

11 Living a queer life in Vietnam

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Introduction

I offer my lived experiences as a boy and as a queer teacher who encountered oppression and discrimination against my non-normative gender identity contextualized by Vietnamese gender hegemonies, explored through personal, social, cultural, and religious lenses that include Confucianism and Buddhism. I treat this autoethnographic study (Jones et al., 2016) as a space of engagement, revisiting my memories of being a gay son in a heteronormative family in Vietnam, situating my experiences through the lens of queer theory, alongside my research in the field of gender and sexual minorities in global education. Queer theory (Foucault, 1978; Butler, 1999, 1993; Sedgwick, 1993) encompasses queerness, queer sense, and queer identities. Minton (1997) posits that queer theory asserts that gender and sexual identities are numerous, unstable, and unfixed. This tenet becomes foundational to defining the feeling of strangeness, not fitting, and not belonging experienced by members of gender and sexual minority communities living in heteronormative societies such as Vietnam. Aligning queer and gender hegemony theories, I explore hegemonic masculinities and femininities alongside gendered stereotypes (Connell, 2008; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Swain, 2006; Schippers, 2007; O'Donoghue, 2018; Paechter, 2018) which have been long ingrained in Asian mindsets. I draw on queer theory and ideologies of Confucianism and Buddhism to create a nexus of ideas that are key to my writing and to bridging theory and practice, creating a praxis of what I experienced as a gay boy and teacher living in a conservative traditional family Vietnam, where binaried hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity dominate.

Connell (1995) laid a theoretical foundation for gender hegemony theory by coining the term hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity is upheld by its dynamic relation with subordinate masculinities, often associated with homosexual masculinity, race, and class, alongside

subordination of femininities (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). According to Schippers (2007), hegemonic femininity is the expression of feminine characteristics which “establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 94). This definition maintains the superior position of men in Vietnamese society. It is also reflected, endemic, and sustained in Vietnamese ideologies of Confucianism and Buddhism. Framed by race, class, social, political, and cultural contexts, there are multiple alternatives to gender-conforming expressions of femininity and masculinity. These expressions are performed in everyday life by gender-nonconforming individuals and groups (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2018). Some forms of sexiness and alpha expressions of sexuality are connected to hegemonic femininities and masculinities (Swain, 2006; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2007; Connell, 2008; Blaikie, 2018). Sexiness contradicts Confucianist and Buddhist ideologies around the moral conduct of Vietnamese women (Nguyen, 2008; Do & Brennan, 2015; Nguyen, 2016; Horton, 2014, 2019). A woman who is seen as too sexy is not a good woman. She is disobedient, dangerous, and untamed and therefore not subordinate to men, which becomes, in the Vietnamese context, a new form of hegemonic femininity.

Vietnamese Confucianism and Buddhism and gender hegemony

Since Chinese rule began in the second century BC on the Indochinese peninsula, Vietnam has been influenced substantially by Chinese Buddhism (Nguyen, 2008). According to Nguyen (1998), China established its cultural and political domination in Vietnam from 111 BC to AD 938 with immense efforts to assimilate the Vietnamese. At this time, Confucianism migrated to Vietnam. With the spread of Neo-Confucianism during the Le dynasty (1428–1788) and its peak influence under the Nguyen dynasty (1802–1945), Chinese oppressors opened schools across Vietnam to teach Chinese characters and train Vietnamese mandarins to serve the dynasty (Nguyen, 1998). For over a millennium, through the teaching of Chinese characters, the Chinese aimed to propagate Chinese customs, practices, and rites of the feudal ruling class. I argue that Confucianism burgeoned in Vietnamese society, enslaving the independent spirit of Vietnamese people and supporting Chinese feudalism, which aimed to destroy Vietnamese people’s consciousness of freedom in political, social, familial, and educational contexts (Nguyen, 1998). Confucianist doctrine values the optimal classist order of “the Emperor” alongside the superior role of men over women in society and family (Nguyen, 1998). Vuong et al. (2018) note that religious pluralism in Vietnam sprouted from the Chinese concept of three religions with the same root, referring to the coexistence, convergence, and unification of three dominant defining ideologies in Vietnam: Confucianism, Buddhism,

and Daoism. In my life, Buddhism has been central to being Vietnamese. Buddhism is the means by which the Vietnamese learn how to live morally, including understanding suffering caused by desire and mindfulness inherent in understanding karma. Vuong et al. (2018) assert that in Vietnamese life, Confucianism is considered a way of life rather than a religion. Confucianism emphasizes basic teachings about moral codes, manners, and etiquette, rooted in the Vietnamese mindset (Vuong et al., 2018). In Vietnamese culture, righteousness is key and refers to the responsibilities of the husband. Meanwhile, purity is highlighted and characterizes the Vietnamese wife's devotion (Vuong et al., 2018).

These core principles result in a form of gender hegemony prevalent in Vietnam, portraying men as superior providers, while women and their requisite premarital virginity is wrapped up in inherent subordination. Under the influences of Confucianism and Buddhism, feminine virginity and fragility are key. According to Hong et al. (2009), in Confucian and Buddhist doctrines, virginity is seen to be the most important standard in evaluating a woman's morality. Being a virgin before marriage is correct moral conduct for a girl who is becoming a young woman. Pressure on women to keep their virginity as a signifier of correct conduct maintains the subordinate position of Vietnamese women.

In Confucianism, shame is a crucial component and is an inevitable consequence of a misdeed, which violates the filial piety of a child to his/her parents or of a wife to her husband. A shameful violation means not taking "right action," which is also key to principles of Buddhist living and being (Vuong et al., 2018, p. 4). Shame is a common feeling for Vietnamese persons who have non-normative gender identities. It is also the feeling of a Vietnamese female whose virginity is taken against her wishes before marriage. Shame is a key and critical aspect of gender and sexuality and links to gender and sexual minorities who live in an oppressive society such as Vietnam, where heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity rule. This sense of shame links to theoretical framing of queer theory.

A personal take on queer theory

The fundamental foundations of queer theory are situated in the work of seminal queer theorists, including Michel Foucault (1978, 1989), Judith Butler (1993, 1999), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985, 1990, 1993). Queer theory emerged from liberal ideas of equality, building on feminism and other liberatory political movements concerned with identity categories and notions of how power is distributed (Watson, 2005). For de Lauretis (1991), queer theory focuses on issues of gendered and sexualized "normalities."

During the gay liberation movement in the west in the 1970s, queer theory burgeoned, transforming lesbian and gay studies (Jagose, 1996). The idea that gender and sexual identities are multiple, unstable, and unfixed (Minton, 1997) challenges binaries that have long been ingrained in conventional

gendered mindsets across cultures and religions. Common binaries include gay-straight, Black-White, heterosexual-homosexual, and male-female. To attack the core of these binaries and to liberate people from binarism requires an innovative understanding of freedom and power (Minton, 1997). In this regard, Minton notes that Foucault's work on power dynamics is fundamental to queer theory: In Foucault's (1978) *The History of Sexuality* he proposes that power should be considered in relation to freedom. Since power is a determinant of everything, and in every social and personal relationship freedom cannot operate outside of power, the objective of oppositional politics must be resistance. For me, Foucault's ideas resonate with what queer people always feel and grapple with. Deep down, I have always known that I belong to gender and sexual minority communities. Living in heteronormative Vietnamese society did not allow a sense of belonging, yet I had to prevent myself from feeling that I did not belong and from feeling othered. Resistance is the word that best describes my fight against the queerness within me. When I was younger, I learned to conform with heteronormative norms within my family and society, at school and beyond. I experienced difficulty being honest with my true self and with acknowledging my gender as non-normative and my sexuality as queer. My resistance to accepting my queerness was reflected through my "acting-straight" performances, such as using a low voice, wearing dull drab-coloured boys' clothing, using straight body gestures and postures, such as always standing tall and looking straight, and having no friendships with girls as a young boy. Queerness and abnormality are interchangeably used to describe othering of people in society where social and cultural norms have been constructed by a dominant heterosexist mindset. For example, boys' hair is cut short, and they play with boys and act cool by speaking louder and joining boisterous physical activities like sports, while girls are softer and pretty, and they wear skirts and have long silky hair with their nails done beautifully (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2007; Renold, 2007; Ringrose & Renold, 2012; Blaikie, 2018). By troubling these dominant conventional understandings of gender (Butler, 1999), queer theory centralizes its focus on gender fluidity. Queer theory highlights the lives of people with marginalized sexual identities who find themselves othered, as I was, within hegemonic social discourses (Minton, 1997).

In the early 1990s, Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick laid the theoretical foundations for queer theory and queer research (Butler, 1993, 1999), examining entangled links among gender, sex, and sexuality whereby, through repetitive acts over time, gender is re/performed. Butler shows how culture informs our understanding of biology by assuming the priority of gender. She argues that there is no such thing as a pre-cultural body: Identity is driven and framed by culture alongside words, language, clothing, and behaviour, which bring the body into being, and individuals are always already gendered before choosing for or against gender identities (Butler, 1993). For me, having to act like a straight boy in a traditional Vietnamese family meant I

was taught culturally to be and become a boy, a son, and a man. My gender performances aligned well with social and cultural conventions regarding boys and men's dressing and behaviour. Boys like me in Vietnam have always felt pressure to perform, including speaking, acting, and behaving as a straight, tough man. I faked my performances until they looked real and until I would not feel I was standing beyond gendered cultural conventions of appearance and behaviour.

Eve Sedgwick (1985, 1990, 1993) advocates for fluid forms of gender and sexuality. Together with Butler, Sedgwick (1993) asserts that the idea of shame necessitates resistance: Being queer and understanding queerness enables queer and non-queer people to acknowledge that human experiences are not monolithic. Shame is perceived as a motivation for transformation. Being queer is a form of stigma, captured in the expression "shame on you" (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 4). Common ideas during my queer childhood were bound up in values and beliefs such as "shame on you and your family/parents as they have a queer child like you." Turning stigma into transformational energy, I know now it is impossible to change who I am. It is more important to transform my queerness into a critically unique strength, into pride about who and what I am, which brings me to this auto-ethnographic approach.

Methodology

Autoethnography is a research methodology wherein one seeks to investigate and write about (graphy) personal experience (auto) situated with culture (ethno) in order to understand the self, contextualized by broader cultural and social phenomena (Jones et al., 2016). Methodologically, autoethnographers express themselves through their lived experiences through the lenses of social and cultural issues and conditions (Jones et al., 2016). I engage in autoethnography to explore and reflect on my personal experiences as a queer boy and man in Vietnamese heteronormative society, contextualized and framed by Vietnamese culture, masculinities, femininities, queer theory, and queerness. Over the course of several weeks I engaged in journaling, referring also to a journal I have kept since I was in Vietnam, living the life of a gay son. I reflect on the pressure that I experienced as first-born son in a traditional Vietnamese family and the expectation that I would continue our family's traditional heteronormativity. I also documented my experiences through photography, seeking out cultural artefacts and photographs to recall memories.

In analysis and interpretation of my data, I follow a narrative style of writing (Ellis, 2004) using storytelling and first-person voice to present my personal experiences as a frame and form of praxis for considering theory, context, and implications (Ellis, 2004). In my findings, I present vignettes that feature learning to perform as a straight boy in my family, grappling with the feeling of falling in love with a boy at school, and finally, disciplining myself

to behave as a straight male teacher at a Vietnamese college. I conclude by reflecting on where I am now, as a doctoral student in Canada, living as a queer man.

Findings

I, like other first-born sons in a Vietnamese family, felt pressure from my father to perform masculinity. I recall being the youngest boy in my large family in Vietnam. There were so many expectations for me as the first son who had to bear the responsibility to continue the family line. Literally, I could feel a lot of eyes watching over me. I was right in the spotlight, truly I was right there, in the centre (Figure 11.1). It was me, an adored innocent little boy, with immense pressure to be straight and upstanding in order to sustain the family lineage.

To be the first son carrying many expectations of the entire family, especially grandparents and parents, meant there was no room to express my non-normative gender identity: Being and performing queer is associated with weakness and femininity, categorized as subordinate to hegemonic



Figure 11.1 Born as the first son (photo by Giang Le).

masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) alongside femininity and being female. I became “the face” of my family, and in a Vietnamese conventional family, to protect the family’s dignity and values, the first son was brought up with the understanding that “there could be no worse fate than to bring shame upon the family” (Nguyen & Angelique, 2017, p. 1618). I understood how to perform my gender according to my parents’ desires. I dressed neatly and was not allowed to play with girls’ toys. There was the power of control and surveillance within the family that forced me to be obedient and submissive. I was forced to surrender to that power. Before coming to Canada for my graduate studies, I went to a photography studio to be photographed. I named the photograph of my pharynx in Figure 11.2 “Roughness” because it expresses male roughness and toughness. A biological male has a pharynx. It is true to say that physically I am always a man, but deep inside I am not and will never be, ultimately failing my family and their expectations of their first-born son. This photo resonates with me because it is a reminder of who I am, how I look, and how people see me through my appearance, although they don’t see my soul and spirit.

I was often told by my parents to conceal feminine characteristics, behaviours, and attitudes, such as speaking softly and smiling timidly. I dressed as a straight boy. My parents said that they felt ashamed when



Figure 11.2 Roughness (photo by Giang Le).

some of their friends, neighbours, and even their brothers and sisters complained about me acting weirdly like a girl. They were told they needed to teach me to be “straighter” like “a real boy.” Again, shame came up as a reminder of my gender-nonconforming identity. Shame has been a key theme of my life and the life of my parents having a queer son. “It’s a shame for your family to have a homo son like him. . . . You need to teach him to be straight. . . . Think of how he can marry a girl and continue the family lineage. . . . It’s unacceptable.” These complaints made me realize the extent of the pressure on both my parents and me, as we lived in an oppressive family and society, where Confucianism and Buddhism shape people’s behaviours, attitudes, mindsets, and lifestyles (Horton & Rydstrom, 2019).

Homosexuality is never associated with the idea of a good family. Following Confucianism and Buddhism, in Vietnam a good family refers to a monogamous and heterosexual couple who have at least two children, continuing the family line (Horton & Rydstrom, 2019), hopefully through the oldest son. The divine ability to keep the family lineage going is crucial in traditional Vietnamese family constructs. These philosophies of living, being, and parenting maintain their power over Vietnamese society, promoting internalized homophobia and destroying the self-esteem of LGBTQ individuals and their families (Nguyen & Angelique, 2017; Truitt, 2015).

In Vietnam, having a gay son is not easy for any parent, and growing up in a family of Vietnamese Confucianists and Buddhists with a homosexual identity was difficult for me as a son. It was certainly challenging for my mother to raise and accept a son with a gender-nonconforming identity. I believe my mother and I have one thing in common: shame. I feel shame that my mother is tortured by not having a heterosexual son to have grandchildren and continue the family line. As a gay son, it is shame for me to bear for my whole life. I could not be “a real boy” with hegemonic masculinity characteristics, such as looking and acting “straight” and getting married to a woman and having a straight son. Brought up with Confucianist and Buddhist ideologies, however, I question whether being dishonest about your true self is a righteous action. Further, getting an innocent woman involved in a marriage without true love can never be a righteous decision, since it causes significant suffering for both. These sufferings embody karma in Buddhism, which is the “spiritual principle of cause and effect where intentions and actions of a person (cause) will affect his future outcomes (effects)” (Vuong et al., 2018, p. 4). So, I learned as a child to place my family’s honour above my own sense of authentic gender and sexual identification, prioritizing my parents’ desires and giving them the power to make some critical decisions about my life, including marriage. It was me always feeling strangled and caught “in-between” letting my parents with those aggressive ideologies take control of my life and my soul and negotiating with them to retain a little power for myself.

Vignette 1: Remember you are a boy

I grew up with many reminders from my parents and relatives about being male. I did perform like that boy, a straight good boy, the first-born son in my family, but I have always known it was never truly me. Yes, I was born gay and I have always wanted to embrace and be embraced for being who I am.

Giang, you need to remember that you were born a boy, and you are the first son of this family lineage. I am not happy to see you play with girls . . . those are clothes for girls . . . cut your hair short today before your dad arrives home . . . I don't like your voice, it's too soft, lower your tone when you speak, that's how your dad speaks . . . keep your back straight and chest out, your hands move too much. No men walk like that . . . I am not happy when people ask me why you look and act like a girl. I feel ashamed having a son like you.

When I was a young boy, my mother often reminded me how to perform the boy who my father and she desired. She left many memos in my backpack or put some in my pocket so I would never forget who they expected me to become. It was a way that they educated me to look, speak, behave, walk, and play like "a real boy." I have to admit that it was quite effective in training my mindset, which somehow enforced masculinity on my behaviours and attitudes. However, now I can relate this parenting style to what Butler (1999) states about social conventions, such as dress and behaviour that enable people to perform their gender. It demonstrates how much my parents wanted me to perceive being male as my gender. Butler (1999) defines this as gender performativity, and through Asian parents' nurturing approaches, gender performativity could be taught. One day, my aunt visited. I felt uncomfortable right away when she entered my house and glared at me brutally from head to toe. I felt offended when she said to my mother:

Giang looks so girly . . . looking at his gestures and postures, he is like a girl not a boy. . . . His hair is so long, no boys have that long hair. Is he homo? You are raising your son homo. It's not acceptable at all! Does he like boys or girls? He must like to play with girls. You know what, many times I saw him play with my daughters pretending to be a princess. That's not normal for a boy in our family. You must talk to him and you must be tough with him. Tell him that he's a boy and he should not be allowed to be that way, so homo!

I never liked her, my aunt. She was always nosy and that was what she liked to do. Perhaps she did not like me either. I did not want to care about what she said about me, but my mother cared. She was not happy at all for what my aunt said about me, her only son. It was a shame for her and the

whole family for raising a gay son. She never accepted it, and will never accept me, as her son who was born gay by her. It is honestly not her choice to bear a gay child and not my choice to be born gay. It is certainly not how I have become; instead, it is who I am naturally, physically, sexually, and emotionally. Many times, I have felt guilty for what people, including relatives, said to my parents about me, being and acting gay. I took it my guilt, my flaw that I needed to conceal in order to protect my parents. Exactly, I was responsible for protecting my parents' pride, the pride of having a straight boy.

Vignette 2: He was my crush

For four years at secondary school, he sat right next to me. He was a very cute guy and he was quite popular among girls not only in my class but also in other classes. I did not like girls around him. They were always flirting with him. I thought they were bitches. I did not like him to smile at them. He was cool when he smiled though. I gradually understood that it was perceived to be normal for schoolboys, like him, and those hot chicks to be flirting. Flirting maintains a regime of compulsory heterosexuality as students acquire social status, positioning themselves "at the top of the hierarchy or pecking order of masculinities and femininities" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2007, p. 356). They establish a hierarchical power relationship at school, and at my school there was no place for homosexuality in that hierarchical system.

I knew that my crush was a cool boy performing hegemonic masculinity. Following Swain (2006), this is idealized form of behaviour for boys to express their manliness. My crush had hegemonic masculine features, such as a high haircut, nice and sharp jawline, attractive smile, and sporty body shape with a big chest and good height. He also played sports like soccer and basketball with other boys. He had a good sense of humor too. He made girls laugh with his stories, but mostly with his beautiful smile, he melted every heart including mine. I was placed next to him during my secondary schooling, and that was one of the best things I could ask. Who knew a gay boy losing his heart to one of the hottest boys at the school could have the best chance to get to know that handsome boy so well? However, I was not sure how to begin a conversation with him. Everyone in my class knew about my gayness through my clothing, speaking, and socializing. I preferred colourful clothes, unisex outfits and accessories, a soft voice, and acting cute like a girl. I had many girls as friends during my schooling; we treated each other like sisters. Kids were very sensitive about everything. My crush knew it too undoubtedly. Unlike other boys, he was always gentle to me, treating me with sweetness and kindness. I felt I was his girlfriend for real. Probably that was just my fantasy that we were a real couple. That was my fantasy about a boy's love and about my first love.

Admittedly, when I was a schoolboy between 1997 and 2000, male homoerotic relationships and stories were not popular, especially in Vietnam, although currently, in contemporary social media, boys' love has started to receive young generations' growing interest in the beautiful boys' romantic love narratives on YouTube and other non-mainstream and mainstream channels, such as Facebook and TV reality shows (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). While my homoerotic feeling for a straight boy was not really acceptable, I enjoyed the fantasy that he would love me back one day. We were very close in class, and we were good friends. He drove me home quite often after school. I sat behind him on his bicycle. From behind, I could see his big shoulders, which made me feel safe and warm. I loved every moment with him. At those moments, there was only him and me in this world. I did not want him to know my special feelings for him, so I always pretended to be a little mean to him. I was behaving like a girl who was jealous about her boyfriend being nice and close to another girl. I liked to scratch him very hard on his hands and neck using my nails or a pen. Sometimes, I bit him too. He smiled, thinking I was childish. Ironically, all I wanted was to have his attention, just like a girl crazily in love doing silly things for her crush's attention. I concealed my real feelings for him. Being mean to him protected my secret homoerotic love, which I knew was taboo at my Vietnamese high school.

There was one time I remember he said to me that he liked me because I looked cute. It was confusing and overwhelming for me because I didn't know if he really liked me or simply treated me kindly, as his younger brother. Or even worse, he just felt sorry observing me being treated badly at school by other boys. For my whole time at school, whatever he did, he was always my crush, the only one who was so nice and sweet to me, a gay boy. Of course, he was just part of my memory as a queer boy fantasizing about a romantic love with a straight attractive boy. He belongs to that beautiful memory of my adolescence.

Vignette 3: Teaching and being straight

Being a gay male teacher in Vietnam is tough. Given the fear of discrimination, dismissal, school and community rejection, and career restrictions, many gender and sexual minority teachers have felt compelled to hide their real gender and sexuality (Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Hooker, 2019). Understanding my divergent gender identity, I always had a fear of exposing my queerness to colleagues and students. Being queer was never allowed in Vietnamese educational settings, especially in higher education, such as at a teacher training college, where I was a college lecturer of English as a second language for Vietnamese students.

For two years at this very traditional college, I pretended to be a straight male teacher to my colleagues, who were all women, and my students. And yes, having a son who was now a college teacher was a source of huge pride for my parents. I needed to protect that pride. Deep inside, I was so sickened

by that image, an image of a real male teacher at my college. It was difficult hiding my gayness, which came through my voice, body gestures, and postures. I was afraid of being found out. I needed to learn to control my queer gender performances. I tried very hard to look strict and tough. I believed toughness represented the masculinity of a straight male teacher. Hence, I became very strict with my students, making them scared of me and, at the same time, I felt safe. I learned that making people afraid of you is a good way to hide your vulnerability.

I did not like my colleagues, as I felt they were always curious about me and I was an alien in that community. I was young and obviously not a normal-looking male teacher like all male teachers they'd ever met. I did not like the way they looked at me at every Monday staff meeting. I often held back from those women and wished they couldn't see me. They said I had a weird voice, it sounded too soft, like a girl's voice. They said I was too gentle, sometimes acting like a girl who was shy when someone called her name. They said I could not stand up straight with my chest open like a man. There had to be something wrong with me and I was hiding it away from them, so they wanted to know what it was. It was true that I never felt a sense of belonging in that professional community. It was not safe for me.

One day I felt very offended when the dean of my department of English spoke to me at the Monday meeting in front of other colleagues that some girl students reported that they saw me often go to the girls' washrooms. I was shocked and embarrassed. I felt like somebody just took off my skin, the skin that covered my real identity as a gay teacher. I felt brutally exposed in front of their eyes. I could feel I was shamefully drowned in those eyes. I knew they were waiting to see me exposed and outed with my real queer gender identity. I was not that stupid to go to the girls' washrooms. It never happened, as I was always cautious about my gender performances. I did not know how the dean came up with this untrue allegation about me. However, she did humiliate me in front of other people successfully. She was also successful in destroying my identity as a teacher when she said that I did not have the dignity of a teacher, and I should not have been a teacher. She and other colleagues were so successful in sensing something wrong with me, my queerness. The hurt was real.

Conclusion

I contextualized queer theory in relation to Vietnamese Confucianism and Buddhism and my own experiences growing up as a queer boy in Vietnam. According to Sedgwick (1993), queerness is seen as a site for discourse, for challenging heterosexist hegemony and, as such, queerness is a source of transformational energy. Butler (1993) situates queer as a sense of difference, strangeness, and nonconformity. A sense of being queer goes beyond homosexuality. Queer theory and queer studies speak to the power of truth, speaking truth to power, challenging notions of hegemony and normativity, oppression, and repression. Queer theory speaks to the power of resistance.

Central to this autoethnography, I presented my personal life story as a gay child, a gay boy, and a gay teacher through three vignettes. I narrated the ways that I was taught to behave, live, and perform as a real boy, as expected by my parents. This parenting approach has been shaped by Confucian and Buddhist ideologies that emphasize shame and filiality in Vietnamese traditional family (Horton, 2014, 2019; Horton & Rydstrom, 2019; Nguyen, 2008; Do & Brennan, 2015; Truitt, 2015; Nguyen, 2016). The second vignette presented my memory of falling in love with a straight boy at school. I fantasized about loving a boy by acting like a girl trying to have her crush's attention. The last vignette was about my unpleasant experience performing as a straight male teacher at a Vietnamese college. I revisited some critical moments in which I felt hurt, offended, and rejected for my nonconforming gender identity. Collegial support and recognition are important for homosexual teachers to feel included in school and professional communities (Hooker, 2019).

Moving from Asia to the West, I have contemplated my queerness as something that might inspire transformational energy (Sedgwick, 1985, 1990, 1993). Now, in Canada, I am able to be myself. I am proud to be a gay man and a gay scholar, enjoying the journey of self-exploration. The process is incomplete. I know being queer involves being open to change. I do not see my journey and life in Canada as a way to escape what I experienced in the past in Vietnam. It is my choice to be open to something new, something I have never done before. Here, in Canada, at my university, young people approached me for warm hugs after a guest lecture on queer theory and what it has meant to me to have lived a queer life in Vietnam. I felt a sense of acceptance and belonging when, for the first time, I have felt included, living the transnational life of a Vietnamese queer student researcher in Canada. I am embraced for who I truly am and for the queerness I was born with.

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