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## **“The Personal Has Become Political”: A Secondary Teacher’s Perceptions of Her Body in the Classroom**

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# "The personal has become political": A secondary teacher's perceptions of her body in the classroom

*Christine A. Mallozzi*

*Abstract:* The purpose of this paper is to examine how a secondary English teacher considered her body a personal and political matter within her professional settings. Discourse analysis of the participant's narrative evidences that women teachers are pressured to present certain feminine and heterosexual bodies and present a similar personal life within their pedagogy. The risk in not following suit is being pushed out of the profession, a matter that can be problematic especially when a teacher undergoes personal changes counter to professional expectations. Teacher education responsibility in preparing teacher candidates for a variable professional trajectory is noted.

*Keywords:* teacher, body, heterosexism, discourse, personal life

## Introduction

In trying to make sense of the world, people, at least initially, may rely on taken-for-granted ideas about how the world works, as well as the people and things in that world. Judging real-life instances against these assumptions about what is normal or typical is a way to organize life experiences and encounters. Yet those assumptions are often overly simple (Gee, 2011). Relying on these too-simple ideas as the standard creates the likelihood that more complicated ideas will be deemed problematic. As a result, there may be pressure to mask complexities and conform to simplistic images lest risk real-life events, people, and things be labeled as deviant or inferior.

Portrayals of teachers have included reductive images of teachers and school contexts feeding a universalizing concept of teacher against which people may

judge real-life teachers. Dalton (2004) and Dalton and Linder (2008) proposed that the too-simple good teacher/bad teacher binary is upheld in both cinema and television, and that women teachers (a focus of this paper) are under especially severe constraints such as needing to be mother-like, “pretty young things” (Dalton, 2004, p. 91), who are able to keep their personal lives out of their public work, thus called to “deny their experiences as women in their teaching” (p. 97). These reductive portrayals are “relatively static conceptions that ignore change within teachers and change in the school system and society that surrounds them” (Lightfoot, 1983, p. 242), effectively attempting to establish teachers as unchanging, a standard that no person can achieve and is a challenge that any real-life teachers is doomed to fail.

A woman teacher’s body too has been simplified, often hidden by asexual or infantilized clothing and often only acknowledged if it deviates from normal expectations. The iconic image of a teacher, described by MacLure (2003) as a modestly dressed woman, standing in front of students, with a nearby blackboard or presentation surface, is often used as the standard with which people organize real life images of teachers. Waller (1932/1965) recognized that some images preexist any actual teacher, meaning that students have expectations for what a teacher should be and superimpose those images onto the actual teacher once they meet her. The pervasiveness of a particular teacher image, the female with their hair in a bun, wearing glasses and pearls, and usually clothing that obscures her body (Weber & Mitchell, 1995), implies the likelihood that many students and others have a schema for how a teacher should style herself. Because teachers’ clothing is used as an indicator of appropriateness for the profession, under the assumption that certain types of personalities accompany certain clothes (Alsup, 2006; Obrycki, 2008; Weber & Mitchell, 1995), the matter of teacher appearance is not trivial.

Images of teachers that do not match the ideal often meet negative reaction and marginalization (MacLure, 2003), reinforcing the iconic teacher as the dominant and thus proper version. And that resignation reinforces constricting images that teachers are expected to embody. In turn, an incomplete view of the teaching profession is reinforced, leaving little room for a teacher as an embodied person with a variable, complicated life open to contradiction. In short, leaving an entire population of real-life teachers seeming as lacking. Grumet (1988) maintained that stories of real-life teachers need to be shared, stories that include the personal and private, otherwise the hegemonic structures will be reinforced and will further produce the same limiting images of teachers, so that “silence certifies the ‘system’” (p. xvi).

The purpose of this paper is to examine how a secondary English teacher Buffy (pseudonym) considered her body a personal and political matter within her professional settings. In short, Buffy found herself without a place in the classroom, unable to reconcile the changes in her personal life (i.e., getting divorced, identifying as a lesbian) and body image in a professional high school setting. de Lauretis's (1984) theory of imaging and Gee's (1999) concept of cultural models provide a framework to answer *how does a woman teacher's body serve to inform others about her personal and professional lives?* de Lauretis's (1984) theory of imaging posits that viewers' expectations, bodily signs, and context shape situated meanings, which can be compared to cultural models (e.g., simplified images or storylines) (Gee, 1999) of the type of teacher that is valued in a society. Discourse analysis of Buffy's narratives provides insight into how she saw her personal life excluded from teaching because it did not match the politicized cultural model of teacher.

## Theoretical perspectives

### *Cultural Models*

The way people see the world and operate in it accordingly is based in part on beliefs and values, which Gee (1996) presents as a type of social theory. A social theory involves "(usually unconscious) assumptions about models of simplified worlds" (p. 78) or what Gee terms cultural models. Gee's theorization of cultural model has undergone several changes (see Mallozzi, 2012), but a cultural model is what a group of people consider normal. As people suppose these simplified worlds to be real, they also judge the events and people of the real world against the cultural model.

For example, unconscious assumptions are linked to the word *teacher*. Importantly, these assumptions have specific social, cultural, and historical ties (Gee, 1996) and cannot be blindly transferred across social group; therefore any assumptions must be couched in the views of a set of people. However they may be held by a quite large social group, such as a group who enacts the dominant discourse of a nation. In the U.S. one might assume that a teacher is someone who falls under the average demographics of the profession: a White, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual woman in their early-to-mid forties (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). These demographics may not hold across other nations, or even in subsets of U.S. communities, but these assumptions are based on what is considered normal in a simplified world from a U.S. perspective.

Demographics are often presented as a simple way to describe a population, but one can (perhaps erroneously) assume those people have certain traits simply based on a statistical description. For example, describing a group of people (e.g., Black, Christian, Southern, and rural, or White Appalachian miners) might call to mind a set of assumptions, however stereotypical, about that group's beliefs, values, and behaviors. Each demographic descriptor has its own interesting issues, but for the purpose of this paper and considering the homogeneity of the teaching population demographics, an examination of the social markers woman (i.e., sex) and heterosexual (i.e., sexuality) is useful in seeing the generalizations and assumptions that feed a cultural model of teacher (Gee, 1996).

The sex/gender system within U.S. culture is pervasive. The sex/gender system (Rubin, 1975), as part of human identity in society, maintains that bodies' sexual and reproductive biology plus societal influence determine people's gendered identities. In short, the sex/gender system is highly influenced by the male/female binary in which males are assumed to be masculine and females are assumed to be feminine. Examples of this expectation of males as masculine and females as feminine are so inescapable that they often go unnoticed in their accepted-as-normal standing.

Bringing the sex/gender system into the feminized profession of U.S. teaching (deMarras & LeCompte, 1998) informs the ways in which women teachers are expected to be feminine. Women teachers as feminine have historically been described as mother figures (Alsup, 2006; Grumet, 1988), compliant, sweet, well-mannered (Donovan, 1974; Grumet, 1988), "all that is good, and wise, and lovely" (Beecher, 1846, p. 10), conservative, patient, calm, and self-possessed (Lortie, 1975/2002). Descriptions also include keeping certain qualities in a fragile balance, such as self-regulating and yet able to be regulated by others (Biklen, 1995) and obscuring feminine bodies with dress but not to the point of full masculinization (Waller, 1932/1965). For example, although there are many versions of Mattel's Barbie doll as teacher, Weber and Mitchell (1995) used student-teacher-Barbie doll as she appeared in a Marvel comic as a site of interrogation into this image of as a feminine woman teacher. Shapely, smiling, manicured, fashionable Barbie is matched with a fun-loving nurturance and concern for her students. Weber and Mitchell's analysis contended that this surface structure matches an ideal of a female student teacher. Barbie is a text of desire with real social effects, and Barbie's success as a stereotype provides an image with corresponding behaviors as a goal for emulation.

U.S. society is also marked by *heteronormativity*, the assumption that heterosexuality is normal and all other sexualities are abnormal. The education system as a part of that society is also heteronormative (Sumara & Davis, 1999). Therefore a non-heterosexual woman teacher would likely be considered deviant in an entire system that holds heterosexuality as the norm. Blount's (2000) historical analysis of educators transgressing gender expectations in U.S. public schools included homosexual teachers in a heteronormative education system, a situation that was often met with the teachers punishment or removal from the institution. Blount argued that through a series of gendered expectation shifts for teachers, single women teachers of an older age (i.e., spinsters), once useful to society as teachers, were eventually likely to be suspected as "not altogether heterosexual" (p. 90) and thus deviant. In the 1940s and 1950s under Cold War McCarthyism in the U.S., to squelch rumors of homosexuality, lesbians later reported marrying men and feminizing their appearance (e.g., dress, high heels, hosiery) (Faderman, 1991) because crossing gender boundaries (e.g., staying single, dressing masculine) became evidence of homosexuality, and marriage was seen as evidence of heterosexuality and suitability as a teacher (Blount, 1998, 2000). The data in this current paper suggests physical appearance and marital status are still important signs of heterosexuality and thus fittingness as a teacher. In this way being married (or in the least hoping for marriage) and being heterosexual are part of a cultural model of teacher.

Gee (1996) noted that with cultural models, which are by definition reductive and simplistic, inconsistencies are ignored because other evidence is deemed more valuable. For example, although heterosexuality is considered normal and thus preferred in teaching, female sexuality is often portrayed in entertainment and other media as unhealthy or perverse (Dalton, 2004; Johnson, 2008; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Therefore women teachers are supposed to have a sexuality but appear to be asexual, hiding any hints to the contrary. Yet a teacher's appearance is taken as a telltale sign of who she really is (Alsup, 2006; Obrycki, 2008; Weber & Mitchell, 1995), and that person is often expected to be of high moral character and certainly not dishonest in representation (Lortie, 1975/2002; Waller, 1932/1965). In the end, cultural models play a role in creating and maintaining stereotypes because they rely on what is supposed to exist in a simplified world, free from complexities and contradiction; therefore only the uni-dimensional examples persist. The cultural model's role in reality is to provide comparison of the ideal to real-world cases. For instance, when one encounters a person called a teacher, one judges that teacher against the cultural model of the simplified world. The real teacher is always compared to the idealized version of

teacher, and therefore under pressure to rise to that unattainable ideal, always being in a position of falling short, partially because the real teacher is complex and open to contradictions while the cultural model is not.

### *Imaging*

de Lauretis's (1984) theory of *imaging* is useful in understanding how context, expectations, and signs can undermine or buttress *teacher* as a cultural model. Imaging is an "ongoing but discontinuous" (p. 56) process by which a person makes meaning from images using context, the observer's expectations, and the image as a sign. The process of imaging includes developing meaning from the image, and the associated language and sound, as well as "the viewer's subjective engagement in that process" (pp. 46-47), so that both the viewer and image creator are implicated in the images' meaning. Therefore these image meanings are socially determined and contextual. As a feminist cinema studies theorist, de Lauretis stated that looking at women's bodies

is so pervasive in our culture, well before and beyond the institution of cinema, ... it necessarily constitutes a starting point for any understanding of sexual difference and its ideological effects in the construction of social subjects, its presence in all forms of subjectivity. (pp. 37-38)

The history of women's bodies as objects for the pleasure gaze of others is well-documented and theorized as a primarily heterosexist practice (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1975; hooks, 1992/2003). Because de Lauretis (1984) posits bodies as a representation, it is necessary to ask, "A representation of what?" The prevalent heterosexist practice of men looking at women has positioned women's bodies as representative of desire, difference from a dominant male perspective, and idealized versions of beauty or motherhood, among other ideas. Each one of these representations is wrapped in a complex web of ideologies and value systems, and each has real social effects as people greet body images and connected ideological values in the real world.

de Lauretis (1984) maintained that images could produce meanings and perceptions of social subjects, even beyond those portrayed in the image. For example, an image of an idealized teacher simultaneously reinforces the idea of a perfect teacher in practice and denigrates all other teachers as de-



viant or less-than the ideal, even though these other teachers were not pictured. de Lauretis's imaging theory asserts the image as a starting point to understanding larger cultural meanings with varying degrees of pervasiveness and social effects. Using de Lauretis's theory of imaging, I show how context, observer expectations, and sign production can subvert or reinforce cultural models of the word *teacher*.

### *Bringing Cultural Models and Imaging Together*

According to de Lauretis (1984), the image is not simply absorbed by viewers. When an image sign is read for meaning, the meaning is shaped by context and the observers' expectations, all of which is historically and socially situated. The context includes the cultural model of teacher, which for the purposes of this paper includes being a heterosexual female among other traits. The cultural model affects the observer's prior knowledge and the educated guesses the viewer makes about teachers. When the observer reads the image based on what is expected within the context, the cultural model of teacher is included as the standard.

Just because the cultural model is simplified does not mean it is innocuous. Gee (1996) reminds his readers that a moral imperative exists to investigate whom the cultural model might harm. Because the cultural model represents a repository of what is valued in a social group, social goods rest with those who appear closer to the cultural model, leaving those who deviate from the cultural model "poorer" and alienated. The likelihood is great that most people will miss the cultural model mark, leaving only a select few who may even come close to approaching the ideal.

## **Methodology and methods**

As part of a feminist interviewing study, this study employs narrative methodology (Riessman, 1993, 2008) to answer *how does a woman teacher's body serve as a text that is read to inform others about her personal and professional lives?* A narrative has been defined in many ways (see Clandinin, 2007). For this study I define narrative as connected and selective events organized into a sequence for meaning (Riessman, 2008) but mainly focus on my purpose for using narrative analysis, which was "to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives" (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). These personal stories provide a site for people to contrast their perceptions and experiences with the models of the dominant culture (Personal Narratives Group, 1989).

The interviews provide an opportunity for the participant to tell the stories that she wants others to hear, as evidence of the way the participants use narrative to make sense of their lives (Riessman, 1993).

## Participant recruitment and design

In the larger study, from which this paper is a part, seven participants were recruited through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) through a combination of a general call on a women's studies' listserv and personal, direct invitations to participate. Each participant needed to be a current or former kindergarten through 12th-grade woman (i.e., self-identify as female) teacher who underwent a personal change and perceived a difference in public perception based on that change.

Each participant engaged in four interviews, the last being a member check and review of analysis. For each of the semi-structured interviews, I used a general interview guide, probes, and follow-up questions (Patton, 2002), allowing for the type of unscripted interactions between interviewer and interviewee complementary to feminist interviewing that tends to include open-ended questions (e.g., What is the story of your teaching career up to this point? What stories can you tell me about undergoing a personal change in the public eye?) and avoids an a priori hypothesis (Reinharz, 1992). Each participant was invited to choose a pseudonym. Buffy (the focal participant of this paper) chose her name as acknowledgement of a schoolmate who teased her using homophobic language years before even Buffy realized she was a lesbian, a matter that is important to the present analysis.

### *Analysis*

To determine what counted as a narrative, I read interview data (40 hours, 759 pages total transcribed verbatim) "to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives" (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). When Buffy (whose transcribed interviews equal 4 hours, 19 minutes) used stories to explain the meaning of her personal changes becoming public knowledge, I considered those stories to be narratives pertinent to this study. For these focal narratives, I used Gee's (1991, 1999) strategy for arranging the transcription into lines and specific linguistic sounds indicated by notational devices (Gee, 1991, 1999; Jefferson, 2004), stanzas, macrostructures, and narrative parts. Each convention (see Appendix) shows Buffy's storytelling decisions to organize meaning of her experiences about her body and personal life in teaching high school English.

Initial analysis consisted of a thematic analysis of content of the narratives, including the ideational reason(s) the Buffy told a story in a particular way (Halliday, 1994; Riessman, 2008). Then, I analyzed the focal narratives using discourse analysis (Gee, 1991, 1996, 1999) driven by linguistic signs, such as psychological subject statements (e.g., I went, we care), syntactical and cohesive arrangements (e.g., cause-effect statements), and other discursive tools of inquiry (e.g., cultural models). As "culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's story" (Riessman, 1993, p. 5), this analytic process developed my understanding of how Buffy's situated stories speak to the sociocultural expectations for teachers.

## Findings

Buffy Tanner was a secondary English teacher, married to her college sweetheart. After teaching at several high schools in several towns in the Southeast U.S. for a total of almost 12 years, Buffy divorced her husband when she realized that she had romantic feelings for another woman and was wrestling with her own homosexuality. Buffy left teaching and was pursuing a graduate degree before she and her husband split and before she entered into a committed relationship with a woman. She credits not being in her secondary teaching job for creating a situation where she even could deal with and commit to her homosexuality.

Even when in graduate school and teaching at the undergraduate level, Buffy was concerned about her professional dress appearing too homosexual, or as she phrased it "dykey," meaning a masculinized lesbian style. On this matter of her professional dress needing to reflect a certain feminine heterosexuality, she stated "I've always been very aware of it." As she sat in the interview dressed in jeans and a button-down shirt, she explained it was an outfit she would have been leery of wearing before she became more comfortable with her homosexuality. Yet, as she was showing me old yearbook photos of her teaching, when I confronted her that the teaching outfit in the photo wasn't much different than the outfit she was currently wearing, she admitted...

"I KNOW, that's what I'm sayin' [laughs]

Isn't that funny?

But see, I've got a lot to hide behind besides just that //

This is my last line of defense [laughs]"

Buffy and I were both struck by and laughed at the fact that two such similar woman's outfits (i.e., a button-down shirt and jeans and a button-

down shirt and khaki pants) could be read in such disparate ways (i.e., “dykey” versus acceptable feminine, heterosexual teacher-wear). Yet Buffy aptly named the reason: she had an entire heterosexual persona to hide behind, of which her clothes were just a part. Although Buffy may have said it in jest, she named her clothes as her “last line of defense,” an idea possibly interpreted as she could still fall back on her clothing to solidify a heterosexual image when needed, an idea reinforced by a narrative presented below about dressing to see former students.

When I asked Buffy to clarify her statement that she has “a lot to hide behind,” she offered a more detailed account of what she wore in the context of her marital status:

Well, I was married you know  
 Um, I was conscious of how I wore my hair↓  
 I think that’s a pretty.. conservative looking haircut I got going  
 on there  
 Um, you know  
 I had that ring o::n  
 living that l::ife  
 I’ve got the makeup going...  
 pearl earrings  
 There was probably a pearl necklace, but you can’t see it under  
 there

Buffy outlined a number of physical body-oriented traits associated with commonly accepted or depicted women teachers. Paired with the somewhat asexual (maybe androgynous) button-down shirt and khakis, she added purposefully feminine touches, such as pearl earrings, a pearl necklace, and makeup, a look closer in line with the average depictions of women teachers (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Further, if Buffy’s sexuality was ever in question, her wedding ring, within this heteronormative context of schooling (Sumara & Davis, 1999), confirmed her marital status and assumed heterosexuality. Buffy’s similar stretching out of the phrases “I had that ring o::n, living that l::ife” links the societal sign and the corresponding life style that is far removed from her current one. Even her conservative hairstyle was a sign that she was part of the mainstream, as expected with being a teacher (Alsup, 2006), and not on the fringes, where deviants might linger. The combination of being married (and thus assumed heterosexuality), feminine accessories, and conservative style gave Buffy the leeway to wear an outfit that in other circumstances might be deemed to masculine or androgynous and thus questionable.

Among the stories told in her interviews, Buffy explained that as a married teacher she often made connections to her personal life to teach novels in her English class, while simultaneously, though perhaps unconsciously, keeping her bodily self out of the classroom by wearing baggy or innocuously feminine clothes (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). She spoke about this idea in a story about attending a former student's funeral visitation where Buffy knew she would see other former students. By the time of the funeral visitation and since Buffy left her high school teaching position, she and her husband had split; she had entered into a committed relationship with a woman and considered herself a lesbian.

### *A Story from Buffy*

#### Part 1. Visitation

##### **I. SETTING**

##### **Stanza A. Orientation**

- A1. when I went back to that
- A2. I went back for the visitation
- A3. when my student died

##### **II. CRISIS**

##### Stanza B. Emotional reaction

- B1. and .. it was a weird feeling for me
- B2. because I was going back into a place .. of

##### **III. EVALUATION**

##### **Stanza C. Connecting with students**

- C1. and my former students just flocked to me
- C2. it was wonderful
- C3. to see them again
- C4. horrible situation but
- C5. they were so sweet
- C6. they ALL came up and just hugged me
- C7. and just had great things to talk about with me
- C8. and um fond memories we were all sharing

##### **Stanza D. Comfort level**

- D1. and I felt so comfortable and uncomfortable at the ↑same time↑

##### **IV. CODA**

##### **Stanza E. Buffy's summative understanding**

- E1. like .. it's just like a different life //

#### **Part 2. Teaching and Life**

##### **V. CRISIS**

**Stanza F. Possibility of returning to teaching high school**

C: Okay, you're gonna have to talk me through that so tell me

F1. yeah 'cause I mean people even talked about

F2. you know are you gonna go back to teach high school↑

F3. and I did not know how

F4. I don't know if I could ↑do this↓

**VI. EVALUATION****Stanza G. Doubt**

G1. 'cause I don't know that I would feel free to talk about my life

G2. and that I used to that used to be a big part of ..um how I ..

G3. of my teaching persona

G4. 'cause I could talk about my life

G5. and tie that in

G6. and tie their lives in.

G7. and now I don't know if I could do that

G8. 'cause you have people like that guy [the administrator] saying

G9. I would never hire someone who's gay

**Stanza H. Change in stance**

H1. and uh you know politically I'm much more um not aggressive but

H2. I'm pretty firm about that

H3. I'm not gonna flip flop around about that

**Stanza I. Personal-Political Connection**

I1. um partly because the political's become very personal to me  
(*clear throat*)

I2. you know at the same time the personal

I3. the political has been personal

I4. and the personal has become political

**VII. RESOLUTION****Stanza J. Saying goodbye**

J1. I just felt weird

J2. it's almost like I was saying goodbye when I was there

J3. I felt like that when I left there

J4. I felt kind of sad 'cause I thought I could never

J5. I could never go back there I don't think

J6. um and be be Mrs. Tanner again↑

J7. 'cause I don't know how to be her anymore

J8. in the way that they would expect me to be

**VII. CODA****Stanza K. Withdrawal**

- K1. I mean I might be totally reading into that
- K2. 'cause I have I bet there are a lot of those students who would be like .. whatever
- K3. I don't know

Buffy begins the narrative with the idea of returning to a setting in the past, emphasizing the word "back" several times (A1, A2, B2, & J5). For Buffy, returning to teaching is moving backwards because she has changed in ways that do not match that "different life" (E1) anymore. This implication is not that teaching is a less advanced profession than her current career in higher education, but in the scope of Buffy's life, teaching in the secondary school does not match her trajectory and personal life. Although she loved teaching high school English, further evidenced by the "fond memories we were all sharing" (C8), and was a talented educator, winning school district awards, she faced the possibility that she might never return to teaching in the secondary setting.

Part 1's crisis, evaluation, and coda are somewhat general, marked by imprecise and contrary words such as "It was a weird feeling" (B1) and "I felt so comfortable and uncomfortable" (D1). Buffy's wrap-up is equally coded; her statement "it's just like a different life" (E1) has shades of her previous statement "living that life," and so she may be drawing connections with her previous marital status, but the following clarification reveals the matter is more complicated.

The problem as Buffy sees it is that she can't foresee if she could return to high school teaching (Stanza F). Buffy provides insight to this problem by linking statements with the conjunction *and* as well as several *'cause* or *because* phrases showing Buffy's cause-effect reasoning (Stanza G). This reasoning surrounded her personal and professional lives and how they functioned in her teaching in the past and might function for a future teaching life. She surmised being gay would now mean that she would have to leave her personal life out of the classroom and forgo those personal connections as effective instructional tools. Her thinking was further supported by a past administrator stating he would "never hire someone who's gay" (G8-G9). It should be noted the administrator's statement technically was not illegal, as the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2004) discrimination guidelines do not include protection against discrimination for sexual orientation. It is up to individual employers if they choose to protect against discrimination of more social markers than the EEOC sees fit. For Buffy, being openly gay would not only make it unlikely that she would be

welcomed into a secondary classroom, but because she brought so much of her personal life into the classroom as a mechanism for teaching, she also felt, it would inhibit her teaching style and maybe her effectiveness.

The changes Buffy experienced involved more than her divorce, sexuality, and dress. Buffy had developed a stronger stance of personal politics than when she taught high school (Stanzas H&I). Her personal life and her politics were intertwined; therefore she did not see how to keep either out of her professional life. Buffy invoked the feminist phrase “the personal is political,” often attributed to Hanisch (1970/1969) and the editors (Firestone & Koedt, 1970) of the book in which it appeared, as a mantra dispelling the notion that women can remove the power relations from their personal lives. The personal is political also connotes living one’s personal life according to one’s politics (i.e., ideas about what should be valued) and that which is valued has unmistakable effects on one’s personal life; therefore personal/political is a false dichotomy.

In kind, for Buffy, personal/professional is a false dichotomy. To be the type of effective teacher she was, she cannot keep her personal life (and thus her politics) out of the classroom. Further, the personal matter of Buffy’s body is political. Buffy is quite aware that if her body was a representation of suitability to be a teacher when she was a married, heterosexual teacher established in a school community, her body would be scrutinized probably more harshly as an unmarried, homosexual teacher trying to reestablish herself in a secondary setting after graduate school.

Buffy’s use of emotional and cognitive reactions [“I just felt weird” (J1), “I felt kind of sad” (J4), “I don’t know” (J7)] reveal her strain as she tries to resolve her future without teaching secondary school. Her ambivalence bled through even when she spoke in absolutes: “I could never go back there I don’t think” (J5). Buffy was uncertain if she could walk away from her teaching world or if she had already walked away as a result of her new personal and political life. Buffy stated that she couldn’t “be Mrs. Tanner again” (J6) at least not “in the way that they would expect me to be” (J8). It is unclear who “they” are in this comment. “They” could be her past students or the school community in general that she envisioned working with were she to return to the secondary classroom. Regardless, Buffy felt she would be limited by others’ expectations for Mrs. Tanner.

The Mrs. Tanner from the past, according to Buffy, more closely aligned with the cultural model (Gee, 1999) of a secondary English teacher – a con-



servative, feminine, heterosexual woman. With her stance of the "the personal [being] political," Buffy was unsure (and seemed to doubt) if she was capable of returning to reclaim that person from the past. Buffy projected that as "they" (i.e., an ambiguous school community group) made meaning of her teacher image, their expectations for her would strongly influence how they read the signs of her body within the context of a professional setting (de Lauretis, 1984). For instance, the expectation that Buffy would be able to proceed as Mrs. Tanner would be shattered as soon as her personal homosexual politics became known. Further, an asexual outfit such as a button-down shirt and khaki pants (with or without feminine accessories) is likely to be read as a sign of her non-femininity and unsuitability for teaching. Buffy did hedge with her assumptions about how her students might receive her recent personal changes, but her uncertainty and hesitation about the students' comfort was clear.

Buffy later admitted she did not come out as a lesbian to her former students partially because the circumstances of the funeral visitation made it inappropriate and partially because she was not comfortable doing so. However, when I first asked if she came out to her students, I wasn't certain if she didn't hear the question or was dodging it when she responded, "Do you want to know what I wore?" In effect, this response wasn't a dodge at all because it revealed her effort to establish her femininity and assumed heterosexuality with her former students. Buffy consciously maintained a heterosexual image, avoiding what she called "dykie-looking" clothes. Buffy chose to wear black Capri pants, high-heeled sandals, and a sleeveless top. She described her outfit as "real cute" and "girly," even more feminine than some outfits she previously wore when teaching. Buffy believed her return to her students and colleagues at the funeral visitation presented a reason to revive the feminine teacher image she once had. Consciously choosing this feminine image and not coming out to her former students and colleagues were evidence that Buffy did not feel her current life had a place in teaching secondary school.

## Discussion

This evidence indicates women teachers' bodies can be present as long as they are the "right" kind of bodies, which, as indicated through this data, is feminine and heterosexual. Similarly, teachers are encouraged to bring their personal lives into their pedagogy, as long as it is the "right" kind of personal life, again shown through this data as arguably a heterosexual (perhaps preferably married) life. Those female teachers, whose personal

matters do not match cultural expectations, may be squeezed out of the profession as they find their lives mismatched to the cultural model as thus positioned as lesser, deviant, unworthy, and otherwise unfit for the classroom. These matters factor into the teaching profession comprised of many different types of teachers, in addition to the female teachers on which this study concentrates.

### *Teaching Profession*

Social pressure that mounts to the point of “shape up” to the cultural model or “get out” is a reality. Blount’s (1998, 2000) depiction of homosexual teachers who live outside the cultural model being pressured to stay closeted, change, or leave the profession is a storyline founded in historical research but present still. Teachers of all sexualities work in all areas of the U.S. (Juul, 1995). Like Buffy, teachers do not always identify as being gay when they enter the profession, but once self-identified, many perceive an incongruity of their sexuality and their profession that manifests in physical and emotional strains and energy spent on developing strategies to avoid being fired (Kissen, 1993). Acceptance of one’s homosexuality can lead to a positive and productive classroom climate (Mellilo, 2003), but lesbian, gay male, and bisexual teachers’ being open or closeted about their sexuality is linked to perceived job stress levels and job satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Juul, 1993), showing that these personal matters are inseparable from teachers’ professional lives. Further, the body is wrapped in the coming out or and staying closeted processes (Moore, 2007), reinforcing Buffy’s body politics.

Buffy did not leave teaching because she was gay and confessed that getting divorced was just as distressing and incongruent with the teacher image she once claimed, but being gay was a reason for this award-winning teacher to feel she could not return. A recent meta-analysis (Borman & Dowling, 2008) of studies of teacher attrition reveals limited attention is given to teachers’ personal matters (e.g., marital status and parenthood) in large scale research on teacher attrition; further, attention to bodies does not go beyond simple demographics such as teachers’ gender, race, and age. A mobility and attrition study using National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data for 2003-2004 found that 40.9% - 64.7% of respondents stated balancing the professional and the personal in a job outside the kindergarten through 12th-grade classroom was better than it was as a K-12 classroom teacher (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2006). According to the 2008-2009 survey data, 56.3% - 62.7% responded in kind to this same

question about personal and professional balance (Keigher, 2010). Data from the 2012-2013 survey 60.8% of public school teachers felt the same (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). The statistics provide little detail as to why or how this is the case. There are many misunderstood or unacknowledged areas of teachers' professional and personal lives that are not represented in mass questionnaire and survey studies, such as these. Calls (e.g., Macdonald, 1999) have been issued for more comprehensive understandings of teachers' career trajectories, and narratives such as Buffy's may provide an entry point to deeper understanding of how professional expectations for teachers do or do not match their personal lives (Grumet, 1988).

Expectations, mechanisms, and social pressures that push teachers out of the profession who do not match the cultural model create recursive and perhaps systemic maltreatment of non-ideal teachers. This is true not just in matters of sexuality but highlights potential problems for many social markers (e.g., race, class, religion, physical ability). The same is true of demands that deter unorthodox people from entering the profession. People who are outside the cultural model are not able to draw on the social goods (Gee, 2011) that others may and thus are less equipped to advocate for themselves within the community's valued discourse. Therefore, not only are they less likely to be accepted outright; they have fewer accessible resources to establish themselves as valued members of the teaching community. Pushing out teachers who are different allows the cultural model teachers and those who approximate the ideal to remain. In short, the homogeneity of the teaching profession, the narrow demographic band of White, heterosexual, middle class women (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005) is reinforced. Subsequent hegemony is likely as the different teachers feel less and less fitting for the job. In turn, the cultural model is reinforced, and non-cultural model teachers open themselves up to critique.

Although it goes beyond the scope of this data and admittedly plays into the binary of male/female, these cultural models of female teachers raise questions about the expectations for male teacher bodies (see Braun, 2011; Francis, 2008; McNinch, 2007). Literature on discourses of pedophilia, especially with suspected gay male teachers (see King, 2004), substantiates heterosexuality as part of a cultural model of male teachers. Existing research indicates nuanced expectations for degrees of masculinity, among all types of male teachers (see Brockenbrough, 2012; Keyworth, 2001; Rofes, 2000; Roulston & Misawa, 2011). Research on cultural models linked with male teacher bodies, as well as research on intersexual and transsexual teacher bodies, would provide useful counterpoints to this study of women teachers' bodies.

*Teacher Education*

Matters of teachers' bodies also have implications for teacher education, especially at the pre-service level, where the discourses of professionalism at that level are often communicated as expectations for teachers' appearance. Teaching practicum guidelines, teacher handbooks, and school dress codes may indicate what is acceptable. The *2009 Job Search Handbook for Educators* (American Association for Employment in Education [AAEE], 2008), a publication distributed to university career centers, advised new teachers to "dress more conservatively and formally than you think is necessary, especially on 'casual Friday,'" adding, "It is far better to be noticed for being 'over-dressed' than to have a reputation as the inappropriately dressed new teacher!" (Obrycki, 2008, p. 9). More often and perhaps most effectively, teachers are enculturated into expectations for teacher appearance long before they even enter the field, yet this body-directed enculturation is unlikely to be acknowledged in teacher education programs as a political act.

Due to what McWilliam (1994) referred to as the "folkloric discourses of teacher education" (p. 48), the recycled and simplistic assumption has been able to persist that prospective teachers are "ideologically conservative, and therefore fail to comprehend the political nature of the teaching act" (p. 51). Teacher educators are remiss to allow this assumption to stand because perhaps teachers are able to comprehend the political nature of teaching but have yet been asked to do so. Alsup (2006) advocated that because educational discourse is political, teacher education must follow suit. Considering this study, teachers need to be asked to attend to how their bodies are texts that are interpreted for meaning about who they are as teachers and people. Teacher educators may help teachers approach issues involved with the inadequate mind/body split and personal/professional divide.

I return to de Lauretis's (1984) appeal for women to become the readers of women's bodies to illustrate that women are not only consumers of these images but also producers. Currently however, feminists are questioning the ability of women to affect how their bodies are seen and subsequently understood by others (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). One side of the debate is that whatever a woman does to her body in an effort to control her image, the body is still subject to the social, political, historical, and cultural pressures, institutions, and structures. The other side of the debate is the adoption of what Buffy named as "the personal [is] political." When framed by Hanisch (1970/1969) and Firestone and Koedt (1970), the personal-political connection was a call to develop one's politics from per-

sonal experiences, but the phrase is now used in the United States to imply a different exclamation: a woman's right to make choices for her own body is an outgrowth of the fight against oppressive conditions and a right that should be practiced freely.

In an interview with Redfern (2002), Natasha Walter stated that feminists in the United States have recently been concentrating on individual successes and empowerment, while other countries and regions, such as her native Britain, have been focusing on the strides of all women. Walter (1998) also wrote that feminism, once based on group aspirations for political equality, has been subsumed by overpersonalization. Likewise, Baumgardner and Richards (2000) conceded that "once-taboo lifestyle activities ... rebellious acts or personal choices" (p. 19) should not be held against women, but self-shaping of a person's image also "shouldn't be construed as the same as political activism" (p. 19). Baumgardner and Richards' point is counter to the arguments made by the women in Levy's (2005) exploration of raunch culture. When Levy studied the practices of women who purposefully changed and displayed their bodies to be looked at, the women explained it was their right and choice to do so and their exhibitionism was not a blow to feminism but evidence that feminism had worked. Although Baumgardner and Richards (2000) were not responding to these women directly, they stated "when you find yourself choosing what the patriarchy promotes, it's worth asking yourself if it really is a choice" (pp. 19-20), pointing to the issue of anyone's independent ability to shape her bodily image and influence the meaning derived from it.

It is inadequate for teacher education programs to relegate discussion of teachers' bodies to the periphery with pat advice such as "dress ... conservatively and formally" (Obrycki, 2008, p. 9), then concentrate almost solely on the cognitive issues of teaching. This study has shown that matters of teachers' bodies are more complicated than professional dress. If teacher education programs are going to effectively address body presence, image, and action in the classroom, teacher educators are going to need to attend to the views that different generations may have about bodies. The feminist debate on a woman's right to shape and display her body illustrates that a generation of women may be entering teacher education classrooms who may practice this personal right without analyzing the larger politics in the context of education. This is not just an issue of asking teachers to cover up their tattoos or piercings. Even when a woman does not intend to reveal aspects of her body image, they can peek out and be read for meaning.

Teacher education programs need to dispel the notion that a teacher can keep her personal and professional lives separate. If teachers anticipate maintaining a personal and professional divide, they may be ill-equipped to handle an event that calls their personal lives into question with their professional lives, like the woman in this study. It would be better to provide realistic options for negotiating the two because a teacher's personal life and professional life are mutually affected.

Again, as the feminist debate on body representation indicated, not all teachers are going to see their bodies and personal lives as mattering in the politics of schooling. Still, teacher educators are in a position to provide a wider view of body and personal matters in schools. Teachers have the option to disregard the inclusion of politics in education, but if socio-cultural politics are never addressed, they never have that option. Teachers need the opportunity to improve their analytical skills on this front because they are already making complicated decisions with their images within public view. For example, the increased use of social networking websites among women who may enter future teacher education classrooms (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007) is an opportunity for teachers to represent their personal and professional lives. On personal social networking pages, they create images that may show resistance to the cultural model of teacher, but teachers also need guidance in how resisting the cultural model of teacher on these sites has affordances and limits. With the help of teacher educators, teachers may be better able to understand the structures that allow certain meanings about a teacher's body to be developed and sustained in relation to the cultural model of teacher. Once those understandings are developed, teachers will be better able to resist overly simplistic cultural models of teacher and advocate for many different types of teachers as valuable.

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## Appendix notation and Arrangement for In-depth Transcription

The following is a combination of Gee's (1991, 1999) and Jefferson's (2004) notations. Gee (1991, 1999) used many of Jefferson's (2004) common notations without acknowledging their source. Therefore, this table of notations is less so a novel combination for this study than an acknowledgment of the notations' multiple sources.

Notation	Explanation	Source
<b>Part 1. Part Label</b>	Part number with bold upper and lower case print indicated the label of the part and is similar to a title for the narrative.	Gee, 1991
<b>II. SECTION</b>	Roman numeral and bold capitalized print indicates macrostructure section of narrative.	Gee, 1999
<b>Stanza A. Description</b>	Stanza letter with bold label with the first letter capitalized indicates the purpose or topic of the data clump in the narrative.	Gee, 1999
A1.	Capital letter and number indicates the stanza and line number spoken by the participant.	Gee, 1991
C:	Indented, italicized capital letter C and colon indicates the researcher Christine is speaking.	Gee, 1999
//	Double slash marks indicate the voice has a pitch that sounds final.	Gee, 1999
<u>word</u>	Underline indicates stressed word or word segment	Gee, 1999
WORD	Capitalized word or word segment indicates an emphatic tone	Gee, 1999; Jefferson, 2004
..	Double periods indicates a pause.	Gee, 1999; Jefferson, 2004
::	Repeated colons indicates elongated sound; the longer the row of colons, the longer the sound.	Gee, 1999; Jefferson, 2004
( )	Parentheses indicate an action or sound, such as (clears throat) or inaudible speech recorded as accurately as possible.	Gee, 1999; Jefferson, 2004
↑	Sound has a rising intonation compared to the pitch that came before.	Jefferson, 2004
↓	Sound has a falling intonation compared to the pitch that came before.	Jefferson, 2004
◦word◦	Degree signs indicate quieter speech	Jefferson, 2004