

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Using Participatory Constructivist Grounded Theory to Understand How Queer College Graduates Build Professional Identity

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PAGES: 292

In a new career era characterized by a post-industrial, knowledge economy, those teaching and working within higher education stand at the critical nexus between a student's educational career and full participation in this economy. The reality for many graduates is they will go on to face discrimination stemming from sexism, racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, transphobia, and xenophobia within professional spaces. Specifically, students who are members of the queer community face high degrees of discrimination or harassment, the highest being in the workplace. This research is extremely timely with over eight million queer professional in the United States, and growing worries from the LGBTQ+ community because of the increase in groups working to remove their rights through legislation and legal action (from state legislatures through the U.S. Supreme Court). Further, the literature looking at how identity is developed at the intersection of professionalism and queerness and literature on the supports queer students and professionals need at this intersection are lacking.

To address this gap, I interviewed 12 queer professionals from across the United States utilizing a Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology. In response to a pilot test, I further incorporate participatory methods through participant diagramming and graphic elicitation

through semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked to model their identity at the intersection of queerness and professionalism, leading to an incredible depth of data coming from the interviews. Findings were taken through a three-step coding process including initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. Findings include mediators of identity construction, frames of identity construction, and ecosystems of identity construction. The first two findings led to the development of a Queer Professional Identity Development model, while the third finding led to the creation of an Ecological Model of Professional Identity Development. Explanations of the grounded theories are provided as well as applications for the field of career development and education in higher education (career services). Further calls to action for career development professionals and educators are included, including the necessity for (re)framing career education in higher education as a tool for social justice.