to self-disclose. The participants in this study were motivated to not-self-conceal when they perceived
that the workplace or their coworkers were safe and supportive. They were also motivated not to self-conceal based on expectations of professional relationships such as not self-concealing with a supervisor because identity concerns were relevant to their counseling work. In this study, deciding not to self-conceal meant no longer engaging in self-concealment behaviors and that the motivation to self-conceal decreased or disappeared because of the perception of support or necessity of professional relationship dynamics. However, participants also shared that when this motivation decreased or disappeared, self-disclosure behaviors often followed. This supports the idea that self-concealment and self-disclosure are not opposite ends of the spectrum of outness (Jackson & Mohr, 2016), and the relationship is much more nuanced. This study suggests that perceived safety and support motivate LGBQ+ counselors not to self-conceal, which could possibly lead to self-disclosure. The results of this study meant that the relationship between self-concealment and self-disclosure was such that decreased self-concealment motivation could motivate self-disclosure, but this must be evaluated on a contextual, almost case-by-case basis because of how concealment motivation was affected by individual experiences. This is further explored in the implications for theme #3, concealment motivation.

The sub-category LGBTQ+ clients stood out from the other three contexts in which LGBQ+ counselors decided not to self-conceal. This context stood out because participants who discussed self-disclosure following deciding not to self-conceal were talking about the use of self-disclosure as a counseling technique. The implications for this sub-category are more complex than the previously discussed reasons not to self-conceal. Frommer (2000) stated that the identity management strategies that gay and lesbian counselors have used themselves, have the potential to impact self-disclosure decision making with their clients. LGBQ+ counselors have self-disclosed with their LGBQ+ clients to communicate understanding or shared
experience (Coolhart, 2005), to provide healthy representation (Cabaj, 1996; Coolhart, 2005; Pearlman, 1996), or let clients know that their therapeutic approach is informed by personal experience (Pearlman, 1996). LGBQ+ counselors have also self-disclosed prior to meeting clients through a website or marking materials (Cabaj, 1996; Coolhart, 2005).

Participants in this study identified using self-disclosure for all the noted reasons in the existing literature. However, participants were asked how they decided not to self-conceal. The meaning behind this was described by a participant when she said, “concealment with LGBTQ+ clients, it feels less necessary.” An important distinction here is that this does not apply to all LGBTQ+ clients, which will be further discussed in the next section, concealment motivation. When it was therapeutically relevant, participants in the study chose not to self-conceal with LGBTQ+ clients, then employed self-disclosure as a counseling technique. This meant that working with LGBTQ+ clients had the potential to decrease or eliminate motivation to self-conceal and could lead to the use of self-disclosure in counseling.

The results of the study deepened the understanding of the relationship between self-disclosure and self-concealment for LGBQ+ people in the workplace. They are clearly two separate, but related constructs, that can influence each other depending on individual and contextual factors. When LGBQ+ counselors perceived safety or support, their motivation to self-conceal diminished. The perception of safety or support had the potential to motivate the use of self-disclosure which suggested that when LGBQ+ people perceived that their workplace environment was safe and supportive, they were less motivated to self-conceal and might be motivated to share their identity in the workplace.

There are specific implications for the counseling profession in addition to the broad implications for LGBQ+ people in the workplace. Participants chose not to self-conceal with a
supervisor or coworkers because their identity could come up in clinical conversations or was relevant to their counseling work. This is supported by existing literature. The counselor’s identity is not a neutral factor in counseling (Guthrie, 2006). Additionally, counselors have a responsibility to assess and understand how clients receive their identity (Moore & Jenkins, 2012). Participants in this study understood when and how their identity was relevant in the counselor-client relationship. This is supported by when they chose not to self-conceal with LGBTQ+ clients and when they were motivated to self-conceal by assessing the client’s needs. The needs of LGBTQ+ clients and an understanding that their identity may have relevance in their counseling work prompted LGBQ+ counselors not to self-conceal. In these instances, the participants did not self-conceal by employing self-disclosure. This supports that self-concealment and self-disclosure are separate constructs, and that in counseling, their relationship is more complex because self-disclosure is a counseling technique. Meaning, decreased or diminished motivation to self-conceal lead to the use of self-disclosure behavior as a counseling technique.

The specific counseling implications are most relevant for supervisors who have LGBQ+ supervisees. These supervisors should understand that their LGBQ+ supervisees have an awareness and an understanding of how their identity shows up in the counseling room and in counselor-client relationships. LGBQ+ counselors may want to process these experiences with a supervisor, but this requires them to self-disclose their affectional orientation to the supervisor. LGBQ+ counselors may only be able to engage in these conversations in the supervision if they perceive safety and support in the supervisory relationship, and in the larger counseling workplace. Supervisors must also recognize that self-disclosure as a counseling technique carries
different meaning and may have different uses for LGBQ+ supervisees compared to their heterosexual peers.

**Theme #3. Concealment Motivation**

The participants’ narratives unearthed ten sub-categories that spoke to LGBQ+ counselors’ motivation to self-conceal their affectional orientation in counseling. The experiences described by the participants in this study spoke to the individual and contextual influences on self-concealment motivation (Cain, 1991) and self-concealment motivators specific to the profession of counseling. Existing literature supported that there were many different things that motivated LGBQ+ people to conceal in the workplace. Some of these motivators included the expectation of being stigmatized and past negative experiences (Clair et al., 2005), negative workplace interactions (Tatum et al., 2017; Willis, 2011), job security or changing workplace norms (Compton & Dougherty, 2017), coworkers who were new or unfamiliar (Marrs & Staton, 2016), and fear of changing established relationships (Dejordy, 2008). This study was believed to be the first to examine the specific motivation behind self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors and many of the motivators already present in the literature in other professions, emerged from the participants’ narratives in this study. One previous study by Jeffery and Tweed (2014) found that counselors engaged in self-concealment behavior but did not discuss self-concealment motivation. The meaning drawn from the participants’ narratives spoke to the following sub-categories of concealment motivation: fear; safety; uncertainty; client needs “this isn’t about me”; professional relationship dynamics; perceptions of the local area; previous negative experiences; culture; concealment is protective; and specifics when working with children.
Fear. Fear emerged as a motivation to self-conceal among the counselors in this study. While each participant was motivated by specific fears, all the participants’ fears appeared to be tied to previous negative experiences. Previous experiences like negative reactions to LGBQ+ identity in their home communities or negative reactions to not self-concealing motivated participants to self-conceal. Two counselors feared that clients would not return to services if they did not self-conceal. Participants expressed a general fear of having their client discover their identity, using it as “ammunition in some kind of way,” which motivated self-concealment. One participant feared that a client would retaliate against them by sharing negative reviews and publicizing their affectional orientation which could hurt them personally, and their business. Another participant tied the fear that motivated self-concealment to “fear of those things that happened when I was little might happen again.” Participants in the focus group had previous experiences with being tokenized as the only queer counselor in their office and considered self-concealing to prevent being tokenized in a new workplace.

Safety. Self-concealment was previously shown to be motivated by the need to feel safe in a specific setting (Cain, 1991; Riggle et al., 2017). Counselors in the study shared experiences like a lack of safety or safety concerns motivating self-concealment in their counseling work. Participants described having to constantly question “do I feel safe” or “is this really a safe spot that I could do this?” Questions of safety were strong motivators for self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors. Participants felt they would self-conceal less if they could guarantee their personal and professional safety. Participants also identified broader safety issues that contributed to a lack of safety in the workplace which motivated self-concealment. The 2016 and 2020 elections, the Pulse Nightclub shooting, and inconsistent legal protections were named among the safety concerns. Participants felt conflicted about safety in the workplace saying
things like “it feels unsafe, even if it’s not” and assuming someone’s views were negative “for safety purposes.” Another participant spoke to this conflict saying, “we do what feels safe, even when our rational brain tells us like, it’s not worth it anymore. We still kind of go with our gut and we go with what we know.” Participants’ experiences in the workplace were characterized by uncertainty, and they were motivated to self-conceal their identity to maintain safety in the face of uncertainty.

Uncertainty. Uncertainty was one of two sub-categories that emerged from the participants’ narratives that was endorsed by every participant. While the individual experiences of the counselors in this study varied, the broad uncertainty that motivated self-concealment was the uncertainty of what would happen if the participants chose not to self-conceal or they chose to self-disclose. Uncertainty was found to be a motivation to self-conceal in the workplace, even when there were supportive policies in place (Gates, 2014). Meaning, even with some type of institutional policy, LGBQ+ workers still experienced their professional lives as uncertain. Orne (2013) described uncertainty as a spectrum of reactions between accepting and hostile reactions to queer identity. While Orne’s (2013) study examining the experiences of queer young people did not examine self-concealment, it was relevant here because the uncertainty from past experiences, even those outside the professional context, were carried into the workplace by queer individuals. Within the spectrum that Orne (2013) described, reactions to queer identity were “ambiguously hostile, uncertain, ‘tolerant,’ socially awkward, or invasively questioning” (p. 230) causing queer people to constantly question how others might react to their identity. Shih et al. (2013) also found that forms of workplace discrimination varied, from subtle discrimination to overt harassment, which left LGBQ+ employees unsure of how to act (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Hebl et al, 2002). LGB workers across various states and professions reported
that the most common experience in the workplace was one of mixed messages from coworkers, supervisors, workplace policies, and workplaces norms (Compton, 2016). The participants’ experiences in this study spoke to the specific uncertainty experienced by LGBQ+ counselors, which has not been previously studied.

“Taking off the mask is a risk factor. Because it’s uncertain. It’s unknown. That’s the ambiguity that I’m not comfortable tolerating,” said one participant about being motivated to self-conceal. The participants were uncertain about the outcome of not self-concealing, and this uncertainty was often based on previous negative experiences in the workplace, as well as in their personal lives. Participants also described uncertainty in the counseling workplace as “it’s hard to navigate,” “It’s a double-edged sword,” and “there’s this push and pull.” Participants also discussed uncertainty in their counselor-client relationships. Uncertainty in client-counselor relationships was client dependent and was most often experienced because participants were uncertain that clients would still work with them if they chose not to self-conceal. Even if participants had not experienced this first hand, they knew other counselors who had experienced a client not wanting to work with them because they were LGBQ+. Uncertain of the outcome, participants approached clients motivated to self-conceal, with the hope they would continue coming to counseling.

Participants also experienced uncertainty in professional relationships that motivated them to self-conceal. Participants experienced uncertainty in certain professional settings, particularly those that worked in more than one setting. Participants were also uncertain how their coworkers would react if they chose to self-disclose after self-concealing because their coworkers might feel the relationship had changed. One participant said, “I have come to develop some good relationships with coworkers that I’ve never been able to figure out if they
were safe or not.” He added that if he were to find out that his coworkers were not safe, the relationship would change, which also motivated him to self-conceal. One participant described the uncertainty that motivated him to self-conceal saying, “I could let everybody know tomorrow, and there’s a possibility that absolutely nothing would change, but I don’t know that. Because there’s still a possibility that things could get bad. And I’m just not up for that risk.” Uncertainty motivated self-concealment across all the domains of the participants’ counseling work.

**Client Needs “This isn’t About Me”**. Client needs stood out among the other motivators as the first motivation that was specific to the profession of counseling. A previous study looking at LGB workers in corporate work found that they self-concealed more with business clients or anyone they did not know more personally (King et al., 2017). However, the nature of the counselor-client relationship was different than a business relationship, despite both being professional relationships. The counselors in this study shared experiences about self-concealing to meet their clients’ needs, and the sub-category client needs “this isn’t about me” emerged. One participant said, “the counseling session is not about me, it’s about meeting the needs of my client.” Participants also spoke to being motivated to self-conceal if they felt their identity was not relevant to the client’s needs. One participant often questioned “would this be helpful?” Counselors in the study were also concerned that not self-concealing would interfere with the client’s process in therapy. Several participants shared that they self-concealed with clients who were struggling with identity issues because they did not want to intrude on their process. One participant shared that she felt motivated to self-conceal to meet the client’s needs by assuming a role that was comfortable to the client. The client’s needs, consistent with counselors’ mandates
to be in service their clients, were a primary consideration in negotiating self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors.

**Professional Relationship Dynamics.** Professional relationships were an already established motivation to self-conceal in the workplace identity management literature and emerged in this study as well. Cain (1991) found that LGBQ+ people in the workplace were motivated to self-conceal because they did not know their coworkers as well as people in their personal lives, and the lack of closeness in the relationship made not self-concealing less worth it. LGBQ+ people were also motivated to self-conceal to protect job security and by not wanting to change already established workplace relationships (Compton & Dougherty, 2017; Dejordy, 2008). Participants described being motivated to self-conceal by fear of changing their established workplace relationships. One professional relationship concern stood out as unique to the counseling profession. This motivation was based on the expectation that participants had that all their colleagues, whether counselor or teachers, would be supportive and inclusive of LGBTQ+ people. Participants were motivated to self-conceal when they encountered a colleague who violated this expectation.

Concerns about people in power was a prominent motivator to self-conceal among the participants in the study. Participants were motivated to self-conceal around people in power because these individuals dictated who got promoted, who got to keep their job, and they set the tone for the entire workplace. The tone set by people in power affected many different experiences in the counseling workplace including overall acceptance and use and appropriateness of self-disclosure. The tone set by people in positions of power, whether management or direct supervisors, was a strong motivator to self-conceal, because counselors in the study felt they were at significant risk if they did not self-conceal.
Participants discussed experiences in which supervisors had strong opinions related to self-disclosure that motivated them to self-conceal. Participants had been discouraged from self-disclosing by previous supervisors, and several participants believed this was due to the content of the self-disclosure. Disclosures that were not LGBQ+ identity would have been welcomed, but participants got the sense that their identity disclosures were not supported, which motivated continued self-concealment. One participant was motivated to self-conceal because they felt their identity was perceived as “unprofessional” and inconsistent with the counseling profession. The role that power played in the workplace for LGBQ+ counselors was a strong motivator to self-conceal when the tone of the workplace was not safe or accepting.

**Perceptions of the Local Area/Region/Town.** Participants in the study were also motivated to self-conceal based on perceived acceptance in their local area, town, or region. Participants who felt motivated to self-conceal by their experience in their local area shared the name of their local area in a way that conveyed that a lack of acceptance was obvious to the researcher. Participants said things like “I’m in North Dakota” and “I’m in “Rural Ohio,”” and “I live in Texas” to convey that their home areas were not affirming. Among LGBQ+ people there appeared to be an understanding that areas that were rural or more conservative were less likely to be accepting. Areas that were perceived to be more religious also motivated participants to self-conceal. Concealment motivation came from a lack of acceptance, but also a need to protect oneself due to fears of not being accepted. Among the participants who lived in small towns or rural areas, self-concealment was motivated by a fear of what one participant called “community repercussions.” Participants discussed repercussions like parents of clients finding out, community backlash, and eventually being fired. While this had never happened to the
participants, some had known others to whom this had happened which made the fear more present.

**Previous Negative Experiences.** Previous negative experiences emerged as the second sub-category within theme #3 that every participant endorsed during their interview. This finding was consistent with existing literature that past negative experiences with self-disclosure could motivate self-concealment (Clair et al, 2005; Gates, 2014). The past negative experiences shared by the participants varied widely in context and content. The shared narratives reflected personal and professional experiences that motivated self-concealment in the participants’ counseling work. Participants said things like “I think some of it had to do with trauma I experienced not growing up in a safe place” and “we’ve been training for this our whole lives.” Participants carried experiences of bullying, rejection, discrimination, and harassment into their counseling work.

Several participants also reflected on past coming out experiences that motivated them to self-conceal in their counseling work. Friends and family members had reacted negatively to the participants disclosing their identities which motivated self-concealment in the workplace. Participants also reflected on their prior negative experiences in the counseling workplace. Participants described being left out of projects or opportunities and being made to feel like they did not belong. Participants also heard or witnessed counselors or teachers use microaggressions or overt homophobia against clients or students. One participant reported working with a counselor who said that LGBTQ people should conceal their identities. The past negative experiences in the personal and professional lives of the participants strongly motivated them to self-conceal. Past negative experiences also reinforced feelings of uncertainty experienced by the participants.
**Culture.** Culture emerged as a potential motivation to self-conceal for two counselors in this study. The participants’ narratives spoke to cultural beliefs about LGBQ+ people. The first participant was an Asian-American counselor who felt that stigma against LGBTQ people in Asian culture motivated her to self-conceal. This participant felt that in her cultural understanding of the word identity, she could not claim her identity, which she felt possibly motivated self-concealment. This participant felt that this spoke to why she often employed passing in her counseling work, because she was whoever her clients needed her to be. She concluded that self-concealment could be motivated by her “internal conflict” with identity because “identity is very much Western concept.” Another participant who was a Latinx gay man, said that he grew up in Mexican culture and “because of machismo, being gay is really difficult to be and open up about.” The intersection of culture, particularly culturally specific views about LGBQ+ identity, was a unique motivation to self-conceal for these participants. Additionally, the interaction of cultural identity and affectional identity warrants further exploration in future research.

**Self-Concealment is Protective.** Self-concealment was shown to protect queer workers from discrimination, violence, hostility (Compton & Dougherty, 2017; Croteau et al., 2008), and other negative outcomes (Dejordy, 2008; Fuller et al., 2009). Counselors were also shown to put forth significant effort to self-conceal to avoid experiencing discrimination (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). Participants described self-concealment as protecting them from potential negative reactions or homophobia. One participant even called self-concealment his “armor.” However, this level of protection came at a cost. “It doesn’t protect me in the way I want it to” a participant said of feeling protected, but inauthentic. Several participants spoke to this feeling when they described how self-concealment by passing gave them the protection of appearing as
heterosexual but came with emotional and psychological costs. The emotional and psychological costs resulted from participants self-concealing their identities which also impacted other aspects of their identities. Finally, several participants who worked in private practice felt that self-concealment protected them from a potential negative reaction from a client, previously references in the uncertainty sub-category, which protected them from potentially losing income.

**Specifics When Working with Children.** Among the participants were several counselors who worked in school settings or community settings with children and youth. These participants’ experiences spoke to specific motivators to self-conceal that were experienced by LGBTQ+ counselors working with children. Specific motivators related to working with children were heavily focused on participants’ concerns that they would be perceived as having influenced over the child in some way, regardless of the child’s affectional orientation. Participants said things like “I worry about people feeling that I am corrupting their children” and “will this child’s parents still trust me with their child?” Some participants also felt that clients’ parents had overall negative views of the LGBTQ+ community and would not want their children working with an LGBTQ+ counselor. Participants described feeling this way when parents said things like “I don’t want the family to know, I don’t want grandma to know” or “well this is really popular right now, it’s a trend.” This made one participant question if parents would think her identity, was a trend. Participants who worked in areas that were perceived to be more conservative and Christian experienced this motivation to a greater degree because parents of clients shared these views. Participants who worked in schools shared a specific motivation related to norms in school communities. These participants were motivated to self-conceal with their students because as one participant said, “in a school setting, telling one is equitable to telling everyone.” Further, one participant observed that anything related to sexual orientation
was equated with sex, and children were deemed too young to hear about sex, so not self-concealing would be deemed as inappropriate.

**Implications.** The motivation to self-conceal described by the participants in this study supported existing research looking at self-concealment in the workplace. However, the findings have implications specific to the counseling field. The single study that mentioned counselor self-concealment did not discuss self-concealment in depth because self-concealment was an unexpected finding in the study which focused on self-disclosure (Jeffery & Tweed, 2014). Participants in that study did report that self-concealment was related to counselor training that discouraged self-disclosure, particularly related to affectional identity. The previously discussed motivations to self-conceal shared by the participants in this study spoke to specific motivators that LGBTQ+ counselors experienced and deepened the understanding of the phenomenon of self-concealment among LGBTQ+ counselors in the workplace.

Self-concealment motivators appeared to be tied to one another. This is evidenced by certain motivators feeding other motivators. For example, many of the experiences of uncertainty described by the participants were also motivated by fear and safety concerns. Fear and safety concerns were also motivated by previous negative experiences, as were feelings of uncertainty. Among LGBTQ+ counselors self-concealing in the workplace, each motivator may not be a discrete type of motivation, instead a complex experience of different motivators that reinforce each other. Concealment motivation was the most challenging theme for the researcher to understand during the explication of the data. The interactions between different motivators spoke to a complex experience for LGBTQ+ counselors that added to the understanding of the moment of assessment that was discussed in theme #1. A feature of that moment was the counselor who was negotiating a concealment decision attempting to figure out which type of
motivation was influencing the need to self-conceal in that moment, and in the case of many of the participants in this study, there were multiple motivators influencing each self-concealment decision. This finding suggested that LGBQ+ counselors who were deciding whether to self-conceal used considerable effort at potential cost to themselves and their clients. This was consistent with the findings of the Jeffery and Tweed (2014) study in which counselors exerted significant effort to self-conceal despite being negatively impacted and often negatively impacting counselor-client relationships. The negative effects of self-concealment are further discussed in themes #5 and #6.

The participant narratives unearthed motivation to self-conceal that was specific to the context of counseling work. Participants were motivated by the possibility of clients not wanting to work with them, not returning to counseling, and retaliating against them publicly. Participants were also motivated by their own past negative experiences with self-disclosure, and the possibility of those experiences being reflected in their counseling work. Self-concealment was motivated by safety concerns about the workplace, clients, and coworkers. Participants reported past negative experiences as well as uncertainty about how others in their professional spaces would react to them choosing not to self-conceal. Participants had also witnessed other LGBQ+ counselors experience discrimination or homophobia in the workplace.

The counselors were motivated by one of their professional duties, which was to ensure that counseling was about the client, not about the counselor. Participants feared they would affect the client’s process which motivated self-concealment. Participants also noted that self-concealment was motivated by self-disclosure not being relevant to the client’s needs or the counseling process. Counselors who worked with children had specific fears that motivated them to self-conceal. They worried that parents would not want an LGBQ+ counselor working with
their child and that they would be perceived to have influenced the child’s affectional identity. The underlying fear here spoke to a larger fear of being perceived as inappropriate because they were LGBQ+.

Counselors in the study were motivated to self-conceal because of fear that they could possibly change established professional relationships. Participants shared that fear about relationships changing was tied to expectations that every counselor was accepting and embraced LGBQ+ identity. When this expectation was violated, LGBQ+ counselors were motivated to self-conceal because they were unsure who was safe, because all counselors are supposed to be accepting and open. The attitudes and behaviors of people in positions of power, such as supervisors or managers, strongly influenced this motivator. When supervisors, or other people who had power over LGBQ+ counselors were not supportive, they were motivated to self-conceal for safety reasons. Self-concealment protected their physical safety and protected their jobs. People in positions of power being unsupportive highly affected LGBQ+ counselor motivation to self-conceal because they were seen as setting the tone for the workplace. Overall lack of safety was also influenced by areas that were perceived as less accepting or unsafe.

LGBQ+ counselors’ past negative experiences also motivated self-concealment in the workplace. Witnessing or experiencing discrimination, negative reactions to personal or professional self-disclosure, and colleagues who were less accepting than expected were experiences described by participants. LGBQ+ counselors were also motivated to self-conceal because of experiences or beliefs associated with intersecting racial, ethnic, or cultural identities. The unique experiences described by the participants suggested that LGBQ+ counselor self-concealment motivation was highly personal, individual, and context based. In contrast to previous motivators, self-concealment also provided LGBQ+ counselors with some level of
protection. It is important to note that while self-concealment was protective, it did not protect counselors from the damaging emotional and psychological effects of self-concealment, nor did it protect clients from being affected by counselor self-concealment. Participants felt protected from judgement and homophobia, but that came at a cost.

The implications of these counseling specific motivators are relevant for LGBQ+ counselors themselves, supervisors working with LGBQ+ supervisees, our understanding of the phenomenon of self-concealment, and the counseling profession as it pertains to supporting LGBQ+ counselors. First, self-concealment motivation and the decisions that followed, could cause LGBQ+ counselors to exert significant energy which could affect their counseling work. This is further explored in theme #6 but warranted discussion here because LGBQ+ counselors need to have an awareness of their motivation to self-conceal to be able to manage it in their counseling work. LGBQ+ counselors and their supervisors need to understand stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999; Pinel & Paulin, 2005) which is an individual’s understanding of being a member of a stigmatized group and how this affects their interactions with others. Gates (2014) asserted that LGB workers may enter professional spaces with the expectation to experience stigma. The results of this study support this assertion.

LGBQ+ counselors entered counseling spaces with the expectation that they may experience stigma from their clients, colleagues, and people in positions of power. This is evidenced by every participant being motivated to self-conceal because of past negative experiences and feeling uncertain in the workplace. Theme #1 took the understanding of self-concealment back one step before self-concealment decisions to the moment of assessment. The implication of stigma consciousness among LGBQ+ counselors was that the phenomenon of self-concealment in the workplace may begin before that moment of assessment. LGBQ+
counselors, and other LGB workers according to Gates (2014), may be motivated to self-conceal before they even encounter their workplace. LGBQ+ counselors who felt the need to self-conceal may approach the entire counseling profession with motivation to self-conceal. However, this can be affected by the individual’s expectation of other counselors being safe or unsafe.

Several participants in the study spoke to the expectation that all counselors would be supportive of LGBTQ+ or queer identities. However, they had encountered counselors who said discriminatory or homophobic things about LGBTQ+ clients or the community in general. This was consistent with previous research that found that counselors also had negative attitudes about LGBQ+ people (Bowers et al., 2005; Carroll et al., 2011). This made them question how welcoming the profession was and motivated self-concealment in spaces they thought were supposed to be supportive and accepting. This finding has implications for the field of counseling because there are counselors advancing through counselor training programs with anti-LGBTQ+ personal beliefs that are affecting clients and their LGBQ+ colleagues.

The individual and contextual factors that motivated LGBQ+ counselors to self-conceal varied widely among the participants. However, the presence of concealment motivation meant that there were forces external to LGBQ+ counselors that pushed them to continue self-concealing in the workplace. Concealment motivation among LGBQ+ counselors was complex because they entered the profession with the hope or expectation of not having to self-conceal, but they self-concealed while trying to determine if the profession was truly safe. This was due to stigma consciousness, expecting to be stigmatized. This means that there were external forces which dictated how LGBQ+ counselors presented in the workplace, and some of these forces were also present in the personal lives of LGBQ+ counselors. The personal experiences of
LGBQ+ counselors had the potential to drastically influence how much of themselves was brought into the counseling workplace.

**Research Question #2**

The second research question for this study was “How do LGBQ+ counselors engage in self-concealment in the workplace?” This question sought to gather information about behaviors that LGBQ+ counselors used to self-conceal their affectional orientation. This question was grounded in the study’s framework of social constructionist theory because identity was socially constructed (Goffman, 1963; Rust, 1993; Troiden, 1984). The question was also grounded in queer theory as Creswell (2007) stated that queer theory explored how identities were enacted in social settings. The influence of social constructionist theory on self-concealment was two-fold. Rust (1993) asserted that identities were constructed from interpretation of available social constructs. This assertion suggested that heterosexual people based their understanding of identity on their available social constructs, which were heavily influenced by heteronormativity and heterosexism. LGBQ+ people knew that they might not meet these social constructs, and their available social constructs of LGBQ+ identity were highly stigmatized because they were assigned stigma for violating social norms (Goffman, 1963). Thus, LGBQ+ people knew that their identities were stigmatized, often violating heteronormative social norms, and they knew how to meet the expectations of the social norms they were violating through self-concealment behavior. From the participant narratives, the master theme of concealment behavior emerged, with three relevant sub-categories of different behaviors. Engaging in the behaviors discussed in this section allowed participants to self-conceal by meeting the expectations of others and not raising questions or concerns.

*Theme #4. Concealment Behavior*
The multidimensional model of identity management by Horowitz and Newcomb (2002) suggested that concealment behavior was dictated by the meaning that individuals took from the experiences that motivated them to conceal. The existing self-concealment behavior literature stated that self-concealment behaviors could be active or passive, explicit or implicit, but the goal was always to prevent identity information from being conveyed to others. The previous section described in depth the many different meanings that LGBQ+ counselors derived from experiences that motivated them to self-conceal. The behaviors the participants in this study described varied by context, which was consistent with the limited existing literature about self-concealment in the workplace (Van Gilder, 2017; Orne, 2011, 2013; Willis, 2011). Orne (2011) found that self-concealment involved altering one’s behavior or managing information to actively and purposefully conceal one’s identity. Orne (2013) also described two concealment strategies, deflecting and dodging, in the “being in the line of fire” framework. Willis (2011) found that LGBQ workers modified their speech to avoid discovery. Three categories of behavior emerged: bodily changes, filtering, and passing.

**Bodily Changes.** Bodily changes described any self-concealment behavior that involved the participants changing their physicality. Only two participants endorsed this category, but it stood out as markedly different from filtering or passing. The two participants who endorsed having made bodily changes described having attempted to make themselves “more butch” or “more masculine and less feminine.” Both participants were gay men, and they changed their physical presence to be more in line with social expectations of heterosexual masculine men. One participant shared that he changed the type of bag he carried after experiencing a homophobic slur being yelled at him while carrying this bag. He believed the type of bag he carried had conveyed that he was gay to the aggressors and by changing the type of bag and
acting “more butch” he would prevent his identity from being known, which also prevented potential harm and violence. Self-concealing through bodily changes was not aimed at passing as heterosexual but presenting in a way that heterosexual people would not question the identity of the participants.

Filtering. Filtering was endorsed by all but one of the participants who had shared that she only employed passing as a concealment behavior. Filtering encompassed several established self-concealment strategies that were aimed at limiting the amount of information about the participants’ affectional identity that was received and interpreted by others. The established self-concealment strategies are discussed here. Filtering involved filtering what was shared in the workplace through covering (Griffin, 1992) or discretion (Clair et al., 2005) so that limited information, misinformation, or more acceptable information (Goffman, 1963; Shih et al., 2013) about the participant’s identity was conveyed to others. Covering involved omitting or censoring information but did not involve an active attempt to appear heterosexual (Griffin, 1992).

Deflecting involved concealing some part of the individual’s identity that made their affectional identity more palatable (Orne, 2013) Participants talked about limiting what interests they shared with others that might signal their identity and using gender-neutral terms for their partners or spouses. Participants also discussed less need to discuss their personal lives in the professional setting because of the nature of professional relationships.

Discretion was a behavior participants used to filter their identity by emphasizing another part of themselves (Clair et al., 2005) or externalizing something about their identity. The goal of discretion according to Shih et al. (2013) was to give cues to others in the workplace that pointed to a more acceptable identity. This was done through participants downplaying their affectional identity and focusing on their role as an ally or advocate for the community. Roberts (2011)
observed this behavior in a sample of gay men who downplayed their affectional identity and emphasized their professional identity. Changing the specific way that individuals referred to their identity to meet a client’s expectations was described as well. One participant talked about referring to herself as pansexual, as opposed to bisexual, to make clients more comfortable despite identifying more with the bisexual label.

Interestingly, participants also described using discretion to test the waters and see if it would be safe for them to not self-conceal. Testing the waters involved, as previously mentioned identifying as an ally instead of within the community or bringing up topics related to the community. Testing the waters was closely related to the discretion strategy but could be its own distinct behavior. Participants used testing the waters to evaluate the safety of not-concealing. This happened through externalizing some portion of their identity on which others could pass judgement, and then the participants would use this to determine how their identity would be received. During this process, no attempt was made to appear heterosexual, the participants’ identities remained concealed, and small amounts of information were filtered to others.

**Passing.** Passing was the most cited concealment strategy in the existing literature. Passing behavior has been described as both an identity management strategy (Fuller et al., 2009; Griffin, 1992; Warren, 1974) and a stage of identity development (Cass, 1979). Passing behavior can be categorized in two ways, active passing and passive passing. Griffin (1992) distinguished between the two saying active passing was a deliberate attempt to make oneself appear heterosexual and passive passing was allowing others to assume heterosexuality while not correcting the mistaken label. The passing behavior described by the participants is best categorized as passive passing.
The participants who endorsed passing all described experiences of being perceived as heterosexual, never making the attempt to appear heterosexual to clients or coworkers. Participants who were married and wore wedding rings talked about the ease of being able to pass because they were assumed to be heterosexual. Several participants shared that because they passed it was likely that others would not know their affectional orientation unless they directly disclosed. Participants also described something that was unique only to the passing strategy. The idea of the “privilege of passing” or “abusing your privilege” by passing was a source of internal conflict that arose for participants. The conflict came from participants not feeling like they had any control over the use of passing behavior because it was based on the perceptions of others, but that it protected them from negative judgements or reactions, so it was protective in many ways.

The researcher initially felt reservations about this sub-category when it emerged because the participants had been asked about the active steps, they took to self-conceal. The researcher chose to include the sub-category because of the essence of passing that was described by the participants. Participants who passed endorsed emotional labor associated with passing. The internal battle between passing being protective but also feeling like they were abusing their privilege was one source of emotional labor. The other source was the negative feelings associated with being perceived inaccurately. While the concealment behavior of passing was not necessarily active, passing was still something that was used to actively self-conceal because mistaken assumptions were not often corrected. Often for safety purposes, the participants allowed themselves to pass as whatever identity they were perceived to be.

**Implications.** The behaviors described by the participants were consistent with existing research about self-concealment in the workplace. The participants described self-concealment
behaviors that were used in both their personal and professional contexts. The participants’
descriptions suggested that the counseling workplace, and counseling work alone were likely not
a strong deciding factor in which behavior was employed to self-conceal affectional orientation.
This was consistent with existing research that suggested that concealment motivation and the
desired outcome of self-concealment dictated which type of concealment behavior is employed.
This is further supported by the fact that this research question yielded the least amount of
discussion and participants described fewer experiences in general related to the actual behavior
they used to self-conceal. In contrast, participants were able to speak more about how they
experienced self-concealment motivation and how self-concealment made them feel.

This theme meant that while self-concealment behaviors were present in counseling work
among LGBQ+ counselors, the experience of self-concealment was more about a felt sense of
the motivation to conceal and effects on the counselor and the counseling work. This study also
suggested that while self-concealment is ripe with nuance and highly contextualized, the
workplace itself may not be the context that dictates self-concealment behavior. Instead, what
makes self-concealment highly contextualized for LGBQ+ counselors are the motivations behind
feeling the need to self-conceal.

Research Question #3

The third research question for this study was “what is the experience of LGBQ+
counselors engaging in self-concealment in the workplace?” This question sought to gather the
essence of the experience of LGBQ+ counselors self-concealing in the workplace. This question
was grounded within three of the study’s conceptual frameworks through which the data were
examined. Hermeneutic phenomenology grounded this question in that it sought the essence
(Van Manen, 1997) of how LGBQ+ counselors experienced self-concealment. This question was
grounded in queer theory because it embodied the tenets of queer theory put forth by Dilley (1999) and sought information about how LGBQ+ counselor identities “perform[ed]” in a social context (Creswell, 2007, p. 29). In this study the context was the counseling workplace. The question was informed by minority stress theory because self-concealment provided possible protection from identity-based stress, but could function as a stressor itself (Meyer, 2003).

Question #3 unearthed experiences about how self-concealment affected the counselor and the work. Two master themes emerged from the participants’ experiences, each with their own relevant sub-categories. The results discussed within themes #5 and #6 represented a what is believed to be completely new area of research. The experiences shared by participants were not yet reflected in the counseling literature. Some of the experiences reflected existing literature about the cost of concealment and this relevant literature is referenced here. However, the experiences within the subcategories of authenticity and genuineness, self-efficacy, and emotional labor differed from existing research because of the unique context of counseling.

The highly contextualized nature of workplace identity management (Lidderdale et al, 2007; Ragins et al., 2007) warranted a workplace context specific investigation and discussion of identity management in the workplace. The counseling profession has an established set of expectations and uses for self-disclosure that is specific to this context. The relationship between self-concealment and self-disclosure, as well as the need for counselors to navigate disclosure decisions daily (Carroll et al., 2011), sets this study apart from literature about self-disclosure in the workplace. Self-concealment in counseling has been shown to negatively impact a counselor’s ability to be authentic (Carroll et al., 2011) and the unique understanding of authenticity and genuineness in the counseling profession situates this experience within the context of counseling work. This does not mean that the participants’ experiences in this study
do not share similarities with LGBQ+ workers in other professions. In fact, the results of this study support existing research and deepen the understanding of workplace identity management strategies among LGBQ+ people. However, the meaning that was unearthed from the participants’ experiences had to be examined and interpreted within the context and bounds of counseling work. This distinction is what makes the findings of the study novel, as they have never been examined. In this section each theme is explored along with experiences that speak to each sub-category. Implications for each theme are also discussed.

**Theme #5. Concealment Affects the Counseling Work**

According to Pachankis (2007), self-concealment had the potential to impair close relationships in certain social contexts. Within the context of counseling, the closest relationships would be counselor-client relationships because of the intimacy in those working relationships, which suggested that self-concealment had the potential to affect counseling relationships. The only previous study that mentioned self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors found that self-concealment always negatively impacted the counselor, but sometimes had a negative impact on the counselor client relationship (Jeffery & Tweed, 2014). However, this study was examining experiences of self-disclosure and self-concealment experiences emerged to the surprise of the researchers. The participants’ narratives in the present study unearthed four relevant sub-categories that spoke to their experiences of how self-concealment affected their work as counselors. The counseling relationship included participants’ experiences or fears about impacting their counselor-client relationships. Representation included participants’ experiences of feeling that they could not provide the representation they felt they needed to, to other queer people, LGBQ+ clients, and their communities because they self-concealed their affectional orientation. Advocacy included participants’ experiences of feeling that they could not advocate
on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community because they self-concealed. Connection points was a surprising and somewhat hopeful experience that emerged from the participants’ narratives. This sub-category included experiences where counselors in the study felt they could connect with clients because of their own experiences of self-concealment. While this was a positive effect, it did not mitigate the participants’ emotional labor.

**The Counseling Relationship.** The counselors in this study felt that self-concealment could potentially damage the counseling relationship. Counseling relationships were experienced as false connections and less real when participants self-concealed. Participants also questioned if relationships would be the same if they chose not to self-conceal. Concerns about whether counselor-client relationships would be more effective and more genuine were also raised by participants. LGBQ+ counselors also wondered if they self-concealed with clients and then later chose not to self-conceal, would they be perceived as deceitful? LGBQ+ counselors were faced with a seemingly impossible decision about affecting the counseling relationship. If they self-concealed their relationships felt to be inauthentic and non-genuine, and if they later chose not to self-conceal, they could be perceived as liars. Additionally, if LGBQ+ counselors felt that they had established a good counselor-client relationship while self-concealing, choosing not to self-conceal could damage that relationship.

Self-concealment of LGBQ+ identity also caused LGBQ+ counselors to miss connections points and opportunities to build deeper relationships with their clients. Interestingly, self-concealment also created connections points, which is discussed later in this section. LGBQ+ counselors worried that self-concealment could harm their clients because their internalized emotional experiences were present in the relationship. Self-concealment of their LGBQ+ identity could prevent counselors from being able to recognize internalized emotions which
presented additional risks to counseling relationships. Participants worried that managing their own reactions when they needed to self-conceal could be detrimental to their counseling relationships. LGBQ+ counselors felt like they were pulled away from being present with the client or that they used significant cognitive energy trying to manage self-concealment decisions while doing their work.

**Representation.** LGBQ+ counselors felt that self-concealment prevented them from providing positive representation to others in their counseling work. Participants’ who felt that self-concealment affected their ability to provide representation to other queer people shared that they wished they had representation when they were young. Providing positive representation that LGBQ+ people could be happy, successful, and have careers was important to LGBQ+ counselors. Participants also said that self-concealment prevented them from representing counseling as a safe place to be queer. The participants’ commitment to representation was affected by having to self-conceal in their counseling work. LGBQ+ counselors who worked with children were concerned that their clients did not experience positive representation anywhere else, and they experienced guilt about not being able to fulfill this role.

**Advocacy.** Self-concealment compromised LGBQ+ counselors’ ability to advocate for other LGBTQ+ people. Participants described experiences where they could have advocated for their clients, but they were unable to because they felt the need to self-conceal. This occurred when others in the workplace said homophobic or discriminatory statements about clients, and because the counselors also felt unsafe, they were unable to speak out or act. LGBQ+ counselors felt they had to not self-conceal to advocate against clients being encouraged to self-conceal. Interestingly, one participant felt that he used advocacy to “compensate” for not being able to provide representation and because of the “guilt of not being as authentic as I would like to be.”
He added, “I have to feel like I’m doing something to further the acceptance of the queer community.” LGBQ+ counselors felt that if they did not have to self-conceal they would be able to advocate for their clients and communities to the degree that they felt they should be advocating.

**Connection Points.** The final sub-category within theme #5 was a surprising finding for the researcher and spoke to the complexity of the effects of self-concealment on LGBQ+ counselors. The connection points that self-concealment allowed counselors in the study to have with clients had a similar essence to the protective motivation to self-conceal that was previously discussed within theme #3. Some of the participants were able to use their experiences to connect with clients who were struggling, but the connection points did not always mean they were not self-concealing, which meant connecting did not relieve the effects on the counselor which are described within theme #6. “Pain knows pain,” said one participant about how he could identify students who were struggling with identity issues, because he had experienced the same struggles. LGBQ+ counselors’ experiences with self-concealment allowed them to identify when their clients self-concealed and the emotional toll that self-concealment took on an individual. Counselors in the study could also identify the fear experienced by their clients who self-concealed their affectional identity. While self-concealment had the ability to enhance and deepen counselor-client relationships, it did not relieve the emotional distress experienced by LGBQ+ counselors.

**Implications.** The findings of this study have implications for the field of counseling. The findings support the findings of Jeffery and Tweed’s (2014) study in that self-concealment sometimes negatively impacted the counselor-client relationship. Self-concealment can cause damage to the counselor client relationship and counselors worried that they would harm clients.
because they self-concealed. LGBQ+ counselors also feared that they would betray the trust of the client if they were discovered to be LGBQ+ after self-concealing in counselor-client relationships. This presented special considerations that LGBQ+ counselors must account for when building and maintaining rapport with clients for which heterosexual counselors would likely not need to account.

Participants also felt that their ability to provide positive LGBTQ+ representation to clients and the community was compromised by needing to self-conceal. Participants felt guilty that they could not provide this representation even though they felt self-concealment was necessary for different individually motivated reasons. Self-concealment sometimes affected LGBQ+ counselors’ ability to advocate for their clients and the community, which made them feel as though they betrayed themselves and other LGBTQ+ people. Participants used their own personal experiences to connect with clients who were struggling with LGBTQ+ identity issues. While this implication was positive, it did not decrease or mitigate the negative effects of self-concealment on the participants themselves.

The results of the study indicated that self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors often affected their ability to work as counselor. Self-concealment negatively affected counselor-client relationships, prevented necessary advocacy work, and prevented representation. Self-concealment felt like a betrayal of the self and a betrayal to the LGBQ+ communities. Self-concealment felt this way because when LGBQ+ counselors self-concealed, they also took away other aspects of their identities, and in this case their counselor identities. Solid relationships, advocacy, and representations were essential elements of counseling work among LGBQ+ counselors and self-concealing meant they were unable to do their work in a manner that was consistent with who they saw themselves to be as counselors. Self-concealment of affectional
identity also affected the LGBQ+ counselor’s counseling identity. The effects of self-concealment on the counselor’s identity are further discussed in the next section.

**Theme #6. Concealment Affects the Counselor**

Existing literature profoundly supported that self-concealment came with great personal costs to LGBQ+ people. There were health-related (Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007), social (Newheiser & Barretto, 2014), and psychological (Tatum et al., 2017) risks associated with self-concealment of affectional orientation. Self-concealment has been shown to generally have a negative impact on well-being (Larson & Chastain, 1990; Riggle et al, 2017; Selvidge et al, 2008). LGBQ+ people also reported feeling inauthentic and non-genuine when they self-concealed (Fuller et al., 2009). Chronic self-concealment of any aspect of the self, such as affectional orientation, had psychological costs (Meyer, 2003). Healy (1993) asserted that self-concealment was significantly more costly than self-disclosure because of the amount of energy individuals must use to maintain a concealment boundary. Selvidge et al. (2008) referred to self-concealment as an energy consuming process. Self-concealment was often used to mitigate identity-based stressors, but it could perpetuate stress or become a stressor itself (Frost et al., 2007; Meyer, 2003, 2013; Riggle et al., 2017). Validation of the concealment subscale of the Nebraska Outness Scale (NOS) found that concealment was associated with increased social anxiety, decreased access to social support, poor quality of life, and increased identity related rejection sensitivity (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). Self-concealment was connected to increased stress from identity-related thoughts (Smart & Wegner, 1999), increased feelings of difference, and internalized homophobia (Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Meidlinger & Hope, 2016; Pachankis, 2007).
The participants’ narratives unearthed three relevant sub-categories that spoke to the how self-concealment affected them as counselors. Authenticity and genuineness included counselors struggling to be authentic and genuine in their work. Self-efficacy included experiences where counselors questioned their effectiveness as counselors because they self-concealed. Emotional labor was a broad category that spoke to the emotional experiences of the counselors engaging in self-concealment in their counseling work. Emotional labor was one of the sub themes that was endorsed by every participant in the study. The name of the sub-category came from several participants who described the emotional effects of self-concealment as “emotional labor.” The experiences shared by participants also conveyed the meaning of emotional labor as defined in employment literature. The definition of emotional labor has evolved through several iterations, but presently it is defined as the management of one’s emotions as part of their work role for organizational goals (Diefendorff & Richard, 2003; Grandey, 2000; Johnson, 2008). In the context of counseling, emotional labor meant managing one’s emotions to continue counseling work and maintain counseling relationships.

**Authenticity and Genuineness.** Participants in the study described how self-concealment made them struggle with being and feeling authentic and genuine in their counseling work. This was consistent with Marrs and Staton (2016) which suggested that self-concealment in the workplace was associated with feelings of inauthenticity, however the relationship between authenticity and self-concealment was under researched. Self-concealment reinforced feeling of inauthenticity and non-genuineness experienced by LGBQ+ counselors in their personal lives. Self-concealment also prevented LGBQ+ counselors from being able to model authenticity and genuineness to their clients. Participants also felt that they could not model authenticity to their clients. Counselors in the study worried that their clients also
experienced their feeling of inauthenticity and non-genuineness, and this had the potential to affect the counseling relationship.

**Self-Efficacy.** Self-concealing in their counseling work caused LGBQ+ counselors to question their self-efficacy. A participant shared that she questioned whether she was a bad counselor because she was mad at a client and mad that she had to self-conceal. The client had expressed anti-LGBTQ+ views which made her self-conceal, but she did not want to bring her personal process into the counseling session. A school counselor in the study questioned whether he was not as helpful as he could be because he self-concealed with students. One participant likened her experience to “impostor syndrome,” saying that self-concealment made her feel like she was not supposed to be a counselor. “I found myself questioning little bits and pieces of my questions, my empathy,” said another participant. Self-concealment caused him to question whether his questions to his clients were correct, and if he could be empathic with those clients.

**Emotional Labor.** Emotional labor emerged as something that encompassed LGBQ+ counselors’ experiences of self-concealment. Each participant described their individual experiences of being emotionally affected by self-concealment. The essence of these individual experiences spoke to how counselors emotionally experienced self-concealment while still trying to get their job done and meet the needs of their clients. Participants felt that experiences of emotional labor were unique to LGBQ+ counselors. They made statements like “there’s a lot of emotional labor in that I don’t think a lot of cis het people have to do” and “if you were straight or cisgender, you probably wouldn’t come across a lot of those same issues.” Wells (2019) had called this queer labor in which queer people tried to negotiate a heteronormative world while trying to embrace their identities. Emotional labor was experienced by LGBQ+ counselors because self-concealing in counseling was an insurmountable internal battle.
Participants described self-concealment as heavy, conveying how laborious trying to manage their affectional identities in counseling could be. A sentiment described in various ways by participants was that self-concealment felt invalidating. LGBTQ+ counselors were reminded of places they experienced a lack of belonging when they had to self-conceal. Several participants felt particularly invalidated by being perceived as heterosexual. Being perceived as heterosexual felt ugly and that an important part of their identity was being erased or killed. What made this experience laborious is that LGBTQ+ counselors managed feeling invalidated to be able to maintain their relationships and continue providing treatment to their clients.

Guilt, fear, resentment, and anger were specific emotions that participants described feeling when they self-concealed in their counseling work. Sadness was an emotion described by LGBTQ+ counselors because they realized they felt self-concealment was just something they had to do. Managing emotions associated with self-concealment while maintaining the ability to do their job as counselors was the labor of LGBTQ+ counselors. What was particularly detrimental about this realization was that participants felt this was a necessary part of their work that would always be present. Participants also felt that self-concealment was physically and emotionally exhausting. They described the labor saying, “I’ve maintained that for so long and I’m just tired” and “to conceal oneself so much so often, and for so long is fucking exhausting.” Self-concealment was exhausting because decisions needed to be made repeatedly and there was never time for LGBTQ+ counselors to process how they were experiencing self-concealment in their counseling work.

Self-concealment caused LGBTQ+ counselors to constantly struggle to manage their emotions, maintenance their identity, and maintain their ability to serve their clients ethically and effectively. The participants’ experiences were consistent with existing literature about how
consuming self-concealment could be for LGBQ+ people. Fuller et al. (2009) found that concealment was a central focus in the lives of LGBTQ people because of how much time was spent attempting to pass. Concealment took a significant amount of energy to maintain (Healy, 1993; Lindley, 2006). Wells (2019) described self-concealment as a labor-intensive and constant effort to maintain identity and maintain vigilance. Emotional labor dominated the work of LGBTQ+ counselors which had crucial implications for the profession of counseling and the health of LGBTQ+ counselors.

**Implications.** This study was the second study to discuss the experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors but believed to be the first study to have self-concealment as the focus of the inquiry. Self-concealment emerged as a surprising finding in the Jeffery and Tweed (2014) study that was extensively discussed in previous sections. The focus of that study was self-disclosure among LGB counselors, but the participants described self-concealment experiences similarly to how participants in this study discussed self-disclosure despite the focus of the study being self-concealment. Participants in Jeffery and Tweed (2014) described self-concealment as a loss of self, “lack of wholeness,” (p. 44), having a “false professional identity” (p.45), and losing parts of their identity that they felt were previously integrated. They also said “feeling the need to conceal represented a lack of intimacy or genuineness within the relationship” (p.44).

The findings of this study expanded upon Jeffery and Tweed’s (2014) findings and deepened the understanding of how self-concealment affected LGBQ+ counselors. Jeffery and Tweed (2014) called for this study saying, “the psychological wellbeing of clients is paramount, but the wellbeing of the clinician should not be overlooked” (p. 47). The findings of this study suggested that LGBQ+ counselors experienced self-concealment as characterized by a lack of
authenticity and genuineness, self-efficacy concerns, and emotional labor. These findings have implications for the field of counseling in LGBQ+ counselor wellbeing, supervision, and mentorship.

LGBQ+ counselors labored emotionally to meet the needs of their clients as well as other professional expectations. This could be detrimental to the counselor, but also to the counseling work, as it could contribute to counselor fatigue and burnout. However, the sentiments of the participants in this study were that emotional labor was just part of the experience of being an LGBQ+ counselor. LGBQ+ counselors also felt the need to do this work to provide representation to and advocate for LGBTQ+ communities. Self-concealment had a detrimental effect on LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. Exhaustion or fatigue, guilt, resentment, anger, fear, hurt, and sadness are some of the specific emotions that participants spoke about in this study. Emotional labor spoke to the necessity of LGBQ+ counselors to manage their own wellbeing through personal work, as briefly discussed in chapter 4, and to the need for the profession of counseling to critically evaluate how it can be more embracing and accepting of LGBQ+ counselors.

Counselors felt inauthentic and non-genuine in their counseling work which could impact the counseling relationship. The relationship between authenticity and self-concealment was under researched, and the findings of this study added to the limited information in the literature about this relationship. Authenticity was shown to possibly influence self-concealment (Riggle et al, 2017), and this study supported that finding. Self-concealment may prevent LGBQ+ counselors from feeling authentic and genuine in their counseling work. Riggle et al. (2017) described authenticity as “intrapersonal decisions and assessments of whether one is being true to oneself, and one’s values in an external context” (p. 56). The findings of this study showed
that self-concealment contributed to LGBQ+ counselors’ feelings of not “being true to oneself and one’s values” in the context of counseling. LGBQ+ counselors feeling inauthentic and non-genuine in their counseling work could negatively affect their clients and raised concerns about personal experiences intruding on the counseling process. The results of this study meant that self-concealment took away from other aspects of the counselor’s personality and identity. So much of the work that LGBQ+ counselors did was tied to their ability to be authentic so when they were unable to be authentic in their LGBQ+ identity, other aspects of their identity felt inauthentic. This affected counselors’ ability to trust their counseling skills and to feel effective in their work.

Supervisors with LGBQ+ supervisees must have an awareness of the unique needs of these supervisees compared to their heterosexual peers. LGBQ+ counselors may feel less authentic and less genuine in their counseling work, which has the potential to affect their counselor-client relationships. They may question their effectiveness as counselors because they must self-conceal. LGBQ+ counselors gave emotional labor to meet the needs of their clients, meaning they may compromise themselves in the process. Understanding these risks would be essential for a supervisor to be able to believe and effectively support an LGBQ+ supervisee. It should also be noted that supervisors must have an awareness of the ways they might motivate a supervisee to self-conceal, so they do not perpetuate any of negative affects discussed in this study. This presents a challenge for supervisors as they must create a supportive environment with the expectation that they might have an LGBQ+ supervisee, because asking or assuming a supervisee’s identity could exacerbate the need to self-conceal. Counselor training programs and supervisor training courses may have to teach future supervisors that affectional identity will
play a role in an LGBQ+ supervisee’s experience in supervision, and the supervisory relationship.

The implications for mentorship in counseling are related to some of the thoughts expressed by participants at the end of each interview when they were asked about their experiences of discussing self-concealment with the researcher. Implications for mentorship are also related to the participants’ desire to provide representation to the LGBTQ+ community. Participants expressed a desire to serve as positive representation, often because they had lacked representation themselves. This spoke to a need for LGBQ+ counselors to see themselves reflected in the profession. LGBQ+ mentors or supervisors would be able to provide a space of understanding for LGBQ+ counselors struggling with self-concealment. These relationships could be particularly powerful if the mentor or supervisor felt that they did not have to self-conceal. Participants stressed the importance of having these connections in their responses to the final interview question. One participant said “we don’t have much research exploring the experience of us,” reflecting that our voices were not present in the literature. A focus group participant said, “I’m the out queer person in my program and it feels like it’s just me,” speaking to how isolating being an LGBQ+ counselor and student can be. The isolation was exacerbated by a need to self-conceal. A participant commented on the overall perception of the counseling profession saying, “we’re supposed to be this really accepting, welcoming environment, and still we don’t do that.” LGBQ+ supervisors and mentors have a role to play in speaking to the realities of counseling work and creating spaces where their supervisees and mentees can exist without the need to self-conceal. Finally, one participant described how self-concealment was a necessary part of life as an LGBQ+ counselor, as previously discussed. She said, “I feel like it’s a known thing for queer counselors. You just conceal, that’s what you do, but no one talks about
it.” Supervisory and mentorship relationships have the potential to assist LGBQ+ counselors navigating self-concealment in the workplace and challenge the established idea that self-concealment is just what counselors must do.

**Limitations of the Study**

This was a qualitative study with ten total participants who all confirmed that they met eligibility requirements for the study. Participants were recruited using purposeful and snowball sampling through distribution of a recruitment email in the researcher’s professional networks and asking each participant to share the recruitment information with anyone they knew who might be interested. The researcher did this to achieve as diverse of a sample as possible.

One potential limitation of this study is the age range of the participants. They ranged in age from 28-39. While the experiences among the participants were diverse, the small age range could skew the findings, only reflecting a certain generational experience. Another limitation was that the participants in the sample were predominantly white. There were three participants that identified themselves in the demographic questionnaire as people of color; their self-reported races and ethnicities are as follows: Asian/Japanese, Latinx/Latinx Mexican descent, White/Latinx. This could potentially skew the data. The researcher’s own identity as a white cisgender man could have influenced this, even though he also identified as queer.

Another potential limitation related to the participant demographics was the education levels of all the participants. All participants either completed or were in the process of completing a PhD in counselor education and supervision. The use of professional networks to recruitment of participants could have influenced this. Additionally, several participants who were completing their PhD felt the need to participate in the researcher not only to share their experiences, but because they also knew they were going to need participants for their
dissertation research. The researcher’s identity as a doctoral candidate could have influenced this as well.

A final potential limitation was the researcher himself. The processes the researcher engaged in to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, as well as the researcher’s presuppositions about the findings were previously discussed. Even so, there could be suppositions or biases of which the researcher was unaware. The researcher was interested in the phenomenon of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors because he had experienced the phenomenon as a queer counselor.

**Implications for Future Research**

The present student generated many different directions for future research about the experiences of queer and trans counselors in the workplace. In general, there is a need for more research exploring these experiences because the literature was extremely limited. A participant in the study spoke to this need saying, “we don’t have much research exploring the experience of us.” The research about queer and trans people in counseling was heavily focused on the experiences of clients, but rarely examines the experiences of counselors, many of whom are working with the clients that the research has focused on. The focus on client experiences can make counselors feel like they are “expected to be invisible” as one participant stated. Increased understanding of these experiences would not only validate the experiences of queer and trans counselors, but it would also provide greater understanding to the supervisors who support them.

The conceptualization of the experiences of queer and trans counselors through a broad systemic lens will be essential to validating these experiences in future research. An important implication of this research is that while it was not situated in a systemic theory, self-concealment is a systemic issue because it is a response to systemic forces of stigmatization such
as homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. Self-concealment is a coping mechanism for these forces which was used by LGBQ+ counselors to cope with the pressure they experienced while still be able to perform their job function as counselors. While this research was not situated within Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, the results of the study indicated that self-concealment was a systemic issue which acted as a force upon LGBQ+ counselors, motivating them to continue self-concealing in the workplace. The very existence of the construct of self-concealment is the result of the system of heteronormativity and heterosexism. In the absence of this system there would not be a need to self-conceal LGBQ+ identity. Future research examining self-concealment among affectionally diverse people must frame self-concealment not as an individual issue, but as the systemic force connected to oppression of affectionally diverse communities that pervasively invades all aspects of their lives. Grounding future research in a systems theory would allow for the examination of the multiple and compounding systemic forces that may be influencing self-concealment decisions among affectionally diverse counselors.

Related to the previous implication, future research should consider the conceptualization of self-concealment as being compose of a motivation and an associated behavior. This study used the conceptualization because this was the description of self-concealment available in the literature. However, recognizing that self-concealment is the result of a systemic pressure may necessitate future research to conceptualize concealment motivation as concealment pressure. The participants in the study were motivated to continue self-concealing in the workplace by stigmatizing forces being enacted upon them or in their workplace. This nuanced context warrants further exploration.
An additional implication relates to the function of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors and workers in other professions. Self-concealment is an identity management strategy which means it is a mechanism for coping with the systemic forces of heteronormativity and heterosexism as previously described. Self-concealment in this study was shown to have detrimental effects on the participants and their work, and still be a necessary tool for LGBQ+ counselors to protect themselves. Future research must recognize the role of self-concealment in the lives of LGBQ+ counselors. Additionally, further research must recognize the complex relationship between self-concealment the coping mechanism and self-disclosure the counseling technique among LGBQ+ counselors. A factor that emerged from the results was this idea of leaving the moment with the client. This moment mean that LGBQ+ counselors were leaving the present with their clients to try to cope with something in the present, while simultaneously managing all of the past negative experiences that were pressuring them to conceal in the present.

A final implication for future research is related to examining the construct of self-concealment in counseling. Prior to this study, there was no precedent for how to study self-concealment in the field of counseling and the study of self-concealment in the personal lives of LGBQ+ people were clouded by multiple interpretations of the function of self-concealment. The results of this study illuminated a way for the construct of self-concealment to be examined through a systemic lens as a coping skill in response to systemic forces that pressure LGBQ+ people to conceal their identity to continue existing and living, and self-concealment warrants continued exploration.
Questions Generated by the Research

Particularly that this inquiry was the first of its kind, many questions that warrant further exploration were generated by the study:

1. What are the experiences of self-concealment among trans, non-binary, and gender-expansive counselors in the workplace?
2. What are the experiences of self-concealment among passing bisexual and pansexual counselors in the workplace?
3. What are the experiences of self-concealment among black and people of color LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace?
4. How are LGBQ+ counselors surviving in the workplace while engaging in self-concealment of their affectional orientation?
5. How does personal work in counseling affect self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace?
6. What are the experiences of emotional labor among LGBQ+ counselors engaging in self-concealment in the workplace?
7. How does LGBQ+ counselors’ emotional labor affect their counseling work?
8. What are the experiences among queer counselors working with a queer mentor or queer counseling supervisor?
9. What is the role of advocacy in the experiences of LGBQ+ counselors engaging in self-concealment in the workplace?
10. What are the perceptions of LGBTQ+ counselors of the counseling profession as a whole?
11. How to LGBQ+ counselor experience stigma consciousness in the workplace?
12. What are the experiences of self-concealment among LGBTQ+ students in counselor education programs?

**Conclusions**

This study sought to unearth the meaning of the lived experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. The findings of the study illustrated the highly individual and contextual experiences of LGBQ+ counselors self-concealing their affectional identity in their counseling work. These experiences were heavily influenced by the systems of heteronormativity and heterosexism that pressured LGBQ+ counselors to self-conceal in the workplace just as they self-concealed in their personal lives. The study deepened the understanding of self-concealment as a construct and provided a rich narrative account of how LGBQ+ counselors experienced self-concealment in the workplace and how self-concealment affected their counseling work. Self-concealment was used a coping mechanism by LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace to deal with the effects of systemic oppressive forces. As this study was believed to be the first of its kind, it produced a multitude of directions for future research that would further the understanding of the role of self-concealment in the work of LGBTQ+ counselors.

This study included six participants in semi-structured individual interviews and four participants in a semi-structured focus group conducted virtually via Zoom. The data were explicated from the participants’ interviews and informed by the three research questions, from which six master themes all with relevant sub-categories emerged. Within the master themes the participants provided rich descriptions of their experiences as counselors engaging in self-concealment in the workplace. The participants discussed concealment motivation, which they often carried into their counseling work with them from personal experience, as well as
motivation that came from their counseling work. They also described the process of making
decisions about whether to self-conceal or not self-conceal, often leading to self-disclosure. This
decision-making process illuminated an additional step, the moment of assessment, not
previously discussed in the existing literature. The participants also described how they engaged
in self-concealment in their counseling work. Finally, participants discussed the affect that self-
concealment has on them as individuals and on their counseling work.

The study had both novel findings and findings that supported existing research. Broadly,
the study confirmed that many LGBQ+ counselors self-concealed in their counseling work. The
study illuminated the process of self-concealment beginning with concealment motivation that
LGBQ+ counselors carry with them into their professional work. Counselors then encounter a
moment of assessment based on the expressed or perceived actions of others. This moment of
assessment required the participants to make a quick decision of self-conceal or do not self-
conceal based on internalized motivation. Self-concealment was then enacted through
concealment behavior which prevented the LGBQ+ counselor’s identity from being conveyed to
others. The study’s findings also illustrated a complex relationship between self-disclosure and
self-concealment and supported that they are distinct but related constructs. The findings pointed
to self-concealment affecting LGBQ+ counselors’ work and negatively affecting LGBQ+
counselors.

The findings of the study have implications broadly for the profession of counseling as
well as counselor well-being, supervision, and mentorship. LGBQ+ counselor experiences
remain under researched, and their voices remain primarily absent from the counseling literature.
This study shifted the focus of counseling research from our clients, back to the counselors, who
also need to have their experiences represented in the literature. How can the profession of
counseling advocate for the needs of LGBQ+ clients when LGBQ+ counselors still feel that they cannot present in the profession authentically as they are? The result of the study also shifted the focus of the experiences of self-concealment among LGBQ+ counselors from individual experiences to the interaction between the counselor and the various systems in which they engage and exist. As the researcher, it is my desperate hope that the narratives contained in this dissertation inspire the profession of counseling to critically evaluate how queer and trans counselors are supported and embraced in the workplace.
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Appendices

Appendix A – Demographic Questionnaire

The following questions were given to participants to complete as an electronic Google form.

1. Are you participating in an individual interview or the focus group?
   a. Individual Interview
   b. Focus Group

2. What is your age?

3. What is your affectional (or sexual) orientation?

4. What is your gender identity?

5. What is your race?

6. What is your ethnicity?

7. Title of your masters or doctoral degree (ex: MSEd Clinical Mental Health Counseling, PhD Counselor Education and Supervision etc.)

8. How many years of experience do you have practicing as a counselor?

9. Are you:
   a. Licensed
   b. Not Licensed
   c. Pursuing Licensure
   d. Prefer not to say

10. What counseling setting(s) do you work in? (ex: Substance Use, Community Mental Health, Student Health Center, Inpatient program etc.)

11. Do you have a population of clients you predominantly work with?
Appendix B – Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. What internal experiences lead you to engage in self-concealment of your affectional orientation in the workplace?

2. Who knows about your identity?

3. How do you decide to not conceal your affectional orientation with your clients?
   Coworkers?

4. What are the differences in how you conceal between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ clients?
   Coworkers?

5. How do you conceal your affectional orientation in your counseling work and relationships?

6. How does concealing your affectional orientation affect your work as a counselor?

7. How does concealing your affectional orientation emotionally affect you?

8. What are the risks associated with concealment in your counseling work?

9. What are the protective factors associated with concealment in your counseling work?

10. How do you experience the relationships between clients and coworkers differently?

11. Is there anything else about your experience that I didn’t cover that I should know about?

12. How was it for you to talk about concealment experiences with me?
Appendix C – Recruitment Email

My name is Joe Charette (He/Him/His), and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. I am seeking participants for a study investigating the lived experiences of LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace and the ways in which they may engage in self-concealment of their affectional orientation. In this study, self-concealment is defined as actively taking steps to conceal LGBQ+ affectional orientation from others. I am seeking participants interested in either an individual interview or a focus group with 5-7 other participants. All interviews and the focus group will take place via Zoom.

The following are criteria that must be met to participate in this study:
(1) Identify as LGBQ+
(2) Hold at least a master’s degree in counseling
(3) Currently be practicing as a counselor (Non-licensed/Pre-licensed counselors are welcome to participate as well as counselor educators who are also CURRENTLY practicing counseling)

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to participating in this study, however you may experience positive psychological effects from having your experience validated by others and knowing that you assisted in the research study.

Participants are under no obligation to participate in this study and are free to withdraw from the study at any point by notifying the researchers at charetter@duq.edu. Your participation in this study, and any identifiable personal information you provide, will be kept confidential to every extent possible, and all data will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the study. All written and electronic forms of data and study materials will be kept secure. Transcriptions of the interview and focus groups will be deidentified. All results will be reported in aggregate and all direct quotes from participants will be presented using pseudonyms. A copy of the results of the study can be made available to you at the conclusion of the study.

The Duquesne University IRB has approved this protocol on 5/1/2021 (Protocol #2021/04/6) Any questions about this research should be directed to the principal investigator, Joe Charette, MSEd, LPC, NCC or Dr. Debra Hyatt-Burkhart (Dissertation Chair) at charetter@duq.edu & hyattburkhartd@duq.edu. If there are any questions regarding protection of human subject issues, you may contact Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board at 412-396-1886.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at charetter@duq.edu with whether you are interested in the individual interviews or the focus group and any questions you might have. I will reach out to interested participants to further discuss the study, informed consent, and to collect demographic information.

Thank you!
Joe Charette, MSEd, LPC, NCC
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:
Self-Concealment Among LGBQ+ Counselors in the Workplace

INVESTIGATOR:
R. Joseph Charette II, MSEd, LPC, NCC
Doctoral Candidate, School of Education
717-385-0109, charetter@duq.edu

ADVISOR:
Dr. Debra Hyatt-Burkhart
Department Chair, Associate Professor, School of Education
412 396-5711, hyattburkhard@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:
This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.

STUDY OVERVIEW:
This is a research project being conducted by a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision Program at Duquesne University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace and the ways in which they may engage in self-concealment of their affectional orientation. You are being asked to participate in an interview that will last approximately 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Participation in this study would require some level of comfort talking about your personal experiences as an LGBQ+ counselor in the workplace. Risks associated with participation are minimal and no greater than would be encountered in day-to-day conversations.

PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of self-concealment of identity among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. In this study, self-concealment is defined as actively taking steps to conceal (Larson & Chastain, 1990) one’s LGBQ+ affectional orientation from others.
In order to qualify for participation, you must:

- Identify as LGBQ+
- Have a master’s degree in counseling
- Currently be working in some capacity as a counselor. (Counselor educators who also practice as counselors are welcome to participate)

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:

If you provide your consent to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview via Zoom. The interviews will be audio and video recorded so that they can later be transcribed. Interviews will take approximately 1 hour to 1.5 hours to complete. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your personal experiences as an LGBQ+ person working in counseling and your experiences with self-concealment of your affectional orientation. Following the transcription of the interviews and data analysis, I will provide a summary of the themes from your interview to you via email. You will be given the opportunity to provide feedback to me about whether your interview data has been interpreted accurately. These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to participating in this study, however you may experience positive psychological effects from having your experience validated by others and knowing that you assisted in the research study.

COMPENSATION:

There will be no compensation in exchange for participating in this study. However, participation in this study will not cost you anything.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your participation in this study, and any identifiable personal information you provide, will be kept confidential to every extent possible, and all data will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the study. All written and electronic forms of data and study materials will be kept secure. Electronic data (electronic transcriptions, researcher journals) will be stored in a password protected folder on a password protected computer. Video/audio recordings will be stored in a password protected folder on a password protected computer and will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the study. Transcriptions will be deidentified using pseudonyms. Paper records (field notes, printed documents, consent forms, other study materials) will be stored in locked filing cabinet only accessible to the investigator. All results will be reported in aggregate. All direct quotes from participants will be presented using pseudonyms. All written and electronic documentation will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the study.
In addition, any publications or presentations about this research will only use data that is combined together with all subjects; therefore, no one will be able to determine how you responded. All direct quotes from participants will be presented using pseudonyms.

The Zoom platform is HIPAA compliant for covered entities (Zoom, 2020). In the use of Zoom, privacy features remain in the control of the meeting host and approved participants at the discretion of the host. These features include entrance to the meeting, screen sharing, and recording abilities. Each meeting link is generated only for the purposes of each specific interview and the waiting room is enabled to allow for the meeting host to verify participants prior to entry. Following participant entrance to the meeting, the host can lock the room to prevent any further entry. Zoom protects data at the application level used the advanced encryption system (Zoom, 2020). For more information go to https://zoom.us/docs/doc/Zoom-hipaa.pdf.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to start or continue this study. You can withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence by notifying the principal investigator via email of your desire to cease participation. Previously collected data will be immediately destroyed and not included in the data analysis, final report, or any subsequent publication.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

At the completion of the study, a summary of the results of this study will be provided to you at no cost. You may request this summary by contacting the researchers and requesting it. The information provided to you will not be your individual responses, but rather a summary of what was discovered during the research project as a whole.

FUTURE USE OF DATA:

Any information collected that can identify you will not be used for future research studies, nor will it be provided to other researchers.

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS

I understand that the researcher(s) running this study have put in place the following guidelines to address concerns related to COVID-19:

- Participant interviews are all being conducted virtually via zoom.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read this informed consent form and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, for any
reason without any consequences. Based on this, I certify I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any questions about my participation in this study, I may contact Joe Charette at charetter@duq.edu or 717-385-0109 or Dr. Debra Hyatt-Burkhart at hyattburkhарт@duq.edu or 412-396-5711. If I have any questions regarding my rights and protections as a subject in this study, I can contact Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at 412.396.1886 or at irb@duq.edu.

___________________________________     __________________
Participant’s Signature       Date

___________________________________     __________________
Researcher’s Signature       Date
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:
Self-Concealment Among LGBQ+ Counselors in the Workplace

INVESTIGATOR:
R. Joseph Charette II, MSEd, LPC, NCC
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ADVISOR:
Dr. Debra Hyatt-Burkhart
Department Chair, Associate Professor, School of Education
412 396-5711, hyattburkhard@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:
This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.

STUDY OVERVIEW:
This is a research project being conducted by a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision Program at Duquesne University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace and the ways in which they may engage in self-concealment of their affectional orientation. You are being asked to participate in a focus group with 5-7 other participants that will last a maximum of 2 hours. Participation in this study will require some level of comfort with talking about your personal experiences as an LGBQ+ counselor in the workplace with other people.

PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of self-concealment of identity among LGBQ+ counselors in the workplace. In this study, self-concealment is defined as actively taking steps to conceal (Larson & Chastain, 1990) one’s LGBQ+ affectional orientation from others.
In order to qualify for participation, you must:

- Identify as LGBQ+
- Have a master’s degree in counseling
- Currently be working in some capacity as a counselor. (Counselor educators who also practice as counselors are welcome to participate)

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:

If you provide your consent to participate, you will be asked to engage in a focus group discussion and answer semi-structured open-ended questions. The focus group will be audio and video recorded and transcribed. The focus group will last for a maximum of two hours. The questions asked during the focus group will prompt you to discuss your personal experiences as an LGBQ+ person working in counseling and your experiences with self-concealment of your affectional identity. You may respond to the other participants’ experiences and may also be asked follow-up questions based on your responses. Following the transcription of the focus group recording and data analysis, I will provide a summary of the themes from discussion to you via email. You will be given the opportunity to provide feedback about these themes. These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to participating in this study, however you may experience positive psychological effects from having your experience validated by others and knowing that you assisted in the research study.

COMPENSATION:

There will be no compensation in exchange for participating in this study. However, participation in this study will not cost you anything.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your participation in this study, and any identifiable personal information you provide, will be kept confidential by the researcher to every extent possible, and all data will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the study. By agreeing to participate in this study you agree to keep the identities of, and information shared by other participants in the focus group confidential to every extent possible by not disclosing any information about other participants. You also acknowledge that the principal investigator will make every effort to maintain confidentiality of the information you share with the group but cannot guarantee that all participants will maintain this confidentiality after the conclusion of the focus group.

All written and electronic forms of data and study materials will be kept secure. Electronic data (electronic transcriptions, researcher journals) will be stored in a password protected folder on a password protected computer. Video/audio recordings will be stored in a password protected
folder on a password protected computer and will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the study. Transcriptions will be deidentified using pseudonyms. Paper records (field notes, printed documents, consent forms, other study materials) will be stored in locked filing cabinet only accessible to the investigator. All results will be reported in aggregate. All direct quotes from participants will be presented using pseudonyms. All written and electronic documentation will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the study.

In addition, any publications or presentations about this research will only use data that is combined together with all subjects; therefore, no one will be able to determine how you responded. All direct quotes from participants will be presented using pseudonyms.

The Zoom platform is HIPAA compliant for covered entities (Zoom, 2020). In the use of Zoom, privacy features remain in the control of the meeting host and approved participants at the discretion of the host. These features include entrance to the meeting, screen sharing, and recording abilities. Each meeting link is generated only for the purposes of each specific interview and the waiting room is enabled to allow for the meeting host to verify participants prior to entry. Following participant entrance to the meeting, the host can lock the room to prevent any further entry. Zoom protects data at the application level used the advanced encryption system (Zoom, 2020). For more information go to https://zoom.us/docs/doc/Zoom-hipaa.pdf.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to start or continue this study. You can withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence by notifying the principal investigator via email of your desire to cease participation. Due to the nature of a focus group, if you withdraw during the focus group or following the focus group, any personal data you provided will be deidentified, but your provided responses to questions or responses to other participants may still be used in the data analysis. All results will be presented in aggregate.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

At the completion of the study, a summary of the results of this study will be provided to you at no cost. You may request this summary by contacting the researchers and requesting it. The information provided to you will not be your individual responses, but rather a summary of what was discovered during the research project as a whole.

FUTURE USE OF DATA:

Any information collected that can identify you will not be used for future research studies, nor will it be provided to other researchers.

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS

I understand that the researcher(s) running this study have put in place the following guidelines to address concerns related to COVID-19:
• Participant interviews are all being conducted virtually via zoom.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read this informed consent form and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, for any reason without any consequences. Based on this, I certify I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any questions about my participation in this study, I may contact Joe Charette at charetter@duq.edu or 717-385-0109 or Dr. Debra Hyatt-Burkhart at hyattburkhartd@duq.edu or 412-396-5711. If I have any questions regarding my rights and protections as a subject in this study, I can contact Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at 412.396.1886 or at irb@duq.edu.

___________________________________     __________________
Participant’s Signature       Date

___________________________________     __________________
Researcher’s Signature       Date