

BREAKING THE SILENCE: LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCES
OF GAY AND LESBIAN EDUCATORS IN THE PREDOMINANTLY
HETERONORMATIVE SPACE OF K-12 SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Gay and lesbian teachers must constantly weigh the consequences regarding the disclosure of their sexuality (i.e. “coming out”) at school with their desire to fully integrate with colleagues and students, while trying to remain regarded as an effective educator that is not a threat to the children they teach. The primary purpose of this study was to describe and increase the understanding of the experiences that gay and lesbian educators have while working in predominantly heteronormative institutions. The study itself was qualitative in nature and relied on a phenomenological method using a series of three semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006) to gain knowledge of participants’ life history, their experiences working as gay or lesbian teachers, and the meaning they made of those experiences as they relate to heteronormative social structures that drive views and attitudes toward sexuality in schools. By analyzing participant stories through a lens of queer phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006), I hoped to understand how these teachers were orienting themselves toward the heteronormative spaces in which they worked, and oftentimes in the process, consequently dis-orienting themselves away from the gay or lesbian component of their identities. The three overall themes that emerged were (1) Orienting One’s Way Inside and Outside of the Educational Closet; (2) Re-Orientation - Being the Good (Gay or Lesbian) Teacher; (3) and Teaching While Gay or Lesbian – Fear and (Dis)Orientation. Although numerous similar studies have been performed, many of those studies have been exclusive of more socio-politically conservative areas such as that of the current study.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Elizabeth Jinright, and my father, the late Harry Jinright. You both instilled the importance of education in me from the first grade. You always set high expectations and supported me in every area of my life. Thank you for teaching me the importance of responsibility, hard work, and organization. Thank you most of all for loving me unconditionally. My only regret is that you, Daddy, did not get to see me graduate in person with my fourth degree. However, I know that you will be watching from the best seat in the house. So I will say this one time especially for you. Roll Tide, Daddy! I miss you terribly. I love you both more than I can ever say.

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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Most non-heterosexuals do not live and work in gay spaces; rather, they live and work in straight spaces where they face prejudice, discrimination, and other forms of violence (Bell & Valentine, 1995). Schools throughout the country employ some very talented, dedicated, and caring teachers. One may be a music teacher who was once an aspiring Metropolitan Opera singer, a physical education teacher who pushes every child to do their best, or a science nerd turned physics teacher. They are just the types of teachers that any parent would want their children to have. However, some of them may have one little secret that could change everything. They are gay or lesbian. Why should that matter? It should not. But for many gay and lesbian teachers, unlike their straight colleagues, their sexuality matters tremendously to their professional lives. Bell and Valentine (1995) claim that “heterosexing of space is a performative act naturalized through repetition – and destabilized by the mere presence of invisibilized sexualities” (p. 18). Thus, gay and lesbian teachers must constantly weigh the consequences regarding the disclosure of their sexuality (i.e. “coming out”) at school with their desire to fully integrate with colleagues and students, while trying to remain regarded as an effective educator that is not a threat to the children they teach.

Everyone knows that teachers have no personal life, right? They go to work to teach, go home to grade papers, and then do it all over again the next day. I remember how strangely exciting it was when I was younger to see one of my teachers out in public doing things that

“real” people do, like buying groceries, shopping for clothes, or going to a movie. It was a rare occurrence, indeed. After becoming a teacher myself, I began to understand why I rarely saw my teachers in public places. Chances are they chose to frequent places where they knew they were not likely to run into students, or even other colleagues for that matter; it was an issue of privacy.

Even more bizarre than realizing that my teachers were “real” people was the realization that some of them had children of their own. Wait a minute. They are not supposed to have children. The students are the children for whom they are supposed to care. How did they get those children anyway? Certainly, they did not...no...I cannot think about them doing *that*. The notion of the teacher, specifically female teachers, as asexual stems from strict Victorian societal beliefs that still influence the view of the female teacher as caring but asexual in nature (King, 2004). If the female teacher acts or appears in any way that contradicts the heteronormative ideal female, she is at risk of being presumed lesbian. Likewise, if a male teacher, who is already doing what has traditionally been labeled as “women’s work” (King, 2004, p. 123), does not embody the traditional heterosexual male qualities, he risks being presumed gay. Although teachers have historically been thought of as asexual, their sexuality is ascribed to them by the very processes and spaces in which they work.

For teachers who are gay or lesbian, privacy often proves to be an even more important issue due to commonly held negative societal beliefs about persons identifying as anything other than heterosexual, the palpable possibility of them losing their jobs, and/or the threat of violence. So what happens gay and lesbian teachers decide to commit to “radical honesty,” what DeJean (2007) describes as “conducting their professional responsibilities in a way that consistently

reveal[s] the truth¹ about their lives” (p. 63)? And oppositely, what happens when they, for any number of reasons, choose not to do so?

Problem

Although intended to primarily prepare students academically, schools also function as institutions of socialization. The social norms taught as part of a “hidden curriculum” (a topic that I will address later) affect not only gay and lesbian students but also gay and lesbian teachers who are expected to support those norms. Such expectations create spaces of inclusion for some and exclusion for others. Thus, for those teachers who are gay or lesbian, the decision to come out at work is a complex one that is guided by both personal fears and principles. According to DeJean (2004), fear of homophobia is cited most often by teachers as one of the factors influencing their decision to come out to students and/or colleagues or remain in the educational closet. DeJean (2004) describes how this “taxonomy of fear” (p. 20) causes some teachers to isolate themselves from both colleagues and students, except when interaction is absolutely necessary. Endo, Reece-Miller, and Santavicca (2010) and Rudoe (2010) found that such teachers, regardless of whether the assumptions about their sexuality were true, claimed to be victims of assumptive homophobia because they did not fit heteronormative gender stereotypes. In other words, based on assumptions about their sexuality, some gay and lesbian teachers reported experiencing derogatory comments and/or various forms of discrimination.

Likewise, Rudoe (2010) reports that gay and lesbian teachers often express difficulty in trying to combat homophobia in the school due to the negative perceptions and beliefs about gay

¹ Although DeJean (2007), as well as some of the participants in this study use the word “truth” when referring to being open or out about their sexual orientation in the workplace. Likewise, some of the participants use the word “true” when referring to their whole identity, or the identity that they recognize as “I” or “me.” Thus, as these words appear throughout this study, I in no way mean to imply that coming out equates to telling the truth. Nor do I intend to imply that remaining in the closet in some way denotes a false identity. After all, Ahmed (2006) explains that the closet is itself an orientation device that allows one to re-orient oneself to (to survive in, if one will) a heteronormative space.

and lesbian persons being a larger societal issue. Even though legislation and local policies exist in some areas to prevent harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation, some teachers are still wary of coming out due to a lack of administrative support and/or a pervasive notion that homosexuality is wrong (Brockenbrough, 2012; Ferfolja, 2007; Rudoe, 2010). Additionally, even though some gay and lesbian educators are fortunate enough to have supportive administrators and/or colleagues, the knowledge and understanding of influential constituents regarding the importance of such support is lacking in general. These constituents most often are not aware of how the lack of support affects these educators both personally and professionally and/or may not care.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to describe and increase the understanding of the experiences that gay and lesbian educators have while working in predominantly heteronormative institutions. Using semi-structured interviews, I hoped to learn from other gay and lesbian teachers' stories regarding their experiences in the classroom. In so doing, I sought to determine how these teachers negotiated what some felt were opposing components of their identities, those being teacher and sexuality. Through the contribution of their stories to literature widely read by influential stakeholders, I aimed to educate those stakeholders and to advocate for support and protection of gay and lesbian teachers against harassment and discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

Research Questions

In fulfilling the purpose of this study, I sought answers to the following phenomenological question: What is it like to be a gay or lesbian teacher in the predominantly heteronormative spaces created within K-12 educational institutions? Related to my overall

question were the following questions: How do gay and lesbian teachers choose whether or not to disclose their sexuality in the workplace? How do they understand their choices as affecting them personally and professionally? How do their choices affect the ways in which they interact with students and colleagues? How are these individual issues related to the larger societal structures that govern gender and sexuality in schools? To answer these questions, I conducted a series of semi-structured, phenomenological interviews and analyzed the participants' experiential data through a queer phenomenological lens.

Significance

Endo et al. (2010) report that a gap in the literature still exists regarding how gay and lesbian teachers construct their teacher identity and in turn negotiate that identity with their sexual identity in spaces constructed as heterosexual. The majority of the research that exists which addresses the effects of homophobia and sexism on gay and lesbian teachers has not been published in professional educational journals, which are widely read by a larger, more diverse group of educational stakeholders (Endo et al., 2010). As such, "gay and lesbian educators remain hidden, invisible, marginalized, [and] ignored" (Duke, 2007, p. 34). Additionally, researchers have called for an examination of gay and lesbian educational issues in the U.S. throughout more geographical regions (DeJean, 2007; Endo et al., 2010). Such studies would indicate how regional differences affect teachers' decisions to come out of the closet. DeJean (2007) specifically identifies a need to study larger, more varied groups, which include teachers in both public and parochial schools. Moreover, King (2004) suggests that research is needed which examines the effects that internalization of societal expectations has on *all* teachers. Brockenbrough (2012), in particular, points to a need for more study on the relationship between homophobia and the expectation to perform hegemonic masculinity, as it specifically relates to

the “gender-mediated culturally relevant pedagogies” of black male teachers (p. 759).

Gay and lesbian teachers have been some of the most vulnerable and heavily scrutinized individuals of the gay and lesbian community due to the historical lack of support by professional organizations contesting social norms, the expectation of teachers to serve as examples for students, the fear that homosexual teachers recruit students to become homosexuals, and the low status assigned to a profession historically dominated by women. Graves (2009) posits that, based on analysis of historical information in this area, teachers are excellent indicators for understanding "how political-economic changes influence sexual identity" (p. xiii). Moreover, she maintains:

...schools are critical institutions for maintaining or challenging dominant ideology, and teachers occupy the most critical positions in schools. To control teachers is to control the dominant ideology...to free teachers from antigay discrimination is a crucial step in dismantling homophobia in our society" (Graves, 2009, p. xvii).

This is part of the reason that I see my research with teachers as so important.

In addition to the knowledge base built by conducting such studies, researchers have found that their subjects often benefit directly by participating. For example, such studies allow the stories of gay and lesbian teachers, who might otherwise feel silenced (DeJean, 2007; Endo et al., 2010) in heterosexualized spaces, to be heard. DeJean (2007) also claims that including gay and lesbian educators in research studies provides an excellent opportunity for them to network with other gay and lesbian teachers, thereby possibly decreasing a sense of isolation. Moreover, Endo et al. (2010) specifically note that research methods which allow participants to openly share ideas and concerns with other gay and lesbian teachers, many for the first time, appear to provide a somewhat therapeutic effect for the participants.

Educational institutions are also in a very powerful position to potentially change the way society views and treats sexual minorities (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010). Legislation and

policies put into place to prevent harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation are not sufficient, particularly when ignored. To combat the broader societal homophobic views and their material effects, radical and systemic changes in school culture must be made (Brockenbrough, 2012; Rudoe, 2010). By providing pre-service programs that include diversity training (Mayo, 2008) and preparation for inclusion and the questioning/challenging of gender and sexual identity constructions of society (Endo et al., 2010), colleges and universities can begin to cultivate teachers and administrators who understand the importance of promoting professional and inclusive working and learning environments for *all* teachers and students (Mayo, 2010). The provision of similar forms of professional development within individual schools by educational leaders would allow faculty members time for self-reflection and equip them with the tools necessary to respond rationally (Mayo, 2010) when presented with situations involving harassment and/or discrimination.

Finally, continuing research that highlights issues associated with homophobia and sexism is necessary, if we are to “empower gay and lesbian educators, students and families” (Duke, 2007, p. 34). Research and education create a space in which alliances between intersecting differences are possible (e.g., alliances between gay and straight, white and non-white, male and female, able bodied and disabled). Audre Lorde (2007), for example, invites any (women) who are willing to stand with her and use their anger as “power to examine and to redefine the terms upon which we will live and work... power to envision and to reconstruct, anger by painful anger, stone upon heavy stone” to move “beyond objectification and guilt” (p. 133). Although Lorde is speaking primarily about the potential constructive use of anger in response to racism when she speaks of the problems of society not being ones of anger but of hate, she could very easily be speaking to the issues related to gender, sexual orientation, class,

ability, or any other area where oppression of individuals may occur. In other words, here is the potential for the political, social, and economic to intersect to bring about change. Unfortunately, such alliances are not always formed. That is also why it is important to advocate for support and equal rights for all. Ahmed (2006) claims that queer phenomenology “involve[s] an orientation toward queer, a way of inhabiting the world by giving ‘support’ to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place. (p. 179). Thus, the framework of queer phenomenology, through which I approach this study, is also important.

In Chapter 2, I present a review of literature that is relevant to my study. I begin with a description of how schools have been created as gendered spaces which further reinforce heterosexuality as the accepted norm. I then discuss how spatial and social structures are related to the establishment/enforcement of dominant ideologies such as homonormativity, including the relationship between bodies, spaces (public, private, queer), and identities. I also provide a brief historical account of how queer teachers came to be regarded as a threat to children and the resulting demonization and persecution of those teachers. Finally, through the examination of studies performed by other researchers, I present the effects that all of these issues continue to have on queer teachers both personally and professionally.

In Chapter 3, I begin by summarizing the pilot study which served as a precursor to this dissertation project. I then review the phenomenological research question that guided the study and follow with a description of the theoretical framework through which I worked to answer that question. I also explain how I identified participants for the study, how I designed the research, and how I addressed the concepts of trustworthiness, validity, privacy, and confidentiality. Finally, I explain how I analyzed the participant interview data.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings based on the analysis of participant data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. The chapter begins with a brief personal profile of each participant to allow the reader to get to know the participants and the context from which their stories originated. The remainder of the chapter is organized based on the three broad themes that emerged from data analysis. Those themes were (1) Orienting One's Way Inside and Outside of the Educational Closet; (2) Re-Orientation - Being the Good (Gay or Lesbian) Teacher; (3) and Teaching While Gay or Lesbian – Fear and (Dis)Orientation.

In Chapter 5, I begin with a discussion of the data that was presented in Chapter 4. I include factors that made up the complexity of coming out at school for the participants. I also examine how the participants struggled to be role models and advocates while navigating the sensitive areas of sex and sexuality in schools. I end with a discussion of identity, performativity, and (dis)orientation.

In Chapter 6, I highlight the implications that this study has for gay and lesbian teachers. I then offer recommendations for legislation changes, local school/district policy and practice, future research, and queer teachers. Finally, I present a conclusion.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will present a review of literature that is relevant to my study. I will begin with a description of how schools have been created as gendered spaces which further reinforce the notion of heterosexual as the accepted norm for both teachers and students. I will then discuss how spatial and social structures are related to the establishment/enforcement of dominant ideologies such as homonormativity, including the relationship between bodies, spaces (public, private, queer), and identities. I will also provide a brief historical account of how gay and lesbian teachers came to be regarded as a threat to children and the resulting persecution of those teachers. Through the examination of studies performed by other researchers, I will present the effects that all of these issues continue to have on gay and lesbian teachers both personally and professionally. Finally, I will point to how the current study responds to gaps in the literature regarding gay and lesbian teachers, particularly in more socially conservative areas.

Schools as Gendered Spaces - Oriented Toward Heteronormativity

Schools are regarded primarily as institutions of learning, places we send our children to be formally educated in academic subjects such as language arts, mathematics, science, and history. However, woven throughout the fabric of the formal curriculum, there exists an informal “hidden curriculum” that serves to educate students in a variety of social mores. Specifically, schools serve as institutions whereby students are socialized in gender based on societal definitions (Lee, Marks, & Byrd, 1994). In other words, spaces are created where girls learn what it means to be girls, while boys learn what it means to be boys. Research has shown that because

of a persisting male-dominated culture and heteronormative ideals, girls and boys each experience and navigate this course very differently (Adams, Schmitke, & Franklin, 2005; Best, 2004; Bettis & Adams, 2006; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004; Fine, 1988; Fordham, 1993; Henry, 1998; Roberts-Morris, 2004).

Schools function as gendered spaces in a variety of ways, including how they separate girls from boys by influencing and/or controlling their participation in certain classes and activities. Such practices, Pascoe (2007) claims, not only “reflect heteronormative gender difference; they actually affirm its value and centrality to social life” (p. 40). Cousins (2007) and Smyth and Darmody (2009) found that the choices students make regarding which courses to take, particularly for girls, are often influenced by conventions of “harder” courses being for males and “easier” courses being for females. Sports also highlight the gendered nature of schools, as some are traditionally viewed as “male” and others as “female.” McDowell (1999), in her discussion of bodies in space and place, highlights a case study performed by Judith Okely, wherein she explains how the use of the body differs between male and female sports. Male sports generally require direct physical contact and use of the entire body against opponents, whereas female sports generally do not. Adams et al. (2005) note, for example, that even though there have been changes in cultural signifiers of femininity, the majority of society is still not comfortable with the female athlete, as she does not fit the heteronormative ideal of femininity. They further claim that this departure from the heteronormative ideal, coupled with the homophobic discourse surrounding girls’ athletics which often labels female athletes as lesbians, makes navigating these spaces even more difficult for adolescent girls. As such, girls recognize that they must also act in ways that promote their “girly” image, thereby proving both their heterosexuality and femininity (Adams et al., 2005). Incidentally, it is evident by the girls’ desire

to avoid the homosexual label that they have learned additional informal lessons regarding the negative connotations associated with homosexuality.

Certain other school-related activities also allow girls to exercise their “girl power” and negotiate their feminine identities in ways that would not normally be possible in the regular school setting, one such way being through participating in cheerleading. Identifying a theme of the cheerleader as a signifier of a school leader, Bettis and Adams (2006) noted that one of the main reasons girls wanted to be a cheerleader was to gain popularity, thereby being seen as more attractive to the boys. Thus, we have the beginning notions of a discourse of sexual desire, discussed by Fine (1988) as being forbidden in schools. By permitting girls to publicly “try on a womanly [i.e. sexual] identity” (Bettis & Adams, 2006, p. 127), girls start to become aware of the advantages and power associated with being more visible in a sexy feminine way and learn to negotiate those advantages in terms of their own sexuality. Additionally, “cheerleading operate[s] as a discursive practice that affirm[s] heterosexualized femininity” (Bettis & Adams, 2006, p. 127). In other words, girls are not just learning how they are supposed to act in order to be read as feminine; they are specifically learning how heterosexual females are supposed to act.

Another event allowing girls to explore the concept of body image and what it means to their own expression of femininity is the prom, a “project of self-change...[that is]...central to their being and becoming feminine” (Best, 2004, p. 196). In other words, the prom is viewed as important to girls’ enlightenment about what it means to be female. Ideologically, the prom is another way that schools “uphold gender and heterosexual norms” (Best, 2004, p. 199). Although the views and restrictions have been challenged and changed in some places, the prom remains reserved for heterosexual couples in most others, and educators (including the gay and lesbian ones) are expected to adhere to such policies.

Although the previous examples primarily refer to how girls are affected by gender norms, the boys are by no means let off the hook. Pascoe (2007) uses her notion of “fag discourse” to explain how a boy can be labeled a fag for acting in any way perceived as contrary to the normative masculine ideal, regardless of whether or not his heterosexuality is actually in question. In this context, fag discourse is used by boys to discipline their behaviors (i.e. compel them to behave in a masculine way) in certain spaces. Although she describes certain spaces where fag discourse ceases to exist (e.g., drama productions), Pascoe notes society’s strong compulsion toward heterosexuality which pressures males to continuously prove their masculinity. Unfortunately, one of the ways in which boys prove their masculinity is by talking about their heterosexuality and their ability to dominate girls’ bodies, an issue which has also recently been very visible during arguments against the nomination of alleged sexual abuser, Brett Kavanaugh, to the U.S. Supreme Court. In describing masculinity (to which one can easily add, femininity) as a “process rather than a social identity associated with specific bodies” (p. 5), Pascoe makes the point that gender is not something that is natural but is rather a set of labels constructed by society. It is the challenges of these labels by certain individuals that tend to disturb normative society.

School has been described as producing spaces in which heterosexuality is both expected (Roberts-Morris, 2004) and assumed (Charles, 2010) to be the orientation of all its constituents, students and teachers. As such, individuals who do not identify with the heterosexual norm are forced to try and constitute their masculinity or femininity within the existing heteronormative discourses. Roberts-Morris (2004) claims that this type of heterosexism discriminates against students and/or teachers who may be struggling with their own sexuality, adding that even in the most progressive schools, homophobia and heterosexism still prevail. Unfortunately, even

though the teachers should be the advocates who squelch homophobic language and actions, they often do not do so for fear of being accused of promoting alternative sexual orientations or possibly being labeled or “outed” as homosexuals themselves.

When considering the overall gendered nature of schools, the message is very clear. While many of the “lessons” learned in school are helpful to some students in negotiating not only their sexual/gender identities but also their social identities, they can also be harmful to others who do not identify with the heterosexual norm. Lack of intervention on the part of schools to protect all students and teachers from homophobia serves only to perpetuate the idea that if sexuality is to be “done” at all, *heterosexuality is the way to do it*. This not only affects students but also teachers. It affects the way the bodies of teachers are viewed, specifically the bodies of gay and lesbian teachers. It also influences the way those bodies affect and are affected by the heteronormative space of schools. And finally, it determines how some gay and lesbian teachers balance the personal and professional components of their identities.

Spaces, Bodies, and Identities

A space is not simply where one is or where things happen. Harvey (2001) tends to use the term “space” to mean place imbued by the social, whereas Soja (1989) seems to view space as dialectically related to the social. Thus, space is what is created by or creates specific social circumstances. Likewise, spaces can both shape and be shaped by the bodies that inhabit them. Related to the space of schools, the socialization that occurs can have material effects on both students and teachers. For example, the bodies of gay and lesbian students may not “fit” into those spaces and may consequently need to change in some way to “line up” with the heteronormative expectations relating to gender and sexuality. Otherwise, those individuals may suffer certain discriminatory consequences or endure otherwise homophobic behaviors.

McDowell (1999) defines the body as the place of the individual and as taking up space. Likewise, Simonsen (2012) says the body *is* space and also *produces* the space it inhabits. McDowell further describes bodies as being malleable or taking on different forms and shapes in different spaces. Relatedly, Ahmed (2006) describes how some spaces allow certain bodily extension while other spaces do not. How the body is presented to or viewed by others depends on spaces in which it is located. Simonsen (2012) describes the critical phenomenological view of the body, mind, materiality, ideality, meaning, and matter as all being inseparable. As such, the experience of otherness can become embodied by individuals through the production of their body as suspect, out of place, or as a site of stress. So how does this happen?

Our lived spatio-temporal bodies, according to Ahmed (2006), serve as the starting point from which our individual world extends and thus become oriented in response to the world around them. That orientation, she explains, involves the alignment of our body to space. To do so, we use things that are familiar to us such as certain social arrangements. Ahmed (2006) explains, “We are ‘in line’ when we face the direction that is already faced by others. Being ‘in line’ allows bodies to extend into spaces that...have already taken their shape” (p. 11). She further describes how societal pressure to line up with a certain way of life “can feel like a physical ‘press’ on the surface of the body” and create “stress points” (p. 16), points that have irreversible effects. For example, in order to “straighten up” or “line up” in an effort to extend into a heteronormative space, a gay person may position their body a certain way, change their voice, or dress their body in a particular way that is contrary to their nature.

The main way bodies get marked is by their differences from other bodies. These differences lead to categorizations, disciplinary actions, and exclusions of certain bodies from certain spaces. When we start to feel uncomfortable with “other” bodies, we start drawing lines

between us/them, normal/deviant, acceptable/unacceptable. It is then that we begin to justify in our own mind the violence we enact on those bodies.

Thus, the body is also a surface that can be affected by social and political practices, as it serves a boundary between one place and another, a boundary formed by relations of power (McDowell, 1999). McDowell also notes that since the body is seen as marking physical differences between women and men, as well having strong links to sexuality and sexual behavior, bodily differences have been used for social discrimination and disadvantage. In fact, “the association with or confinement to the body and its physicality of certain groups...is the basis of inequality and oppression” (McDowell, 1999, p. 47). Since bodies are constructed primarily as sexual, they are viewed as having no place at work. The teacher, for example, is not supposed to be acknowledged as even having a body. What this really means is that he/she is supposed to have a particular kind of body – a heterosexual body. So how is a particular kind of body produced?

Through a historical account of attitudes toward and beliefs about the origins of homosexuality, Endsjø (2008) explains how normative sexuality has been historically associated with a geographical center (a more civilized geography), while what is perceived as sexual deviancy has been associated with a geographical periphery (a less civilized geography). The major line of thinking perpetuated in the Western world has been that non-normative sexual behavior comes from “other” people and cultures on its geographical peripheries as opposed to already existing within its own boundaries. Endsjø (2008) claims that “when boundaries between the geographical center and periphery were drawn, the emphasis on aberrant sexuality would repeatedly be placed in the foreground” (p. 19). Soja (1989) addresses the same issue with his concept of the socio-spatial dialectic. He says that space is organized into dominant centers and

subordinate peripheries. Because the structures of center-periphery and the social relations of production have the same origins, they “are not only homologous...but are also dialectically inseparable” (Soja, 1989, p. 78). In other words, the interdependent production of the spatial and the social work through ideologies and politics to produce specific types of bodies and material effects on those bodies (i.e. bodies relegated to the peripheries, exploited, allowed/not allowed to extend into specific spaces, and/or subjected to violences).

Just as Puar (2007) states that the queer may be afforded some type of temporary acceptance, provided that he is able to fit into a certain context of normativity (e.g., acting straight), Ahmed (2006) says that we fit in or “become straight by ‘lining up’ with lines already given” (p. 23). For example, she claims that this is how “compulsory heterosexuality operates as a straightening device, which re-reads signs of queer desire as deviations from the straight line” (p. 23). Since, as Rubin (1993) claims, the body cannot be separated from sexuality, the gay or lesbian body is often automatically seen as a sexual body. This body as a sexual body becomes very political and outside the normative. As such it becomes something not to be tolerated, something about which to remain silent (Rubin, 1993). Sedgwick (1993) claims, however, that an “incoherence” surrounds the issue of silence and argues that society wants it both ways. Gays and lesbians are expected to remain “in the closet” (i.e. secretive/private) regarding their actions. Many in society do not want to talk about or know what they do; however, there is also a desire or need to know on society’s part, so that the lives and bodies of gays and lesbians can be regulated politically. It is through this incoherence of silence that such bodies are produced as deviant, and the violence against those bodies justified and allowed to occur.

We can also use Harvey’s (2001) definition and description of the corporate state as well as Foucault’s (1995) concept of Panopticism to understand how certain types of bodies are

produced in education. Harvey defines the corporate state as an intervention to promote economic stability and distributive justice and describes it as a sociopolitical organization of hierarchically ordered interlocking institutions, the goal of which is to promote the national interest. Likewise, Foucault (1995) describes Panopticism as a way to arrange power more economically and effectively “to strengthen the social forces – to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of morality; to increase and multiply.” Both the corporate state and Panopticism go about the business of making useful individuals and getting the maximum time and force out of bodies. Under such systems of what Harvey would describe as benevolent bureaucracy, education becomes purely an investment in manpower with graduates being viewed as commodities.

Binnie (1997) might, however, question exactly what kind of graduates and social interests are being produced, promoted, and protected. He argues that heterosexism is continually reproduced through the dominant notion of space as being “naturally” heterosexual. Given our culture’s “suspicion and squeamishness around sex and sexuality” (Binnie, 1997, p. 225), discussions of the embodiment of sexuality tend to generate fear, thereby allowing the issue of homophobia to remain hidden. Salient to the current study is the fact that teachers are expected to have a certain type of body (i.e. heterosexual) that is capable of being consumed in the production (both academically and socially) of potentially productive (and heterosexual) students.

Likewise, the spaces that are produced within educational institutions are also instrumental in the production of teachers’ identities. Massey (1994) writes that even as personal identities can be described as multiple and changing, so can identities of place. Quoting Chantal Mouffe, she asserts, “But we are in fact always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants

of a diversity of communities...constructed by a variety of discourses and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those positions” (p. 8). In other words, as McDowell (1999) notes, bodies are associated with subjectivity, identity, and social concerns. I would argue that the identities of gay and lesbian teachers are indeed also formed within and by complex spatial intersections of personal identity and identity of place.

Many who identify as queer in one or more capacities describe feelings of alienation, of not fitting in anywhere, or as not having any singular identity. Anzaldúa (2007) describes herself as queer for belonging to no specific culture and challenging the hegemonic and heteronormative beliefs of her society. Although identifying as queer, partially in the sexual orientation sense of the word, Eli Clare (1999) attaches a broader meaning to the word when he writes:

In its largest sense, queer has always been where I belong. A girl child not convinced of her girlness. A backwoods hick in the city. A dyke in a straight world. A gimp in an ableist world. The eldest child of a poor father and a working-class mother... (p. 29)

Clare further describes being queer as being “home,” but is troubled by the realization that his queerness is part of his “exile” (p. 32) from and loss of home, and that he even feels “queer in the queer community” (p. 39). Anzaldúa (2007) also speaks of how queerness creates a “fear of going home...afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza* [the race], for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged” (p. 42). This notion of not feeling at home or not “lining up” with the dominant expectations of society is a concept that Ahmed (2006) weaves throughout her discussion of orientation. As she explains, it is through our constant negotiation between that which is familiar to us with that which is strange that allows us to inhabit certain spaces. Further, she writes, “To become straight means that we not only have to turn toward objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must ‘turn away’ from objects that take us

off this line” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 21). It is in this turning away from the gay or lesbian part of our identity, for example, that we may begin to feel our identity becoming fragmented.

Alsup (2006) explained how pre-service teachers are given directions regarding what teachers should do and how they are to behave. Such expectations feed into the normative teacher image. Ahmed (2006) says that the very “concept of direction is a concept of ‘straightness’” (p. 16). To follow directions “...is to follow a line without detour, without mediation...a way of becoming straight, by not deviating at any point” (p. 16). Following such directive “lines of thought as well as lines of motion” is performative, because they “depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16). I argue that a similar negotiation or “straightening” may occur for the gay or lesbian teacher who has chosen not to publicly disclose her/his sexuality. The gay or lesbian identity and the teacher identity merge with other identities to make up the whole identity. Connell (2015) explains that there can then be a constant “negotiation of self” in which these teachers “compartmentalize roles and identities” in an effort to “navigate their positions in the educational system” (p. 21). How the various components of identity play out depends largely on the space in which that performance occurs. Certain performances are not expected in public spaces and, in some cases, even discouraged. Where is the dividing line between public and private? Furthermore, what happens when that line becomes blurred or queered?

Public, Private, and Queer Spaces

Butler (1993) describes performativity as “that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (p. xii). For Butler, gender is not something that one is but something that one does. She claims that gender is performatively constructed through

the “forced reiteration of norms” (Butler, 1993, p. 1994). The performative act is a means of making oneself socially intelligible. Similarly, she does not see heterosexuality or homosexuality as fixed categories. Similarly, when discussing the distinctions often made by non-heterosexuals (as opposed to heterosexuals) between “being themselves” in public versus private places, Freitag (2013) claims that performativity for queer subjects often “hinges on where they are standing, many times quite literally” (p. 17). In other words, individuals may perform straight or queer and may or may not be socially intelligible depending on the context (e.g., work, school, home, gay bar, etc.). Désert (1997) also explains how the issue of privacy is not the same for both heterosexuals and sexual minorities. In fact, he claims, it is more an issue (actually a requirement) of secrecy for sexual minorities. Outward signs of implicit admissions to sexual acts as well as explicit public displays of affection by heterosexuals are tolerated; however, such behavior and information is expected to be kept private by sexual minorities.

In terms of public versus private spaces, Namaste (1996) explains how the portrayal of the expected gender identity (preferably through a heterosexual coupling) grants entrance into specific public spaces. Perceived violations of gender expectations constitute challenges to the security of such spaces. In an effort to regulate public spaces, policies and laws are enacted, often leading to the disproportionate oppression of those merely perceived as a threat to such spaces, socially or otherwise. Different people occupy different public spaces at different times and express different parts of their identities in those spaces, depending on how that space is structured and used by others during the same times.

So what are queer spaces? What makes them queer? And are such spaces just for queer individuals? Désert (1997) asserts that just as it is not solely the homosexual sex act that makes one a homosexual, the act of sex need not be what defines queer space. He describes space in

general as “a delineated or loosely bound area occupied cognitively or physically” and queer space specifically as that which “crosses, engages, and transgresses social, spiritual, and aesthetic locations, all of which is articulated in the realm of the public/private, the built/unbuilt environments” (Désert, 1997, p. 20). The traditional approach has been to define queer spaces as “spaces of gays and lesbians or queers existing in opposition to and as transgressions of heterosexual space” (Oswin, 2008, p. 89). Oswin (2008) and Freitag (2013) both regard the equation of queer space with gay and lesbian space as inadequate, claiming that a space does not become queer simply by having queer-identified individuals inhabit it. Both indicate that queer spaces differ from gay and lesbian spaces, not solely due to their transgression of binaries (i.e. hetero/homo or man/woman), but because they challenge and extend the norms which uphold and are upheld by such dichotomies.

Moreover, Désert (1997) claims that the possibility of a (queer) space depends on the complicity of the observer/inhabitant with its emergence and/or acknowledgement of its presence/evolution. Any space becomes possible once it begins to function or becomes something different for its occupant. This happens most with public spaces, because these spaces can have different meanings depending on how individuals interpret them. Additionally, Désert explains how queer spaces are created by/for both queers and non-queers by the knowledge of and/or attraction to each creator of those spaces. Thus, Freitag (2013) would agree that spaces that are queered produce a space not only for non-heterosexual sexuality but also for non-heteronormative heterosexuality, a production which Désert argues can blur the lines between the public and private realms.

Perhaps one of the most well-known and, according to Sedgwick (1993), most influential spaces for gays and lesbians has been that of the closet. Albeit thought by most as simply a

metaphorical place to which one retreats to avoid various forms of oppression, discrimination, and violence, it has instead proven to be a very real *space* for many. Foucault (1986) describes such real spaces as heterotopias, spaces which are counter-sites or “other” places. As related to queer spaces, these may or may not be actual physical places but spaces constructed by what Foucault describes as a coming together of several seemingly incompatible spaces into one single real space. Thus, these spaces may even be spaces of illusion or compensation, or a “virtual” closet, one with fluid boundaries that “shared the same streets, the same people” as his physical space, but also having “a silence that fostered and still fosters overwhelming complicity” (Désert, 1997, p. 17). The closet as a queer space (and hence heterotopic) also appears to map onto Foucault’s notion of heterotopias as being isolated and/or penetrable. In other words, entry is either compulsory or requires certain submissions for entry. For example, the decision not to disclose one’s homosexuality actually allows for the construction of and entry into the closet.

In the same vein, Sedgwick (1993) claims that at the individual level, there is the potential of a newly erected closet each time openly gay people enter new, unfamiliar spaces and/or meet new people. As “out” as some gay and lesbian teachers may be with select colleagues at their school, there are still instances when some of them question whether it is safe to remain out of the closet in different spaces and with different people (e.g., with new colleagues or at a new school). Specifically, many queer educators feel compelled to remain in the educational closet, and consequently, to be complicit with heteronormative expectations. And even though Sedgwick acknowledges that the risks of stepping through the door have been decreased for some by the work of those who have come before them, there are still risks; thus, she cautions against criticism of those who choose not to follow.

For many gays and lesbians, specifically for teachers, these risks have been great. There have always been gay and lesbian teachers. However, public views of proper gender roles and fears related to gay and lesbian teachers' influences on children have also historically fed a fire that has left those teachers at risk of being burned.

Demonization of Queer Teachers

Queerness may be viewed as any deviation from the normative which may or may not cause one some form of demonization and ultimately oppression. McRuer (2006) cites Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* when he writes "we are the queer groups...we cover so many oppressions...the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit, and because we do not fit we are a threat (p. 37)." As such, McRuer argues that we are all queer by virtue of the fact that no one fits one notion of normal. If this is the case, whose straight edge gets used to determine which of the rest of us lines up with the norm?

Although Anzaldúa (2007) appears to be speaking of *queer* in the narrower sense of sexuality, I believe the imagery can be expanded to a broader queer interpretation when she writes, "The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human" (p. 40). The referral to the queer as something less than human is particularly poignant, for it is the dehumanization that allows the dominant culture to justify the violence against the Other. Puar and Rai (2002) write that "queerness as sexual deviancy is tied to the monstrous figure of the terrorist as a way to otherize and quarantine subjects classified as 'terrorists,' but also to normalize and discipline a population through these very monstrous figures" (p. 126). As queer teachers, we are often seen as such "monstrous figures", whose mere presence in schools poses a threat to the dominant

heteronormative environment of schools and the supposed/expected heterosexuality of their constituents.

In her book, *Fit to Teach*, Jackie M. Blount paints a picture of the early demonization of gay and lesbian teachers and how it shaped the future of all gay and lesbian educators. Even as far back as the late 1800s, schools were becoming spaces for the social promotion of proper gendered behaviors. Single (read chaste) women and married men became the preferred education employees. However, threats to masculinity such as the lack of autonomy due to supervision by other males, as well as the stigma associated with performing “women’s work,” still ensured a female dominated profession. Incidentally, as changes in gender association occurred within education during the late 1800s, the terms heterosexuality and homosexuality began to be used as specific categories (Blount, 2005).

As women became more independent, began to demand equal pay, and became involved in the overall fight for other rights, many felt that such changes represented inappropriate crossings of an established gender barrier. Conversely, male teachers were often regarded as effeminate when performing “women’s work” (Blount, 2005, p. 13). Parents soon started becoming concerned that a lack of male influence would make boys more effeminate, while the gender bending influences of single, independent female teachers would turn girls away from marriage. As a result of certain studies and more pronounced media coverage, the public was also becoming more aware of the notion of same sex relationships. It did not take long for people to develop the belief that the lack of men and the predominance of single women in education opened the door for more unconventional sexualities. As such, same sex desire would soon become conflated with gender non-conformity, and the professional and social actions of

teachers who were perceived as crossing gender barriers would become highly scrutinized in an effort to maintain appropriate gender roles for students in schools (Blount, 2005).

The majority of schools that existed in the mid-1800s were segregated by gender, the idea being to keep genders separate in preparation for a society that shared the same ideology of reinforcing proper gender roles. Ironically, even though such segregation was meant to reduce the problems and scandals often associated with heterosexual relationships between boys and girls, these schools would ultimately be viewed as promoting something even more scandalous, same-sex relationships (Harbeck, 1997). The criminalization of same-sex sexual activity between men in England in the late 1800s brought with it the scrutiny of same-sex boarding schools in England and the United States as possible places where homosexuality could be learned or could possibly thrive (Blount, 2005).

With the emerging awareness of homosexuality, parents began to become concerned about the influence (homosexual) teachers might have over students. Young girls might miss out on a marriage opportunity, if they were not encouraged to exhibit appropriately gendered behavior and/or not encouraged to move past any “phase” of romantic crushes on other girls. Likewise, male schoolmasters in all-male boarding schools, by virtue of having attended all-male boarding schools and having possibly formed similar same-sex relationships themselves (be they fleeting or permanent), were viewed as potentially condoning or promoting such relationships between boys (Harbeck 1997). Regardless of any alleged effects on students, prior to the rise of public scrutiny of same-sex boarding schools, such schools were in fact a haven for teachers who desired same-sex relationships. However, by the end of the 19th century, single female and male teachers were becoming highly scrutinized.

As attention to same-sex sexual activity grew from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, thinking shifted from that of behavior to identity. Various research studies contributed to a general change from using the term homosexual as an adjective to describe a particular sexual act, to a noun to label a specific category of persons. Other European sex studies further contributed to the change in perception of same-sex sexual acts as common occurrences to a pathological behavior manifested as homosexuality. Although some studies attempted to make distinctions between the terms homosexual and gender deviant, the term homosexual eventually became conflated with a notion of sexual perversion manifested by inappropriate gender behaviors (Ellis, 1915; Faderman, 1978).

The stage had been set for an increased suspicion of homosexuality in general, a greater need for prospective and current teachers to prove their gender-conformity and heterosexuality, and the possibility of teachers losing their jobs based on mere doubts of their heterosexuality (Davis, 1972). The sexuality of teachers, however, was not explicitly investigated until the mid-1900s, during which time a perfect storm was forming in Florida that would support one of the largest and most unique witch hunts for gay and lesbian teachers. This situation in Florida was unique due to the amount of resources that were used to aggressively identify teachers and remove them from their positions.

Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers

In her book, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers*, Karen Graves provides a detailed account of how one of the largest witch hunts in history set out to purge Florida of queer teachers. In 1956 the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee was formed and was nicknamed the Johns Committee for one of its primary constituents, Senator Charley Johns. Disguised as a committee to conduct general investigations of those violating the law or posing a

threat to the well-being of others, the committee actually intended "to interrogate, harass, and intimidate members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other civil rights activists pushing for desegregation" (Graves, 2009, p. 2). The committee reasoned that if it could hamper the power of the NAACP, then the process of integration could be slowed. When initial attempts to weaken the NAACP failed, Johns employed typical Cold War rhetoric in an attempt to connect the organization to communism. However, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the NAACP was not required to release its membership list which may have helped establish such a link.

Around the same time, a study of state tuberculosis hospitals led to the discovery of several homosexual hospital workers (Graves, 2009; Harbeck, 1997). Upon further investigation and interrogation, other homosexual individuals were identified by the hospital workers, some of which included teachers in Hillsborough County, Florida. This information came on the heels of a purge of homosexuals in Miami and added to the already growing violence against homosexuals in Tampa. All of these events made it very easy for the Johns Committee, which was trying to do anything it could to maintain its political clout and thus its legislative funding, to switch its focus from the NAACP to an intense investigation of homosexual teachers, even though such actions were beyond its original legislative mandate (Graves, 2009).

The Johns Committee began its interrogations with any teachers identified by county superintendents as having been dismissed for immoral conduct. Those teachers were often coerced into naming other teachers, both past and present. The interrogations were always framed as mere fact finding missions at first rather than basis for prosecution; however, witnesses who were hesitant to answer questions were always reminded that they could be prosecuted for perjury for not telling the truth. After getting the teachers to admit to various

physical acts to prove their homosexuality, he would push for them to identify other homosexual teachers. The questioning, which went far beyond what was necessary in establishing homosexuality, could get quite graphic and become particularly degrading. From there investigators relied on various entrapment methods and surveillance of places known to be frequented by homosexuals (Graves, 2009).

Although the committee had been granted subpoena power, neither the committee nor the witnesses wanted the public hearings that would be required by its use. Teachers feared public humiliation, and often believed that they would be spared for their cooperation. The committee, in turn, favored private interrogations due to their element of surprise, the lack of presence of counsel to protect teachers, and the ability to violate the constitutional rights of witnesses without scrutiny (Graves, 2009; Harbeck, 1997). Moreover, they were still stinging from their lack of success in their public duels with the NAACP. Teachers generally had no legal counsel present due to their inability to afford it, the inability to find someone who would represent them, or the prevention of counsel presence by the committee (Graves, 2009).

Because investigators had no real proof of homosexual activity in many cases, they relied on relentless, heavy-handed questioning and the use of just enough information to make witnesses believe that proof did exist. Once investigators got a favorable reaction, they pushed harder and threatened the use of polygraph tests and charges for perjury. Some teachers tried to deny their homosexuality, simply remain silent, or cooperate by identifying other teachers as homosexuals; however, nothing protected them from the relentless questions, even if they finally admitted to homosexual desires or acts (Graves, 2009). Although some teachers put up various forms of resistance to such questions and admissions and were able to hire attorneys and produce witnesses, the only thing that the SBE admitted as evidence was their original interrogation

recordings. The end results were almost always the same: firing or resignation (Graves, 2009; Harbeck, 1997).

To provide a bit more historical context of the times, issues of non-normative gender and sexuality, along with the threat of communism, civil rights protests, feminism, and other forms of social and political activism, were coming to be viewed as threats to the social, political, and economic stability of the country during the Cold War era. The threat of communism and the government's fallacious relation of it to homosexuality caused the release of many government employees and trickled down to state and local agencies, particularly schools. Moreover, "sexual deviance" (read homosexuality) was linked to a growing concern with juvenile delinquency, and homosexuality came to be known and feared as a "moral menace" that was "infecting" the nation's youth and contributing to its corruption (Graves, 2009, pp. 18-19). Homophile movements were occurring on the East and West coasts to combat society's negative views of homosexuals. Thus, the Johns Committee easily relied on commonly held beliefs such as the sinfulness and pathology of homosexuality. Additionally, it played on the 1950s myth that homosexual teachers would recruit young people and even insinuated that faculty at the University of Florida were recruiting students to become homosexuals, who would in turn enter elementary and secondary schools and do the same (Graves, 2009).

In its nine years of existence the Johns Committee specifically focused on the NAACP and homosexual teachers. By the early 1960s, the committee reported having revoked 71 teachers' certificates, having 63 pending cases, and having files for another 100 suspects. However, by this point, the public was expressing concern that the committee had gone too far and had overstepped its authority. As the State Department of Education reclaimed its authority over school system regulations, the committee received even more criticism regarding its

distasteful presentation of some of its investigative results (Graves, 2009; Harbeck, 1997). Although the committee's 1963 legislative charter was not renewed, and the committee was dissolved in 1965, its effects would last for decades, and the State Department of Education would continue revoking the teaching certificates of gay and lesbian teachers. We can now examine some of the lingering effects of the historical demonization of queer teachers.

Effects on Gay and Lesbian Teachers – Homophobia and Heteronormativity

For those teachers who self-identify as gay or lesbian, the decision to come out at work is a complex one that is guided by both personal fears and principles. Fear of homophobia is cited most often by teachers as one of the factors influencing their decision to come out to students and/or colleagues or to remain in the educational closet (DeJean, 2004; King, 2004; Wood, 2005). One of the main problems with coming out as gay (or lesbian) is that being gay commonly and specifically implicates the act of sex (King, 2004; Khayatt, 1997). This in itself contravenes the presumed, if not expected, asexuality of teachers. Khayatt (1997) writes, “Coming out to students by its very nature is an allusion to sexual matters, and it is consequently considered outside the realm of what is appropriate for children to know or discuss” (p. 130). Moreover, the implication of sexuality invokes a host of other homophobic beliefs of society about homosexuals, two of which repeatedly appear in the literature.

First is belief that homosexual teachers may promote homosexuality and/or actively “recruit” children as homosexuals (Bishop et al., 2010; Graydon, 2011; King, 2004). King (2004) goes on to argue that the homosexual teacher’s influence over a child’s sexuality is a myth devised by some heterosexuals, by pointing out that children’s structures of sexual desire and affection are already in place by school age. The second commonly held homophobic belief is that homosexual teachers are pedophiles (Bishop et al., 2010; Graydon, 2011; King, 2004).

Again, King (2004) refutes this notion, claiming an “unclear definition of actual pedophilic relationships” (p. 126), noting that the majority of pedophilic offenses are not between gay men and young boys.

DeJean (2004) describes how this “taxonomy of fear” (p. 20) causes some teachers to isolate themselves from both colleagues and students, except when interaction is absolutely necessary. Similarly, King (2004) found that in order to combat the idea of recruitment, some gay males reported interacting less with male students than female students, thereby creating an additional problem of gender differentiation. The lack of sufficient critical deconstruction of such homophobic perceptions continually prevents gay males from working effectively with young children (King, 2004).

Gay or Lesbian – A Good Thing, or Spaces of Resistance

The presence of gay and lesbian teachers in the classroom, regardless of whether they are out or not, can create spaces of resistance and/or identify those spaces of resistance that already exist. Contrary to the views of some in society that gay and lesbian teachers pose a threat to their students, gay and lesbian teachers themselves have claimed that having to be honest about their sexual identities and more critically aware of themselves (DeJean, 2007), regardless of their level of disclosure about their sexuality, has influenced their teaching philosophies and practices in ways that have led to positive interactions with and effects on their students (DeJean, 2004; DeJean, 2007; Endo et al., 2010; King, 2004; Mayo, 2008). For example, teachers reported believing that their own exclusion by society caused them to be more compassionate and sensitive toward students who did not always fit in or otherwise felt different, which led them to attempt to create more inclusive classrooms where those students could feel safe and welcome (DeJean, 2004; DeJean, 2007). In so doing, teachers are able to promote social justice for all

students (Endo et al., 2010) and combat issues of homophobia (Gust, 2007) without necessarily having to be out at work. This also equates to a subversion of the homonormative views present in heterosexualized spaces.

Some of Brockenbrough's (2012) teachers also spoke of using homophobic speech acts as anti-homophobic teachable moments and of creating spaces for students to discuss sexuality issues, if they chose to do so. In the event that a student revealed her/his homosexuality either directly or indirectly, Mayo's teachers (2008) all indicated that they took some form of action such as privately talking with the student, offering advice, watching over the students, or following school protocol such as counselor referral. Gay and lesbian teachers may also be able to help narrow the "caring gap" (King, 2004, p. 126) for students from troubled families due to their own experiences with and understanding of the effects of gendered contexts. They may also fight gender stereotyping by simply expressing their own right to be themselves (Endo et al., 2010). Specifically for gay male teachers, "working like a woman" means having the ability to teach with more emotion, sensitivity, creativity, and child-centeredness (King, 2004, p. 123). As an added advantage, King (2004) also highlights how a gay male, by virtue of his masculine privilege, may be able to fulfill the male image of disciplinarian while also conveying the female image of internal self-control.

The teachers studied by DeJean (2004) shared the belief that their "identity shapes [their] literacy philosophies and practices" (p. 66), and that identity and integrity often make a larger impact on students than content knowledge. As such they all expressed the belief that it is important for teachers to "encourage them [i.e. students] to explore *intrapersonal* literacy that fosters a greater understanding of their individual identities and beliefs as well as *interpersonal* literacies that provide a critical awareness and respect for the identities and values of others" (p.

66). This, they claimed, helps students to develop self-awareness, personal beliefs, values, and the ability to work well with others.

Silent Teachers and Silenced Students

Another recurring discourse is that of silence, not only surrounding how remaining silent about their sexuality affects the teachers themselves, but also how their choice to disclose their sexual identity has the potential to silence their students. Khayatt (1997) and King (2004) found that some teachers worried that their silence about their sexuality allowed others more freedom to perpetuate negative perceptions. However, Wood (2005) argues that teachers are at risk of having the dominant culture define their life, self, and ability to teach regardless of their decision to disclose their sexuality. Endo et al. (2010) and Rudoe (2010) found that such teachers, regardless of whether the assumptions about their sexuality are true, claimed to be victims of “assumptive homophobia,” (p. 1029) because they did not fit heteronormative gender stereotypes. In other words, even if teachers are simply assumed to be gay or lesbian, but are not necessarily confirmed as such, they can become objects of homophobic comments and actions.

Whereas some of King’s teachers (2004) reported that remaining silent caused them to be paranoid and to constantly monitor their actions to avoid false accusations such as the promotion of homosexuality, others described a fear that the queer component of their identity would supersede all of their other identity components (Endo et al., 2010; Wood, 2005). For example, because of the conservative nature of her school and students, Wood (2005) worried that if her students knew she was queer, they would see everything else she did as related to her queerness, thus creating a counterproductive teaching situation. Similarly, Khayatt (1997) found that as soon as she declared herself as a feminist, her students “filter[ed] all information or discussion of texts through their knowledge of my political bent” (p. 142). It is for this very reason that she has

chosen not to come out as a lesbian in a “declarative” way to her class, even though she considers herself to already be implicitly out with her students. In other words, these teachers did not want to be viewed as just queer individuals with a queer message or agenda. Instead, they wanted to be seen as teachers first. That they also happen to be queer was, for them, just another component that determined who they were.

While remaining in the closet about our sexual identity may provide some degree of safety, it can also stifle our teacher identities thereby preventing us from effectively reaching our students (DeJean, 2004) and has been reported to cause psychological stress and even depression (Rudoe, 2010). Wood (2005) in particular writes that her silence troubles her nearly as much as her fear of homophobia, admitting that being complicit with her assumed heterosexuality and not performing her sexual identity as a lesbian has caused a “disconnection between my critical theory and my pedagogic practice” (p. 430) and renders her own identity “incoherent” (p. 431) for herself. In other words, she does not feel that she can critically engage her college students with her use of queer theory as she feels she should. As such, she also laments her struggle to respond to students’ writing and comments such as ‘Only queers care about what queer people go through’ (Wood, 2005, p. 436) in ways that make them think without allowing too much insight into her personal life. Because of the conservative nature of her school and students, Wood (2005) worries that if her students knew she was queer, they would see everything else she did as related to her queerness, thus creating a counterproductive teaching situation.

As teachers, we must also realize that we have a certain amount of power over our students in the classroom just by virtue of our authority. Both Wood (2005) and Gust (2007) realize the potential of this power, with respect to the performance of their sexual identity, to govern how students respond to both them and class content. In explaining how he used Moisés

Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* as part of a lesson on perception in communication, Gust (2007) describes observing how students who were normally critically reflexive when discussing communication theories became silently resistant. He writes, "Fear of retribution from me as a teacher and an inability to understand and articulate the issues of homophobia and perception prevented the teachable moment I had attempted to craft" (Gust, 2007, p. 49). In other words, by virtue of being explicitly out *and* being the teacher, he was essentially viewed as an authority figure on gay issues, effectively silencing his students.

Often students are afraid to contribute to a conversation around sensitive issues for fear that they may not be knowledgeable enough about the topic, or that they may insult the subjects being discussed by saying the "wrong" things. In four poignant stories from her own life as a professor, Sapon-Shevin (2004) warns that educators must consider who they silence by expressing their own views, for example, silencing the majority (or few) while empowering a few (or majority) with respect to sexuality. Gust (2007) and Sapon-Shevin (2004) both warn that we as teachers must be mindful of our positions in the eyes of the students. When we lend our voice to class discussions, which may or may not include personal opinions shaped by our own identities (sexual or otherwise), we should take care to avoid becoming *the* voice, a threatening or silencing voice.

Choosing Not to Come Out

Although some teachers have reported finding places with where the gay and lesbian population was larger, where the administration supported teachers in negative situations, and where school policies followed laws to prevent discrimination and harassment to be advantageous to their decision to come out (DeJean, 2007), still others have chosen not come out to students and/or colleagues for a variety of reasons. Homophobia, the subjugation of teacher

identity by sexual identity, and the silencing effects on students are some of the reasons already discussed. Whereas some teachers who chose to come out explicitly reported feelings of personal liberation, more energy, and less stress (DeJean, 2007), others claimed that being out was not necessary to their being able to do their job (Brockenbrough, 2012; Endo et al., 2010).

Additionally, Khayatt (1997) indicates that teachers can still make political statements and fight various forms of discrimination without making a declarative statement about their sexuality, and should thus critically analyze all benefits and consequences of their decision to come out.

However, just because a teacher chooses not to come out in some way or the other, he/she may still face challenges at school regarding his/her (perceived/suspected) sexuality, such as questions or confrontations by students or colleagues and the chore of diffusing such questions without specifically denying their sexuality (Brockenbrough, 2010; Endo et al., 2010; Rudoe, 2010). Thus, many teachers have indicated the importance of maintaining the “good teacher” image. In addition to good pedagogy, this image was found to be linked to a self-expressed level of confidence, the commandment of respect by both students and colleagues, and the popularity among students (Brockenbrough, 2012; Rudoe, 2010). The absence of these qualities tended to invite attempts by students and/or colleagues to attack queer (or suspected queer) teachers personally or undermine their authority, as though identity implicates teaching ability.

Ferfolja (2007) notes that the group of lesbian teachers she studied based their decision not to disclose their sexuality more on a “right of privacy” discourse than a necessity to hide their sexuality, and that they engaged the discourse even during times when they wished to be open about their sexuality, such as when they felt it might serve a pedagogical purpose or empower a gay or lesbian student. Moreover, they maintained that since their role as teachers and colleagues at work took precedence over making friends with colleagues, there was no

reason to share personal information with those colleagues. Similarly, all of Mayo's (2008) subjects, although either implicitly or explicitly out, saw no reason to develop anything other than cordial, professional relationships with other colleagues. Teachers noted that their unwillingness to share personal information and socialize often led to resentment and accusations of being anti-social by colleagues (Mayo, 2008) as well as to colleagues feeling that they had something to hide (Fefolja, 2007). Wood (2005) felt that she was able to perform as a heterosexual due in part to her colleagues' and students' choice to remain ignorant about her sexual identity. She claimed that they really "*do not go there*," (p. 432) because it might cause them to question their own preconceived notions about homosexuality.

Although others have argued that silence may be seen as reinforcing heterosexual dominance, Fefolja (2007) counters this notion, saying that just by virtue of their ability to perform and construct heterosexuality, they question its "validity and naturalization" (p. 576). She describes different methods used specifically by lesbian teachers to perform as heterosexuals, such as the establishment of a prior heterosexual history by having been married to a male at some point and/or having children from the relationship. This also allowed them to be viewed as a heterosexually available female who happened to be indifferent toward men as a result of the failed relationship. Younger women were able to play the young, single girl who was still waiting on "Mr. Right." Still other teachers cited geographic location as an advantage. For example, one teacher noted that more geographically isolated places (e.g., rural areas) in which inhabitants tended to be more socially conservative and less privy to notions of sexual diversity help to hide her sexuality.

Brockenbrough's (2012) study adds an entirely different dimension to the sexual/teacher identity problem, that of race. All of the participants in the other studies reviewed were white,

except for the Mayo (2008) study which included three Latino males. Incidentally, Mayo did not discuss any differences based on race or gender. Although some of the overall issues of intersectionality that Brockenbrough (2012) raises are definitely beyond the scope of this project, the conflicts that he points out between the black male, black queer, and teacher identities warrant mention. Even though he had gained implicit information about his participants' queerness through pre-study interactions, he found that they were not as forthcoming as he had hoped when speaking formally about their role as black male teachers. Most of them indicated that their blackness was more influential in shaping their identity than was their queerness and, in fact, presented additional conflicts when trying to remain heteronormatively composed in the eyes of a completely black student body.

The review of the literature has shown that schools are inherently constructed as gendered spaces into which the normative views of a predominantly heteronormative society are built. Due to this very nature, schools include structures that ensure (either explicitly or implicitly) the reproduction of such heteronormative values and practices. Thus, queer bodies that do not fit into such spaces are continuously policed both personally and by others. Such surveillance not only affects gay and lesbian teachers' experiences in the workplace but may also have very real and material effects on them physically and psychologically. In an effort to better understand the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers, we must go directly to the source, the teachers themselves. Thus, a series of phenomenological interviews, as prescribed by Seidman (2013), proved an effective method for collecting experiential data from participants. In searching for a lens through which to best examine the data, Ahmed's (2006) concept of a queer phenomenology provided a framework that not only allowed me to expand beyond the experiences of the participants (i.e. the micro-focus of traditional phenomenology) to the social

structures that affected those experiences (i.e. a macro focus). In other words, although the institutional frame is not necessarily phenomenological in nature, the institutions do directly affect the teachers' lived experiences both at work and in their personal lives. Moreover, queer phenomenology enabled me to not only analyze the participants' experiences at work relative to their sexual orientations but also (and unlike similar projects) to understand how those experiences may have produced a dis-orientation (or turning away) from their sexuality at work. In Chapter 3, I further explicate how I combined a phenomenological method and a queer phenomenological framework into a practicable methodology.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I begin by summarizing my pilot study which served as a precursor to my dissertation work. I then review my phenomenological research question and follow with a description of the theoretical framework of queer phenomenology through which I worked to answer that question. I also explain how I identified participants for the study and how I used a three-interview phenomenological interview method to collect data regarding their experiences. I follow with an explanation of how I addressed the concepts of privacy, confidentiality and validity. Finally, I explain how I analyzed the data that I collected from the participants.

Pilot Study

As part of a field research course in my doctoral program, I conducted a pilot study related to the current study. My intentions were to employ the pilot study to begin identifying possible themes that might warrant more in-depth investigation and analysis for my dissertation study. The participants included a total of six educators (four employed and two retired). There were three males (two black, one white) and three females (all white). Although the participants represented varied experience levels and subject areas and were all from different school systems, they all happened to be from the same general geographic area.

Using semi-structured interviews to develop participant narratives, I sought to answer the questions: What decisions do queer teachers make, or feel they are forced to make, regarding their decision to disclose their sexuality in the workplace? How do they understand their

decisions regarding disclosure as affecting them personally and professionally? How do those decisions affect the ways in which they interact with students and colleagues?

Overarching themes that emerged in the pilot study included: (1) Decisions of teachers to disclose information about their sexuality in the workplace are determined by multiple factors including, but not limited to, location, comfort with colleagues, and support of administration; (2) The fear that queer teachers have surrounding coming out at work are related to homophobia and heteronormative misconceptions about queer persons; (3) There are additional concerns regarding the intersection of race and sexuality for those who also identify as a racial minority; (4) Some teachers have been able to empathize more with the struggles of students who do not fit in, and attributed this to their own struggles with their sexual identities; and (5) Many teachers are still afraid to come out or to otherwise advocate for their own or their queer students' rights due to a lack of formal protections. In the current study, I expanded upon these themes and further examined them through a queer phenomenological framework.

Research Questions

In fulfilling the purpose of the current study, which was to describe and increase the understanding of the experiences of gay and lesbian educators while working in predominantly heteronormative institutions, I sought to answer the following overall phenomenological question: What is it like to be a gay or lesbian teacher in the predominantly heteronormative space of K-12 schools. Related to my overall question are the following questions: How do gay and lesbian teachers choose whether or not to disclose their sexuality in the workplace? How do they understand their choices as affecting them personally and professionally? How do their choices affect the ways in which they interact with students and colleagues? How are these

individual issues related to the larger societal structures that govern gender and sexuality in schools?

Theoretical Framework

In working to determine answers to the research questions, I utilized participant narratives constructed from interview transcripts to describe the real-life experiences of the participants and how those experiences determined their subjectivities and identities. As such, I examined how gay and lesbian teachers have traditionally been silenced by a fear of coming “out” and/or otherwise marginalized, harassed, or discriminated against after doing so. Other studies such as those presented in the literature review have focused on the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers in schools and how those experiences have affected them both personally and professionally. However, I aimed to also examine the experiences of the participants in terms of how they were orienting themselves to the heteronormative space of schools. Thus, I analyzed this work through a queer phenomenological framework. The thought process by which I arrived at a queer phenomenological framework follows.

According to Madison (2012), interpretation of participant stories through a phenomenological framework aids in the construction of meaning of the stories. Smith (2011) defines phenomenology as the study of “conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view” (What is phenomenology section, para. 2). In other words, it can relate to how things appear in our experience, how we experience things, or how our experiences determine the meanings we attach to those things. According to Husserl (1999) our reality is determined by our consciousness. Everything that we know is known through our own conscious experience of phenomena. Heidegger (as quoted in Van Manen, 2014, p. 28) wrote, “Hence phenomenology means: to let what shows itself be seen from itself; just as it shows itself from

itself. That is the formal meaning of the type of research that calls itself ‘phenomenology.’” In other words, the description of experiences and the meaning of those experiences should come directly from those who have had the experiences (i.e. the study participants). Van Manen himself (2014) describes phenomenology as a method of questioning through which meaning making occurs. Interpreting Heidegger’s definition, he writes that it is about bringing forth that which is hidden. Many of the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers remain hidden for a number of reasons already presented in the relevant literature. Thus, the phenomenological lens helped to focus on the uniqueness of participant experiences, their feelings of societal and institutional pressures to suppress the gay or lesbian part of their identity and/or their attempts to balance it with the teacher part of their identity.

Since I was interested in understanding not only how gay and lesbian teachers’ realities are formed through their lived experiences, but also how those realities determine how they balance their teacher identity with their gay/lesbian identity, it was also necessary to apply a queer lens to the phenomenological study. Using a queer lens aided in my analysis of how some gay and lesbian teachers see their reality, construct their sexual identity, and understand their decision to live their sexual identity openly as relating to and affecting their teacher identities (Madison, 2012). Additionally, it provided a basis for discussing how categories such as heterosexuality and homosexuality are social constructs that perpetuate the normal/abnormal binary which contributes to the legitimization of oppression of queer individuals (Butler, 1999). Developing the concepts of sexuality and normativity allowed me to interpret how participants may have understood their sexualities as being regulated and how politics (Butler, 1999) played into their choice to come out or remain in the closet.

In the current study, I was not necessarily interested in attempting to essentialize what it means to be a gay or lesbian teacher. To do so would have meant focusing on the subject of gay/lesbian teachers and reducing the participants to that one identity category, rather than examining how they interacted performatively with and were affected by the heteronormative institutions and societies in which they work. As such, in lieu of using a traditional phenomenological lens, I chose to peer through Ahmed's (2006) broader lens of queer phenomenology to examine the material effects that performativity, power relations, and discourses of sexuality and schooling had on the gay and lesbian teachers in the study. Phenomenology in its traditional form has been criticized for focusing so much on the individual experience, that it ignores the relation between those experiences and how they are produced socially within certain spaces. For example, although Desjarlais (1997) acknowledges that the use of experience is crucial when writing about humans, he cautions that by "taking experience as a uniquely authentic domain of life...we risk of losing the opportunity to question both the social production of that domain and the practices that define its use" (p. 12). Both Desjarlais (1997) and Ahmed (2006) claim that experiences are produced both historically and culturally depending on one's being in the world. Our experiences are more than just events; they are directed toward us and change us (Desjarlais, 1997). Ahmed (2006) would further argue that those experiences depend on how we are oriented to the spaces in which those experiences occur as well as objects or other bodies within those spaces.

All of that being said, I realize that much of my analysis focused on an institutional frame which is not necessarily phenomenological in nature. However, I argue that the institutional frame did directly affect the participants' personal experiences. Thus, the reason why the theoretical framework of queer phenomenology was useful to my project was that it guided my

analysis of how the institution served to orient and/or disorient the participants toward and/or away from various components of their identities. In her explication of the concept of orientation, Ahmed (2006) uses Husserl's metaphoric writing table throughout her book to illustrate how Husserl's orientation toward his writing table relegates everything else to the background. For example, she writes that by focusing on the table, the signs of the work done to make the table available for use in writing are erased. Likewise, I argue that by focusing too much on the individual teacher's experiences, I could risk losing sight of the work that has been done to create those experiences (i.e. the social structures that are created and re-created and which enforce the compulsory heterosexuality and the gendered nature of schools). Again, these structures, the reproduction of heteronormative and gendered spaces, and the orientation of gay and lesbian teachers to these spaces are all related and serve to define the experiences of these teachers.

Ahmed's (2006) concept of a queer phenomenology offered a way of orienting me as a researcher toward my work that allowed me to bring forth that which was hidden without losing sight of the work that was done by social structures which created the necessity for hiding in the first place. Moreover, Ahmed helped me to relate the concept of orientation as "finding our way" or "feeling at home" (p. 7) to how gay and lesbian teachers align their bodies toward their work spaces. Queer phenomenology offered an explanation of how gay and lesbian teachers present (or perform) at school involves more than simply their sexual orientation. They can be oriented queerly just by virtue of whether or not they "line up" with that which is considered *straight* or *normal*. Their bodies, which "have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 107) are made reachable through queer orientations. In other words, their queer bodies, as viewed through common social beliefs, do not fit. They are seen as

not “lining up” with the (hetero) normative, which Ahmed (2006) writes, “is shaped by the repetition of bodily and social actions over time” (p. 66). They are unable to extend into the heteronormative space of schools in *their* normal orientation, unless they can perform in a way that allows them to fit into the heteronormative space.

By analyzing participant stories through a queer phenomenological lens, I hoped to understand how these teachers were orienting themselves to the heteronormative spaces in which they worked. I pursued explanations of how they saw themselves as extending (fitting) into those spaces, or having to re-align (straighten) themselves to do so. I also examined how they viewed others’ (colleagues and students) orientations with respect to them. Additionally, I was interested in how the orientations of the teachers and their students/colleagues related to each other. In other words, I was looking for not only what their experiences were, but also what they were not – what was said/done by the teachers and what was left unsaid or undone. Through such analysis, I aimed to relate their individual experiences (the micro) to the social structures associated with schools and the material effects that they have on gay and lesbian teachers (the macro).

Participants

In recruiting participants for the current study, I chose not to distribute advertising flyers, or otherwise try to directly solicit participation, in or around gay/lesbian venues or events. Such methods have proven to make gaining the trust of potential participants for similar studies difficult, consequently generating little to no participation (Wardle, 2007). Trust is better established when the potential participants already know the researcher or someone who is able to vouch for the trustworthiness of the researcher. Thus, although such “friend of a friend” methods make it difficult to obtain a good representative sample, I opted to use a snowball sampling technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994) because of the sensitive nature of the topic. I

initially asked educators who participated in the pilot study (acquaintances and/or their friends) and others who I personally knew identified along the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) spectrum to serve as recruiters. I asked the recruiters to provide my contact information and a lay summary of my study to those whom they felt may have been willing to participate in the study. A recruitment email is included as Appendix 1. Once a prospective participant contacted me, and I determined that they met the study criteria (LGBTQ teacher currently in a public or private K-12 setting), I contacted them to schedule an interview time. During the initial interview, I obtained informed consent. An informed consent document is included as Appendix 2.

Based on the level of participation in the pilot study, I expected to identify a greater number of participants for the current study. However, recruiting participants who would actually agree to be interviewed proved more difficult than expected. Even though measures of confidentiality were in place to avoid participant identification, two potential participants who were very closeted about their sexuality felt that the risk of being identified was one that they just did not wish to take. Thus, while no cap was initially placed on the number of participants, only ten participants out of the initial twelve who were identified ultimately participated in the study. All ten participants remained for the duration of the study. The sample, however, did represent a diversity of gender, race, age, ethnicity, grade levels, subject/administrative areas, and experience levels.

I originally chose to limit participation to the secondary level based on results of my pilot study in Spring 2015, in which I found that teachers of upper grade levels are more likely to deal with issues and questions of sexuality in school in general (both theirs and that of their students) due to the older students being more aware of individual differences in others. However, because

recruiting participants was proving difficult, I elected to open up sampling to middle and elementary level teachers. Participants were not required to be “out” (i.e. public disclosure of their sexuality) to participate. Although I had hopes of finding teachers who were out at work, I realized that there was a reduced chance of that happening in the socio-politically conservative area of the study, where no statewide laws existed to protect gay and lesbian teachers. I feel that some of the more powerful messages, in fact, ultimately came from those teachers who were living and working in fear of being outed and the possibility of being fired.

The quandary of *queer*

Although I use the term “queer” in my title and throughout my writing, I realize that the term conjures different connotations among different groups. Some who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer/questioning, intersexed, and asexual (LGBTQIA) have come to embrace it as a positive, more inclusive term which generally is meant to include any and all non-heterosexual individuals. Some of the younger generations have taken on the term *queer* more as a sense of empowerment. Still others avoid using “queer” because they feel it has a negative meaning (Savage & Harley, 2009).

I would offer that it is a way to complicate spaces and issues, a way to look critically at and deconstruct that which may at first appear to be one thing or another, but which may in fact be neither or both. Puar (2007) perhaps says it best in writing, “Queerness irreverently challenges a linear mode of conduction and transmission: there is no recipe for a queer endeavor, no a priori system that taxonomizes the linkages, disruptions, and contradictions into a tiny vessel” (p. xv). In other words, not only do those of us who identify as queer not belong in the closet; we cannot and will not be fitted neatly into any box, the size and shape of which has been predetermined by the normative. As I expect to locate more participants who actually self-identify as gay or

lesbian, these are the terms I plan to use when recruiting individuals for the study.

At the risk of implying that the term “queer” is a synonym for LGBTQIA+ (the plus being for any group that may have be emerging to represent specific identities of those otherwise viewed as non-normative by the rest of society), I do wish to invoke it as a term of inclusivity. By doing so, I acknowledge that gays and lesbians are not the only individuals facing discrimination and oppression by heteronormativity. Describing the term “queer” as an “antiquated pejorative for homosexual” (p. 18) which has been reclaimed and used by activists in acts of subversion and redefinition, Désert (1997) claims “queer” to be “a liberating rubric encompassing multiple sensibilities exclusively or in tandem” (p. 19). In other words, it has the power to shift the focus from the traditional homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy to a continuous spectrum of sexualities. Additionally, I understand the term “queer” (used as noun, adjective, or verb) to indicate a transgression of the boundaries between binaries and a challenge/extension of the norms produced by society, not just surrounding sexuality but also any/all forms of hegemony that work to discriminate, oppress, or otherwise alienate specific groups of individuals.

Again, the term “queer” has historically carried a pejorative connotation for many individuals, but has in recent years been reclaimed by others (particularly in academia) as a more inclusive term for individuals and practices that go against any normative expectation. Additionally, labels can have various cultural, raced, classed, and academic meanings. In the current study, when appropriate, and depending on how individual participants identified, I used specific terminology such as “gay” or “lesbian.” This is because upon interviewing the participants, I noticed that not a single participant used “queer” to describe themselves, even though the original title of my study had the term “queer” rather than the terms “gay” and

“lesbian.” All identified as either gay or lesbian. Thus, in the final interview, I asked each of them to comment on their understanding of the term “queer.”

Sara, although she did not describe herself as queer in the current study, was the only participant who indicated that she had used the term to describe herself in the past. She said,

I guess I just think of [queer] as being an umbrella term that keeps you from having to go through the entire alphabet soup...LGBT...however many letters we are up to now. It just sort of covers everything. It doesn't BOTHER me. I have described myself that way, so I don't think of it as being derogatory.

That being said, Sara also indicated that she had also used the term “dyke” to describe herself in her younger years, another term that other lesbians still find offensive. Still, the majority of the participants found the term “queer” to be offensive and otherwise outdated. Madelyn, the oldest of the participants, felt that it is a “generational thing” and a word that she just did not hear much anymore. Megan, who was younger, described queer as being “archaic” and added, “I wouldn't be offended if somebody [called me queer]...I'm not easily offended anyway. But I wouldn't choose it to describe myself.” Liz and Ricky both had stronger feelings about the negative connotations of queer. Liz, for example said, “I don't even like gay people to call somebody queer. It's kind of like calling a black person a nigger to me...it leaves a dirty taste in my mouth to say it.” Ricky agreed that queer was “like the ‘N’ word,” and felt that “even as a black person, [he] would never call another black person that.” Ricky added that he felt that queer is currently used more in a “professional” or “academic” setting.

All of that being said, I ultimately made the decision to change the original title of my study from *Breaking the Silence: Learning from the Experiences of Queer Secondary Educators in the Predominantly Heteronormative Space of Schools* to *Breaking the Silence: Learning from the Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Educators in the Predominantly Heteronormative Space of K-12 Schools*. I made the change for two reasons. First, I understand Ahmed's (2006) claim that:

...queer describes a sexual as well as political orientation, and to lose site of the sexual specificity of queer would also be to 'overlook' how compulsory heterosexuality shapes what coheres as given, and the effects of this coherence on those who refuse to be compelled. (p. 172)

Although I was inclined to use "queer" in the title since it resonates with me personally for the very reasons pointed out by Ahmed, it did not resonate with my participants. Again, not a single participant used the term to identify themselves, most viewing it negatively. Thus, I made the methodological decision *not* to use it in staying true to the identities of the participants.² Second, the new title also reflects the broader range of grade levels of the participants. Whereas some might argue that the study would not necessarily be situated within queer studies, simply because none of the participants identified as queer (Wardle, 2007), I tend to disagree. Given my use of queer phenomenology as a framework for examining the participants' orientation toward heteronormative work spaces and/or dis-orientation away from the queer parts of their identities, I would argue that the study could rightly fit into either gay/lesbian studies or queer studies.

Data Collection

Semi-structured phenomenological interviews

The bringing forth of that which is hidden for participants called for a method of questioning that was supported through the use of in-depth interviews. Thus, in order to elicit stories and gain more detailed descriptions of the life worlds of my participants based on their interpretations of their experiences as queer teachers, I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions as described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). Following Seidman's (2013) method for phenomenological interviewing, I conducted a series of three interviews with

² For the very same reason, I did not use the terms "bisexual," "transgender," "intersex," or "asexual" in the title. Additionally, as noted in the section on participant recruitment and in the recruitment email in Appendix 1, I used the term "queer" during recruitment. Thus, simply because the title includes only the terms "gay" and "lesbian," that is not to indicate that persons who identified in other ways were intentionally excluded from this study.

each participant. The interviews were limited to no more than 90 minutes each and were spaced three days to one week apart. The interviews were conducted face-to-face at a location chosen by the participant and at a date/time mutually agreed upon by the participant and myself. During the initial interview, I obtained informed consent. I read the informed consent form with each participant, after which we both signed one copy. I gave an unsigned copy (to further protect privacy and confidentiality) to the participant and retained the signed copy for my records. The informed consent document is included as Appendix 2. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed. During the interviews I also made field notes, which I was able to use later to write analytic memos. The notes and memos helped me to recall participant moods/attitudes when answering questions and further aided with preliminary data analysis and the organization of my own thoughts.

The first interview focused on participant life history in an effort to place their experiences in the context of the study topic. The second interview focused on participant experiences at work as they related to their being gay or lesbian. The third interview focused on the participant's sense of meaning and understanding of her/his experiences. An interview method and protocol is included as Appendix 3. Additionally, a table of participant demographic data to be collected is included as Appendix 4. I also made use of field notes and analytic memos as described by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) which included notes and definitions of key terms, initial analyses/observations, and possible follow-up items for subsequent interviews.

The multiple interview method served three purposes. First, it allowed for member checking. Member checking is commonly used as a tool in qualitative research to provide participants an opportunity to review their transcript and clarify any information with the investigator, which also strengthens the validity of the research design (Creswell & Miller, 2000;

Merriam, 1998). Secondly, subsequent interviews allowed for further probing of key points or emerging themes and for gaining information about the meanings that participants attached to their feelings and actions discussed in prior interviews, thus allowing me to start connecting their meanings to the larger (macro) structural issues. Finally, they allowed for the recovery of interrupted/indeterminable audio recordings.

Privacy and confidentiality

Throughout the study, I contacted the participants only when necessary and directly related to the study. I had access to the participants via a personal email address but only for providing the next steps of the study and scheduling the interviews. The participants' email addresses were not shared with any other parties and are not included anywhere in the study. Any emails sent by me always contained a generic subject line such as "Invitation to Participate in a Research Study." The participant interviews were conducted in a location chosen by the participant. Only the participant and I were present during the interviews. The location chosen by the study participant was always a private area that was conducive to a confidential one-on-one interview.

All participants agreed for the interviews to be recorded with a digital audio recorder. Digital recordings of the interviews were necessary to ensure the accurate analysis and interpretation of participants' responses. However, participants were not required to consent to being recorded in order to participate. Had a participant not been comfortable with being recorded, I was prepared to take handwritten notes. Participants were also given the options of refusing to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable or stressed, disclosing any information that they felt might be too personal in nature, and quitting the study at any time. However, all participants answered all questions for all three interviews.

The data collected was, and will continue to be, used for research purposes only. I reassured participants that all information shared during interviews would only be used for the specific purpose of this research study and would not be shared or discussed with others. I was the only person to ever have access to the data. The digital audio was transcribed by me. No data collected was or will be given to other persons or shared with outside agencies.

Demographic data collected on participants included age, race, gender, sexual orientation, grade(s)/subject(s) taught, and number of years in education. Participant names and the names of their institution were never recorded digitally or in writing. Personally identifiable information that was expressed by participants during the interviews was removed during transcription and participant transcripts were assigned a number as a way to separate them from other transcripts. Additional measures of confidentiality included using pseudonyms chosen by each participant in place of real names.

All audio files, field notes, and consent forms were stored on an external hard drive at my private residence and kept in a locked cabinet. I will maintain such files for twelve months after the completion of the study, at which time all audio files and individual participant notes will be destroyed by me. The external hard drive was password protected. Additionally, files on the external hard drive were only be accessed by my use of a computer that was also password protected.

Validity

Validity has traditionally dealt with “whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). However, Schwandt (as cited in Creswell & Miller, 2000) defines validity as “how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them” (p. 124). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the

concept of trustworthiness in place of validity. Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe trustworthiness as the “goodness of qualitative research” (p. 39). This definition more closely agrees with the constructs of credibility and transferability (analogous to internal and external validity, respectively) as put forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

To address the credibility of my study I examined validity through three different lenses as described by Creswell and Miller (2000). First, through my lens as a researcher I triangulated across individual participant data in the series of three semi-structured interviews. Seidman (2013) further suggests that the three-interview structure increases validity by (1) placing participant data in context; (2) accounting for participant daily idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies; (3) uncovering connections between participants’ data; and (4) allowing participants and researcher to make meaning of participants’ experiences. Second, through the lens of the participants I conducted member checks of transcripts and profiles to confirm my interpretation and presentation of their words. Third, through the lens of external individuals (e.g., my dissertation committee and peers) I utilized peer debriefing as a way to further confirm my methodological interpretations.

Although I attended to the minimum requirements of informed consent and Institutional Review Board processes as well as precautions for anonymity, I understand that my ethical responsibility to my participants continues beyond my study. Marshall and Rossman (2011) write of the importance of being respectful, practicing beneficence, and remaining attentive to justice. I tend to identify with Koro-Ljungberg’s (2010) relation of responsibility to validity. She claims that by objectifying validity too much, we risk ignoring ethics, and that taking an epistemological view of validity affords more attention to relationships between subjects and reality. I understand that the validity of my research relies heavily on my ability to make

responsible and ethical decisions before, during, and after the research process, decisions that have the best interests of all involved at heart. Most importantly, my primary responsibility is to the participants and the accurate recording of their stories. However, as Sheurich (1996) cautions, I had to take care not to let my voice become *the* voice; rather, I attempted to establish a space in which I presented the participants' subjective experiences, yet analyzed them objectively. Thus, again through my lens as researcher and in functioning through a critical paradigm, I remained reflexive by addressing my own assumptions, beliefs, and biases (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data Analysis

The analysis of participant narratives enabled me to let the stories of the participants be told from their own words, as the participants made sense of their own lived experiences. There is no claim that phenomenological results are predictive or replicable. However, by analyzing the narratives of multiple participants that focused on the same phenomenon, I was able to uncover similar meanings, each described from a unique perspective. And although I was not interested in replication or generalization, the ability to compare the stories from the various participants provided some commonalities which allowed for a better understanding of how gay and lesbian teachers in the Southeast manage their sexuality in the workplace. Additionally, findings may be viewed by other gay and lesbian teachers as transferrable in relation to their own circumstances.

As soon as possible after each interview, I transferred the interview to an audio file folder on my computer by using the software that came with my digital recorder. I then used a word processor program to transcribe the audio files verbatim. This allowed me to have the audio files stored in a secure place rather than remaining on the recording device and ensured that the participants' words and expressions remained fresh in my own memory while transcribing. The

software included a function that allowed me to adjust the speed of playback and to rewind or forward the recordings as necessary. I was careful to include parenthetical references to laughter, non-verbal communications, long or thoughtful pauses in responses, and any other interruptions that may have occurred. I used field notes to fill in other gaps and other meaningful contextual information as applicable.

After transcribing all three interviews for each participant, I began the task of writing participant narrative profiles. Seidman (2006) suggests that "...crafting a profile in the participant's own words...allows those words to reflect the person's consciousness" (p. 122). He further indicates that it allows for the crafting of a story with a beginning, middle, and end. To begin crafting the profiles, I first stripped the transcripts of any information that could have possibly identified the participants. I then removed all of my own voice (i.e. the questions/prompts that I used and/or any of my own conversational replies/commentary). Finally, I cut and pasted the raw responses of the three interviews for each participant into a separate new document, retaining the same order of the responses. By doing so, I was able to remain less distracted by the extraneous information and to focus solely on the participants' words. Seidman (2006) points out that participants do not always speak in full and coherent sentences when responding to questions or speaking narratively. As such, as I began crafting the narrative profiles, I removed filler words (e.g., "ah," "um," etc.), added ellipses to indicate breaks in participant responses, and used brackets to add connecting words when fashioning the responses into sentences to form a coherent narrative. I also only transposed information from one part of an interview to another when those parts complimented each other and added coherency and natural flow to the narrative without changing the context of the participants'

words or stories. In keeping with efforts toward validity and reliability, I emailed transcripts and profiles to participants. None of the participants requested changes.

Once the profiles were complete, I began initial analysis with a close reading of each participant profile, focusing word by word to identify specific words or phrases of significance and interest (Seidman, 2006). As I read, I underlined words and made notes in the margins of each of the profiles. During the second reading, I axially coded related words and phrases into clusters to begin organizing the large amount of data into related categories. This resulted in 32 different clusters across all participant profiles. As the amount of data was still overwhelming, I constructed a spreadsheet in which I listed each cluster of data down the first column. I then listed each participant's pseudonym across the top row of the spreadsheet in a separate column. I then transferred all notes, words/phrases, and corresponding profile page numbers into the appropriately intersecting cluster/participant cell. This allowed me to have all of the data in one place and to begin looking at the data across all participant profiles.

During the third reading of the data in the spreadsheet format, I was able to constantly compare data within and between participant narratives (Charmaz, 2006) to identify similarities and differences. This also enabled me to focus on how and in what context the stories were told by participants as well as their feelings, reactions, meanings, and expectations (Glesne, 2011). As such, I was then able to start selectively coding the data to determine relationships between the categories. From there, I began a thematic analysis in which I looked for patterns, themes, and cases that did not fit norms within the data (Glesne, 2011). I did so by using different colored highlighters, a process that once again allowed me to have visual representation of the data across all participants and categories.

I was interested in analyzing participant data for the effects of specific experiences of individual participants, how those experiences were similar to or different from those of other participants, and how the experiences were related to the overall heteronormative space of schools. I originally categorized responses into four overall themes. However, upon initial writing, there were still too many subheadings under each theme, some of which were overlapping and repetitive. This made it difficult to present the findings in an organized manner that would have made sense to the reader. Thus, I returned to the codes and initial themes and began combining related codes, until I eventually collapsed them into the three broader themes currently presented in Chapter 4 of this study. Although separated for the purposes of organized presentation of the findings, the identified themes are in no way independent of each other. In fact, many elements of the participants' experiences overlap and thus, may appear in different categories.

A note on the issue of bracketing within phenomenological research is also warranted here. This entire study could have very well been autobiographical. My primary interest in the study originated from my own experiences. However, these are not my stories but are those of the participants. Thus, I am aware of the methodological and theoretical issues related to my completing the study as a gay teacher. Traditional phenomenologists might have advised me to bracket my own experiences as a gay teacher so as not to let them interfere with my analysis and interpretation of participant data. Moustakas (1994), for example, refers to "set[ting] aside our prejudices, biases, and preconceived ideas about things" (p. 85) as the concept of "epoche" in phenomenological research. As much as one might attempt to adhere to such methodological practices, I see it as nearly impossible. Ahmed (2006) argues that, "We remain reliant on what we put in brackets; indeed, the activity of bracketing may sustain the fantasy that 'what we put

aside' can be transcended in the first place" (p. 33). She adds that what we are able to see through phenomenology may very well disappear when we bracket that which is familiar to us. We risk not only the disappearance of what we bracket but also the disappearance of ourselves as writers. Thus, we must "look, then, at what we do with things, how the arrival of things may be shaped by the work that we do, rather than putting aside what it is that we do" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 34). In other words, the participants' stories, although interesting and informative, were not going to stand alone methodologically. I, as the researcher, was obligated to lend my own analysis and interpretation. Attempting to bracket what which was familiar to me (i.e. my own experiences as a gay teacher) would have meant possibly missing the nuances of the participants' stories and a lack of interpretation.

CHAPTER IV:

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings of the project through data provided by the participants during their three interviews. I begin with a personal profile of each participant which includes demographic and personal historic data. I then present the remainder of the participant data organized under three broad themes that I identified during analysis: (1) Orienting One's Way Inside and Outside of the Educational Closet; (2) Re-Orientation - Being the Good (Gay or Lesbian) Teacher; (3) and Teaching While Gay or Lesbian – Fear and (Dis)Orientation.

Within the first theme, I present the participants' professional experiences regarding their decisions to come out (or not) at work. To do so, I define the identity management strategies used by each participant and how she/he compartmentalized her/his personal and professional lives. I also discuss the structures that governed participants' exercise of personal agency in their choice to come out (or not).

Within the second theme, I present the strategies used by participants to protect against potential negative consequences associated with being known or suspected as gay or lesbian at work. The section includes stories of empathizing with students, creating a culture and curriculum of inclusivity, serving as role models and advocates for students, and maintaining a positive image and reputation as a "good teacher."

In the final theme, I present participant descriptions of what it meant to them to be teaching while gay or lesbian. I do so by outlining the "taxonomy of fear" created by

homophobic assumptions and heteronormative misconceptions made about the participants at work and sharing some of the resulting personal discriminations experienced by them. Finally, I report how such negative experiences and the stress of performing an alternate version of themselves at work often left some participants feeling disoriented, or in other words, oriented away from what they believed to be their true selves.

Meet the Participants

Drew

Drew, a white male, was 40 years old when he first interviewed. He had been teaching history/social studies for grades ten through twelve for 17 years. The large high school in which he was teaching was the only high school in a small district, located in an affluent suburb of a major metropolitan area. According to Drew, the community in which the school was located was not racially diverse and was very socially conservative. Describing his life before becoming a teacher, he said that there was “not much of one,” since he grew up in a small town and went to a nearby in-state college. He explained that sex and sexuality was “not really high on the priority list, not really on the awareness list” during high school or college. Commenting on his sexuality, Drew said, “I am not even sure that I entirely define myself as gay now...[maybe]...sexually fluid, bisexual, whatever.” He recalled that he never had any real defining moments in his life as far as his sexuality was concerned and never really felt the need to “announce from the top of the mountain” to anyone that he was gay. As for teaching, it was not his first choice of a career. In fact, because he did not know what he wanted to do when he finished his undergraduate degree, he decided to travel overseas for a while, that was until his parents told him that he needed to come home and work on a master’s degree in education so that he would have something lucrative to do. In terms of teaching, Drew remarked, “Do I wake up in the morning excited, like

I'm going to be an amazing teacher today? No. I don't do that." However, he said that he had been told that he was a good teacher and felt that his students liked him. In addition to setting high expectations for himself, Drew claimed that he does the same for his students, pushing them to "think outside of the box" in an effort to "broaden their horizons" beyond what he described as an "insular" community.

Gina

Gina, a white female who identified as lesbian, was 54 years old at the time of the interviews. The majority of her 25 years of teaching had been in physical education (P.E.) for grades six through eight. Gina was also legally married to her long-time partner.

Regarding growing up as a lesbian, Gina said that she realized around age 12 that she was different. However, she really did not know what her feelings meant and did not yet know the terminology to describe them. She said that, as she grew older and began to understand more, she denied being a lesbian when questioned by others. In fact, she did not even admit it to herself until she was 25 years old, claiming that she "thought it was wrong." She described coming out to her parents at age 32 as "not good." She recalled her mother becoming "hysterical" and saying hateful things like "she wished that I had never been born." Her father bombarded her with Bible verses, proclaiming her life as a sin. Sadly, Gina did not see her parents for a number of years, after which she and her father never discussed her sexuality again. Her mother, on the other hand, "just kind of changed" and told her that, even though she did not agree with it, she still loved her.

Gina said that she knew that she wanted to teach from about the age of 13. She talked of her love of sports, children, and P.E. She added, "I knew I wanted to go into PE. It was just my passion." Gina described herself, in general, as "very sensitive and compassionate." She felt that

those qualities guided her teaching philosophy when working with middle school children. Gina added that she “always tried to encourage the kids,” and felt like they knew that “I would help them any way I can.”

Janet

Janet, a white female who identified as a lesbian, was 39 years old at the time of the interviews. She had been teaching P.E. in kindergarten through fifth grade for 18 years. Janet was also married and shared custody of her wife’s biological daughter who was conceived via artificial insemination.

Janet recalled growing up “in the middle of nowhere, very rural” and attending “a very small K-12 school in a very non-diverse, completely white, community,” where “you get married, you have kids, and the woman stays at home.” Although her parents were “not huge church goers,” Janet described them as “really politically, financially, and socially conservative.” Janet grew up mostly with male cousins and remembered her parents and others referring to her as a tomboy. Even though she remembered thinking as early as fifth grade, “I was a little different,” and knew that she was attracted to females, Janet said that she did not completely understand those feelings and went on to date boys throughout high school. She fondly told of how, as she got older, she would curiously watch Ellen DeGeneres on her television talk show and K.D. Lang whenever she appeared on *Hee Haw*, all while trying not to appear too interested for fear of her parents picking up on her curiosity. Janet had deduced that her parents were not going to take well to her being a lesbian after hearing her mother’s wonderings about her first college roommate being a lesbian. Janet said, “I just tried to not answer any questions, because I was fearful of how she would take my responses.”

Janet said that it was not until she left her parents and her small town for college that she “fully identified” and accepted her sexuality for herself. However, during her senior year of college, her worst fear came true when she and her wife (then girlfriend) decided to come out as both lesbians and as a couple to Janet’s parents while staying with them one weekend. Janet described the scene as “awful...Mom threw dishes...Dad got physically ill...took my truck keys so that we couldn’t leave.” Once they were able to leave, her parents took back everything, drained the spending money from a bank account that they had provided, and would not pay for the rest of her undergraduate college. Janet said sadly that her Mom told her, “...she wished that I had called and told her that I had cancer...[or]...that I was pregnant with a black man’s baby, because she could have handled that better.” Although Janet reported that “things have gotten better,” she added that, “they are still not great.”

Regarding her pathway to teaching, Janet recalled, “I always knew I was going to be a teacher...except for fifth grade, when I said that I was going to be the first female NBA basketball player.” Janet also knew that she wanted to coach sports and teach history, “...because that’s what all coaches teach.” At the advice of her father, she attempted a double major with math until, she said, “I took calculus and...proofs were the death of me.” Janet remembered seeing a flyer about a P.E. program informational meeting and decided to “step out of my comfort zone” and attend. Describing her own P.E. experience as “awful and unmemorable,” she recalled being really excited to learn what a quality P.E. program could be. Thus, she said, “I just fell in love with that. So I went the elementary route and coaching really fell off my radar.” She laughingly added, “It was kind of funny how everything that I thought that I wanted was completely not how I ended up.”

Janet described herself as “a hard-working teacher” who “tr[ies] to put students first.” As a physical education teacher, she wished to impact the wellness of not only the students but also her colleagues. She ended by adding, “I like school...and am constantly trying to grow professionally.”

Julian

Julian, a black male who identified as gay, was 30 years old when he first interviewed. He had been teaching sixth grade history for six years. The youngest of three siblings and a third generation educator, Julian described growing up very poor in a rural community just south of a major metropolitan city and being raised by his grandmother. His grandmother worked to put herself through college and always emphasized the importance of an education to Julian. All of the women in his family were teachers and were “like celebrities” in their community. As such, Julian recalled having always wanted to be a teacher, because “it was a good, honest profession.” As he laughed, he added that it was a good thing, because he knew he was “not good on the tractor...not good with feeding cattle, because I don’t like to sweat.”

Regarding being gay, Julian said, “I guess in my situation, it’s just something that came normally, like a sense...something I was born with, to be this way.” He said that most of the people in his poor, rural community were simply trying to survive and really did not ask questions about or discuss sexuality. He did not recall having been picked on in school much until high school when he tried out for sports. However, after watching the basketball try-out video, he said to one of his friends, “I dribbled like a lady.” The friend agreed, so off to drama club Julian went. He remembered being called gay for being in drama but also added that he was pretty sure no one really knew much about what being gay really meant at his little school.

Julian described one of his most significant experiences in high school as “just playing around, experimenting, and heavy petting” with one of his male friends for the first time after school as they got dressed for a school social function. He recalled it as “kind of strange, because I had never experienced it, but I didn’t feel odd or bad about it.” That was the point at which, Julian said, “I really processed myself a different way than what others thought I should be.” When he entered college, he became very involved with dramatic arts. He recalled feeling safe to explore his sexuality, because he was surrounded by people from many different backgrounds, including students and instructors. He spoke fondly of a particular gay male professor from whom he “got his fashion sense.” He remembered overhearing the professor speaking to another male over the speakerphone in his office, and the joy and comfort it brought him when the professor spoke openly about it being his husband on the phone.

At the time of the interviews, Julian was teaching in an inner-city school in which ninety-five percent of the students received free/reduced lunch and many lived in single-parent homes. He described the area as having “a high rate of gang activity, bullying, and peer pressure.” Julian indicated that they were working hard to reduce violence and increase student achievement to avoid a potential takeover by the state department. He described himself as a “creative and innovative” teacher who wanted to “have a positive impact” on students by not only providing “meaningful hands-on lessons” but also by teaching them “stuff that they need to survive [that] is not taught in the textbooks.” He said that he always tries to be the one who can make people laugh, adding that, “If I can help you, I will. I don’t give up.”

Liz

Liz, a white female who identified as lesbian, was 44 years old at the time of her interviews. She had been teaching P.E. for kindergarten through fifth grade for the majority of

her 16 years. She also spent a brief period at the middle school level. Liz was married and shared custody of her wife's biological daughter who was conceived via artificial insemination.

Liz explained that she did not even realize that she was a lesbian until after entering college. She said that, even though she may have been attracted to girls in high school, she did not recall knowing what it really meant. She added, "I wasn't around it, exposed to it, or didn't see it every day. We didn't talk about stuff like that. Being from a rural town, I'd never heard of it." It wasn't until Liz started participating in intramural softball in college that she visited a gay bar for the first time. She recalled using another girl's identification to get into the bar, as she was still under age. She also remembered the boy who she was dating at the time becoming jealous and breaking up with her. That all worked out well, because Liz finally felt that she had found "a group of people who are just like me, who like sports, and just like to hang out." And then "a light bulb went off" for her as she thought to herself, "Maybe I do like girls and just never knew it." She eventually met her first girlfriend, with whom she had a short-lived relationship before transferring to a larger university. It was at that point that she "started hanging out at the bars, going to the softball fields," and having her "first serious relationship." This relationship lasted until she met the woman to whom she is now married.

Liz said that she actually intended to become an accountant. However, through an invitation to observe and work with a P.E. class as part of her P.E. minor, she "fell in love with the kids, participating with the kids, wanting to teach the kids." Afterwards, she changed her major to education.

Liz described herself as an "energetic" teacher, who "get[s] along with the kids pretty well." She said that her students feel comfortable coming to her about anything. Liz enjoys keeping the students "active and integrated into the classrooms" and works to adapt the P.E.

program to all grade levels and abilities. As she smiled and laughed a bit, she claimed, “I’m the good coach. They like me the best.”

Madelyn

Madelyn, a white female who identified as gay, was 58 years old when she first interviewed. She had been teaching P.E. for grades nine through twelve for the majority of her 20 years. She had also taught P.E., geography, and science at the middle school level for a brief period. Madelyn described the small magnet high school where she taught, located in a large district in a major metropolitan area, as being “multicultural” with “many different types of people.” She proudly shared that she had a daughter from a short-lived marriage of many years ago, and that she loved her grandchildren.

Madelyn recalled being “what is considered normal” [using air quotes] in high school, clarifying that she dated guys. And although she remembered getting “all tingly and stuff” after a really close female friend gave her a peck on the mouth at the high school going away party, she said that she did not think much about it until several years later after having a child and divorcing her husband of only four years. It was then that she had her first real kiss from a woman, after which she recalled really struggling with feelings of guilt and begging God to help her understand.

Before becoming a teacher, Madelyn had always been an athletic person and participated on several women’s sports teams. Recalling a time when she was helping with some middle school girls softball tryouts, she described how disturbed she was to notice that so many of the girls could not even throw a ball correctly. That is when she decided that she would teach physical education and coach girls to play sports.

Madelyn was very passionate when she talked about coaching, adding that over the years her focus had changed from cognitive skills (how to throw a ball) to affective skills (teamwork, getting along, taking turns). She believed that, although it was fun to win in sports, it was more important that “everybody plays and has a good time...the best game you can have is to get a big enough lead that everybody gets to play...to watch the kids that hardly get to play...score two points...to watch your bench go wild.” She added, “...that tells me I’m doing what I need to do.”

Megan

Megan, a white female who identified as lesbian, was 34 years old when she was interviewed. Megan had been teaching for 11 years at both the elementary and middle school levels. At the time of the interview she was working with English Language Learners (ELLs) in kindergarten through eighth grade. Megan was also married to a woman who had a child from a previous heterosexual relationship.

Megan came from a family of female teachers and attributed her passion for teaching to both her mother and grandmother. She grew up in a small town in which she attended grades K-11 at the same school and described herself as “a goody two shoes...church goer...straight-A student...in the band...very straight laced.” She recalled not really being interested in boys *or* girls and said, “I went to dances and things with guys. And I had a little church boyfriend from seventh to tenth grade, but...it wasn’t anything serious.” Megan went on to say that she did not really know that she was a lesbian and “didn’t know any gay people...anybody of any diversity...no other cultures.” She said that she knew what *gay* meant, but that it was not until she got away from her small town that she started learning more about herself and “it kind of hit me like a brick wall.”

Just before her senior year, Megan's dad got a job transfer and moved the family out of state, during which time, she met her first girlfriend. Although she recalled that her dad did not seem to mind it so much, her mom "did her best to tear us apart" and wanted Megan to move back to her home state with other family. After her family eventually moved back to her home state, Megan "snuck around" and continued her long-distance relationship with her new girlfriend for seven years until she found out that her girlfriend had cheated on her. She said, "Nobody at college knew my situation, so I did start going out with some guys...trying to be who I thought I needed to be. And...I was like, this is not me at all. I'm not happy." It was not until her mom point blank asked her about being a lesbian that Megan decided to "come to terms with it 100 percent." Megan described things between her and her mom as much better now, and said that her mom even walked her down the aisle when she and her wife got married. Years later she realized that her mom's initial reaction was just one of "panic" due to her young age, and the fact that her first girlfriend seemed to be driving a wedge between Megan and her family.

Megan said that her biggest passion was working with the ELLs. She added, "I have learned so much from these kids and have so much interest in their cultures." In order to get past language and cultural barriers, Megan acknowledged that "...you kind of have to just put yourself out there. You're not going to be able to understand the parents. You're not going to be able to communicate very well, but...making them feel comfortable is very important."

Ricky

Ricky, a black male who identified as gay, was 35 years old and had been teaching for 11 years at the time of the interviews. He had a background in special education and taught in kindergarten through sixth grade for nine years prior to his participation in this project. However, Ricky's working environment at the time of his interviews was very different from all of the

other participants. For the past two years, he had been serving as a teacher within a large medical facility for students of multiple grade levels who were there for long-term physiological or psychological care.

In terms of being gay, Ricky said, “I think I’ve always known. I don’t think there was a time when I didn’t know.” He added that, even though he did not know the correct sexuality terminology or truly understand what he was feeling until junior high school, he knew that he was “different” as early as kindergarten. Although Ricky did not remember his parents having an issue with his differences, he laughingly said that they would always acknowledge, “Ricky is different,” and were careful to instruct him on how to *not* walk, stand, or “swish” like a girl.

As much as he claimed to have wanted one, Ricky said that he had no boyfriends in junior high or high school. He recalled telling one person at the end of ninth grade that he was gay and then coming out slowly to all of his classmates in tenth grade. Having access to “anything gay...was so important” to Ricky at the time. Thus, he became “a pro with the Internet” and started to investigate gay chat rooms to learn more and meet other gay people. Referring to Ellen DeGeneres coming out on her television talk show, Ricky said, “It was huge...for me to see that on a national level.” He fondly remembered most of his straight female friends and some straight male friends who embraced him with no problem, and laughed as he told of a female friend purchasing a popular gay magazine from a local bookstore and smuggling it into the school for him to read.

Ricky explained that he originally intended to major in sociology and work in the social sciences. However, he took a job as a special education teacher on an emergency certification during a time when there was a shortage of special education teachers and “loved it.” He said that most of his colleagues and students would probably describe him as very patient, but added

that he is also a very “detail oriented teacher” who has “compassion for students that are...diverse...or maybe more difficult than typical students.”

Sam

Sam, a white male who identified as gay, was 46 at the time of the interviews. He served as a band instructor for grades six through twelve at his school for 13 years. Unlike all of the other participants, Sam had also served eight years as an administrator and two years as a district level staff member.

Sam did not talk much about his early experience growing up gay. However, regarding being gay in general and the faction of society which believes being gay is a choice, Sam said, “I’ve said a million times, and this is probably a terrible thing to say but, if I could do it over, I think anybody would be crazy to choose to be gay” (with the caveat that in some ways he meant that, and in other ways he did not). Sam claimed, “As far back as I can remember, I’ve always felt like this.” Still, he contemplated “why anybody would choose to live in hiding, to be discriminated against, to worry about your job...grow[ing] up in a Baptist mindset where you’re doomed for all eternity.”

When explaining how he became a teacher, Sam said that he had thought about teaching as early as sixth grade. He said that he was not sure why he was drawn to teaching, because he could not recall “playing school...like some people do” as children, but added, “Something just lead me down that pathway from the beginning.” However, coming from a family where his parents dropped out of high school and later obtained their GEDs, Sam admitted that he “hadn’t really thought about college” while in high school. Then, he remembered, “I started hanging around with a different set of kids in school...the geekier set...who studied more. I started taking a little bit more difficult classes.” He had fond memories of the school hiring a new band

director, who he said, "...encouraged me to look at instrumental music as a possible career." Because he loved music and "was just a big band nerd," he decided to work toward making that a reality.

Sam described himself as a "charismatic" teacher who was interested in "building relationships with kids and their families, sharing something with them that is unique...being able to play an instrument." He indicated that he liked to emphasize to students that the ability to play music is "really extra special," because it was something that not everyone could do. He felt that one of his real strengths was that he enjoyed using music education to teach about "whole team work...life lessons" and that "sometimes everything is not fair." Finally, Sam added as a side note that teaching music had "made it [being a gay teacher] a little easier, because you get an excuse to be a little more artsy."

Sara

Sara, a white female who identified as lesbian, was 36 years old when she first interviewed. She had been teaching chemistry and physics in grades ten through twelve for 14 years. Sara was also eagerly anticipating her upcoming marriage to her long-time girlfriend.

Sara recalled having a "sheltered childhood" and not really having the vocabulary to describe her first feelings of "Wow. One of these things is not like the others. And it's me!" She spoke of refusing to participate in Polynesian dancing during fifth grade physical education and wanting to play hockey with the boys instead. Describing herself as a tomboy who wore mostly blue jeans, t-shirts, and hiking boots, she was happy that her mom had not been "one of those people who was determined to dress her little girl up like a baby doll," while "Dad still jokes that he is waiting for me to go through my expensive teenage girl phase."

Sara's first realization that there was a word to describe herself came in sixth grade when someone called her a dyke. After recalling her mother's explanation that dyke was "a derogatory term for lesbian" and asking Sara if she knew what the term lesbian meant, Sara proclaimed that she "smiled and nodded and...almost floated upstairs to my room." She recalled thinking to herself, "If there is a word for this already in the English language, then I was not the only one. [laughs] There is somebody out there...somebody else that is the same kind of weird that I am." Later in college, Sara had a lesbian professor who "recognized how completely freaked out I was and kind of mentored me a little bit." Sara remembered the professor fondly as the first person who ever really told her, "It's ok that you are who you are. This is not the end of the world. You really CAN have a completely normal life and be gay." Sara said that she found this "very reassuring," adding that she had started college at age 16 to escape her misery of high school.

Sara also remembered "a literal Oprah moment" when watching the "coming out" episode of *Oprah* over a college break with her mom which her mom had recorded for the sole purpose of sharing with her. Sara said that when it was over, her mom just asked her if there was anything she wanted to say. Sara just laughed and said, "So that was how I came out to my Mom. She told Dad; I didn't. But by the next day Dad knew, and it was fine."

Sara originally intended to obtain a Ph.D. and proceed directly into higher education as a professor. However, she said that she figured out early on how much she "absolutely loathed research" and was afraid that "spending the rest of my life with my head in a fume hood was probably going to kill me." So she transferred to the education department and decided, "I would teach for a couple of years while I figured out what I actually wanted to do while I grew up. Then I liked it. So I kept doing it."

During the interviews, Sara's sense of humor and ability to laugh at herself permeated her stories, something that she claimed to use "a lot to connect with the kids." Remembering an exchange with her first mentor teacher, she recalled being told, "To keep control of your classroom, they either have to fear you or like you." Sara remembered just laughing along with her mentor, because they both knew that the students were "never going to be afraid" of her. Sara added that she loved her content and described herself as "a huge science nerd," as she gestured to the Superhero Periodic Table t-shirt that she had worn to work that day. She said, "I hope that I'm the teacher that the kids like and respect. I think they can tell that I love my subject, that I like them, and that I'm funny...and that's why they do...what I ask them to do."

Theme 1: Orientating One's Way Inside and Outside of the Educational Closet

If we know where we are when we turn this way or that way, then we are orientated...To be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way...If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as 'who' or 'what' we inhabit spaces with. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 1)

The first identified theme dealt with participants' responses to a series of questions about whether or not they were out at school and how they chose which information (if any) to disclose about their sexuality. Their individual responses varied based on their own definitions and degrees of being out. In other words, some may have still been oriented toward the educational closet, while others had "found their way" outside of it. The degree to which they were out depended largely on how they chose to manage their identity at work. This involved how they oriented themselves toward or away from certain situations, individuals, and actions. As Ahmed writes above, their sexual orientation often became a matter of how they inhabited the heteronormative spaces in which they worked. Some spoke of coming out at work as a continuous process due to faculty turnover and/or their own relocation to different schools. In

each case, this involved a re-orientation to another space and/or new people. Most believed that they did have a choice regarding whether or not to come out at work, and that they possessed a certain amount of agency to make that choice. However, they all measured that agency against structures such as the sociopolitical climate of their location/community, administrative support, collegial relationships, job security (e.g., tenure), and even personal financial security. All of these structures (in addition to beliefs about personal privacy) governed if, and to what extent, the participants chose to come out at work or to compartmentalize their personal and professional lives.

Identity management and compartmentalization

Participants described varying degrees of disclosure regarding their sexuality at school dependent upon individual beliefs and situations. As a way of helping to understand the participants' different experiences, I employed Griffin's (1992) table of identity management strategies to guide the categorization of the participants as "passing," "covering," "implicitly out," or "explicitly out" based on their levels of disclosure. These categories followed a continuum of disclosure in the school community which ranged from "completely closeted" to "publicly out," respectively (Griffin, 1992, p. 177). According to Griffin's descriptions, someone who was passing may have essentially been lying about their sexuality in an effort to be viewed as heterosexual. Those who were described as covering were censoring what they shared at work so as not to be seen necessarily as gay or lesbian. Those who were implicitly out assumed that some people knew they were gay or lesbian but did not directly confirm or deny such speculations. Finally, those who were explicitly out had actually told someone at school that they were gay or lesbian (Griffin, 1992). Although overlap of strategies existed for some the participants in the current study, each participant primarily fell into one of three of Griffin's

categories (covering, implicitly out, or explicitly out). The structure allowed me to arrange the participants in order of increasing level of disclosure about their sexuality at work, thereby proving useful in organizing the participants' experiences.

The participants who remained the most private about their sexuality at school were by far Gina, Julian, Sam, Drew, and Madelyn. Regarding their sexuality at work, they each tended to censor themselves more than the other participants. They all regarded sexuality as a personal issue, did not wish to be known as gay or lesbian at school, and generally came out only to close friends. Although they did not necessarily assume that people at school knew about them, they admitted that their sexuality may have been in question by some. Thus, these participants were best described as "covering." Again, the categories overlapped to some extent.

Although "covering" may have best described Gina's method of managing her identity at work, she definitely did not fit perfectly into this category. She admitted to lying one time about not being a lesbian when threatened with non-renewal by a homophobic administrator, which could have possibly categorized her as "passing," but also recalled explicitly telling one other teacher that she was a lesbian. However, Gina indicated that it was only one person in 25 years of teaching, and was because the other teacher "just point blank asked me" and "was from a place that was a lot more accepting than [home state name]." Speaking on compartmentalization of her personal and professional lives and how it made her feel, Gina recalled:

Occasionally, we would have dinner as a group...as a faculty. Most of the time...if we went out as a group, I would participate. But as far as just becoming friends with them or hanging out with them on the weekend...no...I didn't do that. I didn't do a lot of personal things with the people I worked with. I felt kind of left out at times. I wanted to. I didn't feel like it was a good idea. I didn't feel like they would really know me, you know?

Julian, similarly to Gina, could have been classified as "covering" for the most part. He said that even though some of his colleagues may have suspected that he was gay, none of them actually

asked, nor did he tell. One exception was a female colleague with whom he had been very close friends for 10 years prior to teaching with her. Julian explained:

That's one of the codes of being an educator. You keep your troubles in your car. When you close your car door and walk in the building, you're a professional. You don't bring your business in the school. The folks in my school only know my name, what I teach, and that if I can help them, I will help them. They don't know my address. Some don't even know my phone number. I don't add anyone on Facebook. At school, I'm Mr. [last name]. At home, I'm [first name]. That can be a downfall. Whatever you tell people at school, they can use against you.

Thus, Julian categorized his decision not to disclose his sexuality more as an issue of personal privacy rather than a necessity to hide his sexuality.

Sam initially said, "I find there are different versions of *out* for me...you can be kind of peeking out of the closet *out*. And you can also just rip the door off of the hinges and run out. I would say [I was] more the peeking out of the closet *out*." Although Sam compartmentalized his life and censored himself at work, he had a few close colleagues to whom he disclosed personal information regarding his sexuality, only eight in 23 years to be exact. Sam added:

Anything about work...I always kept it very separated. I didn't go and pretend...like there was somebody at home that was a woman or put some fake pictures on my desk or tell any lies. I just played a game of avoidance. People would ask me, 'Do you want to get married?' I guess I could have said that I would love to get married, but unfortunately, it's against the law. It was just always kind of awkward, but I had practiced so much deflecting that or just coming up with some other excuse, that it was second nature.

Drew had the following to say about coming out at work versus compartmentalizing his life:

I've never sat down with anyone I've worked with and said look, I want you to know something. I just never have. I think ALL teachers have to do that [compartmentalize] to an extent. Having to compartmentalize is something I really don't like. I'm a big believer that, when you allow people to be who they are, they really bring themselves to the table.

Madelyn, who was the most closeted of these three participants and perhaps the most closeted in this project, spoke about keeping things strictly professional at work.

I am not out at school...as far as me actually saying it. I mean...there are a couple of people who I think have figured it out, but they didn't hear it from me. They will invite me to come to their house in a social setting. They will say that I can bring my 'friend.' And I just say thank you, and then I don't go...[or]...I would go and wouldn't bring my 'friend.' I just kind of stay very professional with the majority of people...no social relationships really.

Additionally, Madelyn explained how compartmentalization and self-censorship had negatively affected her personal life, a feeling echoed by other participants in this and related studies.

I wish I didn't live in the same town that I teach in. If my partner and I go to the grocery store or out to dinner, then they [students and/or parents] are going to see me with the same individual again and again. They might start asking questions. So I'm never really comfortable going out in the town. I'm more comfortable in another state, in another country. We have it figured out. If we are shopping somewhere, and one of my students or parents comes toward me, my partner will just kind of fade away and shop on another aisle. If life was fair, I would introduce them. But that's just too much information to put out there. Maybe I worry about it [my private life] more when I'm NOT at work. I don't think you should make a big deal of it [being out at school]. You have to get comfortable in your own skin if you're going to out yourself. If you do...it doesn't mean you have to go into the specifics of your relationship with your partner.

The next group of participants (Sara, Liz, and Ricky) were all comfortable with allowing others to assume whatever they wished about their sexuality without necessarily using the labels of gay or lesbian, or as Griffin (1992) defined, being "implicitly out." Each of them commented that, even though they had also explicitly come out to a few very close colleagues, they still limited the amount of private information they shared.

Although Sara indicated that she had explicitly discussed her sexuality with some of her closest colleagues, she felt that she had been at the same school long enough that most people knew her implicitly to be lesbian.

Over the years, I've developed a pretty good instinct about who it is safe to tell and who it is not. I don't usually tell somebody until I know them, or until I have reason to tell them. I just kind of got over myself and reached a point where I basically say, this is who I am. I mean, I'm never going to work waving a rainbow flag and claiming that I'm here and I'm queer; you can get over it. But I don't make any particular effort to hide. With the rest of the faculty...yes...the ones I'm closest to...they know I'm gay. They know my partner's name. I'd say probably a third of our faculty have met my partner in the context

of ‘this is my partner.’ I *do* socialize with some of my co-workers outside of work. Some have even been to visit us. If other members of the faculty *ask* me if I’m gay, I don’t lie. I’ve said enough that I think they have probably figured it out. But I haven’t really come right out and said, I’m gay! [laughs] But they’re not stupid. I think they know.

Regarding the continuous coming out process, Sara claimed, “It’s only sort of awkward when new faculty members start the ‘are you married...do you have kids’ conversation. I do feel that I have to risk coming out over and over again.” Ricky added that, even though it is a “process that gay educators have to go through,” he felt that “coming out and being out gets easier the more you have to do it professionally.” Later in the interview, Ricky explained further:

I’ve been out roughly the last three years of the 11 years that I’ve been teaching. To clarify with what ‘out’ means to me, I’m just out to the people I am most comfortable with. In the instances where I have been out at school...I haven’t been out because I’ve told everyone but because I told someone, and then the rest knew. I mean, I’m sure they already knew, because you can only talk about ‘my roommate’ so many times before people start putting two and two together...when you have the characteristics that make everyone question otherwise. [laughs] I feel like my sexual orientation is something, not necessarily to be defensive about, but more guarded, because it’s not the norm. But now it’s not so much of a declaration by me anymore; rather, I just include references to my partner as part of my everyday talk.

Ricky also noted that, since he started casually including references to his partner in everyday conversations with colleagues, he noticed that they began to reciprocate by inquiring about the well-being of his partner or asking about their house hunting progress and plans for a possible marriage.

I also included Liz primarily in the implicitly out category even though she was, to use Griffin’s (1992) words, “more aggressively implicit” (p. 178) in how she initially handled coming out to colleagues. She recalled being at the first faculty meeting of the year shortly after the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage.

We had to tell someone three things about ourselves. I told my colleague that...I would actually get to legally marry the person I fell in love with 20 years ago. I talked with her, and we built a rapport. Then she had to share out with the whole group.

So Liz really only told the one teacher and simply did not object to her sharing out with the rest of the group. She said that some colleagues who were more open-minded would talk with her about it but with “the rest of them...we just talk about professional stuff.” There were still a few colleagues with whom she was cautious because they “are Pentecostal religious people. If they ask, I’ll tell them, but they don’t ask.” Overall, she chose to take an implicit approach and said:

At this point, I’m just direct with them. If you ask me a question, I’m going to tell you the answer. If you don’t want to know the answer, then don’t ask. I’ve actually had teachers come up and ask me about the adoption process...I recently officially adopted our daughter. They assume that she was adopted by both of us, and I have to explain that we have had her since birth, because she was conceived by artificial insemination [Liz’s wife carried the child].

Liz, similarly to Ricky, said that colleagues will generally ask how her wife is doing and fondly recalled how several of them visited the funeral home when her wife’s mother died.

The last two participants, Megan and Janet, seemed to be the most open about their sexuality at work. Based on their stories, they appeared to be explicitly out at work for the most part. Based strictly on Griffin’s (1992) definition, Megan, like some of the previous participants, could have been viewed as implicitly out since she said, “It’s not like I went around telling people I was a lesbian. I just got to where I didn’t worry about it anymore.” However, Megan told a couple of stories that made her level of disclosure appear a bit more explicit.

When I got engaged to [wife’s name]...I decided I wasn’t going to say anything about my personal life. I’m just going to teach...do my best job. That’s it. Well...I did tell one girl who was close to me on my hall after a year of teaching with her. [Wife’s name] and I got engaged my second year teaching there. I had my ring. One day we were in a meeting, and my principal asked me if I was getting married. I said yes but didn’t elaborate. She said that I could have told them.

Megan went on to explain how her wife “comes to all of my programs that I do with the kids.

She volunteers at sporting events. It’s really been a great experience for me.” Megan had

definitely become more open about her sexuality, something she felt empowered to do based on the support that she received from colleagues and administration.

Janet was by far the most out of all of my participants and described the way she came out (or was essentially outed) at work to be a “bit of anomaly” due to her family’s participation in a high profile lawsuit regarding the adoption of children by same-sex parents. Janet explained, “I came out all at once. It wasn’t like I told one person and then had to tell somebody else, and then it just kind of filtered around. It was *bam*, it was there!” However, Janet explained that her level of disclosure was a fairly recent development and recalled some of the difficulties associated with her coming out process.

Up until three years ago, I probably had only come out to four people, and that was over a 16-year period. So I was very, very, very closeted. Of course, people probably assumed...but when the lawsuit came out, that’s truly when I came out. I knew that there would be no way *not* to be out. At that point, I started talking to my colleagues about my family and wasn’t as afraid, I guess. It was difficult. I remember, a bunch of teachers went to [local brewery name] right after school had let out for the summer. There were probably about 15 teachers there, and I told them. Even though it was with a group of people who I love, a group of people that I wanted to go and spend time and drink beer with, a group of people who I had worked with for years and years, it was still very, very hard.

Even though Janet considered her sexuality to be publicly known both within and outside of the school and district, she still spoke about the same process of continuously coming out that Ricky and Sara described as it related to a school merger that occurred within her district. Janet said:

This year especially has been a little bit more difficult because of the way the schools merged. We had teachers from two schools merging into a building that was new for all of us. Everybody shifted grade levels. Of course, teachers who I had connected with got moved to the other school. So, it was, in a sense, kind of like starting all over...like I had to come out all over again...I think a lot of them probably had heard about it, because our district is small. But at this point, I guess I’m older now and just don’t care anymore. When I’m talking, I don’t care who it is. I say, ‘my wife and I’....Sometimes I just do it to see them squirm and how they’re going to handle it. Some people I know probably are not ready for it, so I don’t.

Old habits of censorship apparently still die hard, at least where Janet's family is concerned. For many years, they practiced a similar strategy to that of Madelyn and her partner when seeing someone out in public who had no knowledge of their relationship, that of separation to avoid an awkward introduction or conversation about her wife and child. Janet recalled a fairly recent similar experience at a very public event.

It was kind of funny. We were at the women's march recently, and I saw two of my kids and their mom there. I really didn't know that the mom was progressive or anything. So I told myself that I had to go and speak, because I felt that it would be as important for them to see me there as it was for me to see them there. As I walked that way and talked to them, I looked back to see that my wife had already walked away. When I asked my wife why she left, she said that it looked like a parent and student. I said, yes, but look where you are. It would have been ok here.

Although Janet did not consider herself to be as private as she used to be and explained that this avoidance technique only happens now when they see students or parents in public, the incident served to remind her of how her life is still censored to a certain extent.

Structures governing the exercise of agency in coming out at school

Regardless of the level of information that the participants shared about their sexuality at school, they all believed that it was their own choice to do so (with the exception of Janet, who initially felt somewhat outed at school by the lawsuit). They also felt that, while the agency to make that choice came from within themselves, there were some very important structures that governed the ways and extent to which they exercised their agency in coming out at school. In other words, we are all agentic. However, how we exercise our agency can be affected by the spaces that we inhabit and how we are oriented within those spaces. For some, tenure and personal financial security were important. Others spoke on the importance of non-discrimination policies that specifically addressed sexual orientation. However, all participants

talked extensively about the importance of location/community, administrative support, and close collegial relationships.

Madelyn, the most closeted of all participants, spoke specifically about the importance of personal financial security to her decision to remain in the classroom closet.

I still don't think I would be [out] unless I was financially set for the rest of my life. I sure would not come out in this society that I live in. Who comes out and makes the papers? Athletes that are making over \$100K a year. Movie stars who are financially there. If something happens, and they don't make another movie, they are ok. They have enough money. So yeah, I think it is a privilege. Some people come out, I'm sure, being strong-willed, hard-headed, and if you piss off the wrong people, you're going to be in trouble. It's going to be tough if you're not financially set. It's not fair [not being able to be myself at work], but I'm not one to buck the system or...make a stand on it. I'm not there yet, because I'm not financially secure. I don't think I'll ever be able to take that monkey off my back until I'm totally retired and out of debt. Then I can breathe. I feel like you have a choice...[but]...you've got to have something established to fall back on to make that choice.

Thus, Madelyn felt that the only way she could ever possibly risk coming out at school was to be financially secure enough to fight a legal battle or simply retire if she lost her job as a result. For Madelyn, this meant that she was “stuck in...alignment” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 92) with the closet, an effect of the production of a heteronormative space, one in which she did not feel financially secure enough to orient her way out of.

Janet and Ricky both mentioned the fear of coming out without first having tenure. Janet said, “Before you are tenured, you can get fired for anything, and they don't have to tell you a reason. I certainly didn't want just being gay to be a reason that I got fired.” Speaking of his first two schools, Ricky claimed, “I was tenured when I did come out at previous schools. I don't think I would have ever done it being non-tenured.” He also said that the only reason he came out immediately at his third school was because he kept his tenure when he moved within the same district. Referencing his partner who is a non-tenured teacher, Ricky explained, “I think that [not having tenure] scares a lot of people who are more closeted at work. My partner is not

tenured...and that scares him a little bit about being open.” Thus, although having tenure is not a guaranteed safeguard against being let go on the grounds of sexual orientation, it did seem to provide a certain sense of security for some teachers.

Only two participants, Sara and Ricky, were teaching in districts that had any kind of policy language designed to protect teachers regarding sexual orientation. Again, Ricky’s school was unique due it being a public school within a medical facility, one that both included the words “sexual orientation” in its non-discrimination and equal opportunity policies and offered medical benefits for same-sex spouses, long before the legalization of same-sex marriage. At the time of Sara’s initial interview, her school district had just one year previously updated its equal opportunity and non-discrimination policy to include sexual orientation language. Sara described her initial reaction to her discovery and an enlightening conversation she had with her administrator.

When I noticed that my district had added sexual orientation to the non-discrimination policy, I got so excited that I printed out that page from the online handbook and went running to my assistant principal's office to share the good news. ‘Have you seen this!?!’ I asked. And she said that she hadn't seen it, and...yeah, that was great. She didn't seem excited enough (by my standards), so I bounced around her office a little more sort of celebrating, and eventually she asked, ‘Have you felt discriminated against here before?’ I said no, absolutely not, that she'd never been anything but supportive, but that I was just excited because I didn't have to be afraid anymore. And she looked at me, totally confused, and said, ‘Why were you ever afraid?’ It really brought home to me the degree to which straight people in school system jobs just don't get it. She seemed to think that since she wasn't personally discriminating against anyone, it wasn't happening. And when I explained how terrified I'd actually been over the years, she was horrified: ‘But you're a great teacher. You never had anything to worry about.’ So I told her the story about the human resources person telling me I'd be fired if I ‘turned out to be queer or something,’ and I thought she was literally going to topple out of her chair. Even the people who consider themselves our allies have no idea what we go through. It’s astonishing how much difference it made in my attitude. And if you had asked me in advance whether it would, I’d have said no. But when my school system actually added the words ‘sexual orientation’ to the non-discrimination policy, which was this huge weight that I didn’t realize I had been carrying around had been lifted off my shoulders. If we did get a different boss, who was not friendly, at least now...they couldn’t just walk into my room and say, ‘We figured out that you’re a lesbian. Pack you your stuff and get

out.’ They would have to invent some other reason to let me go, which is surprisingly reassuring. [laughs]

Sara’s story illustrates how excited she was to know that she no longer had to worry about her sexuality at work, at least as it related to district policy and protections. It also demonstrated how lifting such a weight off her shoulders affected her overall attitude.

In the schools where there were no policies to specifically protect gay and lesbian teachers, the sociopolitical atmosphere and administration were important factors in participants’ comfort level with coming out. Some of the teachers mentioned how non-diverse communities and schools negatively affected their decisions to come out. Drew, who was not out at school, summed up the feelings of many of the teachers when he said:

It’s tough [being a gay teacher] and largely depends on where you’re working. I think some school systems, some communities, are much more open to the idea of it. Others are not. You have to sort of be guarded about what you’re doing. You would have to know your school system really well and how supportive they would be with you being out. I feel like...there are two things that define the culture of a school, the principal and the community.

Drew’s school was located in one of the most affluent communities in his state, one that he described as very socially conservative, non-diverse, and lacking regard for minorities in general. Related to effects on school policy, he recalled school and community tension surrounding opposing views of an alleged racist school mascot and the denial by school administration for the request of gay and lesbian students to form a gay-straight alliance (GSA). In the first case, racial hatred was spewed on an online community discussion board. In the second case, the student group was just conveniently placed under the already established “multicultural association.” In fact, Drew’s school was the only one within a group of similarly classified schools within the same metro area that did not have anything resembling a GSA. Drew poignantly noted:

When situations like that do arise, you need to know somebody has your back. And that has not really been the case within our system. I don't know how it would play out if we had a teacher to be openly gay or lesbian.

Describing his former principal as “opposed to anything that was not predominantly white, male, and Christian,” Drew spoke optimistically of change from the new principal, who “seems to be a lot more liberal in his attitudes and ideologies.” Although a more racially diverse community, Liz described the area in which she taught as still being very socially conservative. She claimed to have a lot of “problems with rednecks...black/white issues...also gay/straight issues,” and added, “...you don't really discuss it [being gay], because there are still people who are not open to it.” Ricky also recalled how, when he first started teaching, working in a more rural, non-diverse community school caused him to remain in the closet when he first started teaching.

With the situation where I was when I first started teaching, I was not only scared because I was a first year teacher, but just because the area I was in did not have a lot of diversity, in terms of race anyway. And I was the only male teacher at the time. [There was] just negative thinking and using words...not directly at me... language mostly...you know... 'those queers'. I heard that once...and not directly at me...just in conversation back when gay marriage and equality started going somewhere or when something queer on TV would happen...talking about that in a very negative way. But I knew from [hearing] that, it was not the environment to be open in terms of sexuality.

Conversely, Madelyn said that her school “is multicultural and has so many different types of people...sexual orientation doesn't seem to be an issue with anybody over here.” She added that there had been students who were out and had been well received. Still, Madelyn did not feel comfortable coming out as a teacher who was lesbian, even though she assumed her principal would not have an issue with it. Like others, she was also afraid that things might “go bad, really bad” for her with changes in the faculty and/or administration.

Sara, Janet, and Megan all spoke specifically about the importance of having supportive school administrators and how it relieved a lot of undue stress for them. Speaking about her choice to move to a different school and the difference it made for her, Sara said:

I *chose* to move to a school where I thought it was more likely that I would eventually be able to actually be me. When I moved to a different school with a totally different culture and got a wonderful boss, who got who I was and was not freaked out by me, I realized that I did have a choice. I didn't have to hide who I was from everybody, that maybe it was ok to take it on a case by case basis and decide [who to tell].

Sara went on to give two examples of when she felt supported by her administrators.

I know at least once a parent...said he knew that one of the science teachers was a lesbian. The principal said, 'Yes. She is. And what was it you wanted to speak with me about?' That is not something that every administrator would do.

Regarding originally coming out to her administrators, Sara fondly remembered:

I came out to my assistant principal. And she outed me to the principal...which I didn't mind. I figured, they're such a close team that I knew when I told her, that I was telling him, too. Her description of his reaction to it was pretty funny. Apparently, his immediate response was to ask whether I was with somebody, and if so, had she [the AP] met my girlfriend. And was she ok? And should they be worried about me? And that's the boss that I have. [laughs] So I've been really fortunate in that regard. That's *why* I changed schools. I wanted to go to a school that had a better culture, the faculty got along better, and the boss didn't put up with people's discriminatory shenanigans.

Janet recalled her principal's reaction when briefing her about what to expect with the pending lawsuit, of which she and her wife were a part in their state regarding the adoption of children by same-sex parents.

I let her know that I was somewhat fearful of parents in the community talking. She asked me what I wanted her to say to parents if they called. I told her that I hoped she would tell them that I was a good teacher, and that my professional life and my personal life are two different matters. She indicated that she had planned on saying something exactly like that. When I checked in with her about six months later, she said that she had never received a phone call or anything.

Janet said that some of the parents were also supportive, telling her in the carpool line that they "believed in what I was fighting for." She added, "No parents said anything negative to me."

Lastly, having previously taught at a school where Megan was convinced that her principal pink slipped her because she was a lesbian, she found her new school to have an entirely different culture and partially attributed the difference to the administration.

I'm not the only one [gay or lesbian] at my school; there are several others. Even when we changed administration, she's even better than the former principal. I sent her a Christmas card with our [family] picture, and she hung it on her door at school. She's

very supportive. I've been extremely pleased. I think this has definitely been my favorite job and the best fit for me. I hope that if we ever have any change in administration, things will be the same for me.

Again, Megan summed up the main point made by each of these teachers regarding the importance of supportive administrators by saying, "I think a lot of it has to do with administration and how they value their staff, the climate that they create, the attitude of acceptance and embracing diversity." Thus far, all of the teachers' stories, in some way, highlight the importance of a supportive administration to creating a culture of inclusivity, one in which they felt empowered to be themselves at work without fear of negative repercussions.

In addition to a supportive administration, the participants explained how close and supportive relationships with peer teachers to whom they had come out also made their work experience more pleasant and tolerable. Liz recalled the reaction she received upon sharing at the back to school faculty meeting that she was finally going to be able to marry her longtime partner. She said, "Most people were very congratulatory. Several of them wanted to throw me a wedding shower." She also remembered individual teachers telling her to just be herself, that they were proud of her, and that they were standing up for her. Since Liz just decided to share that bit of information as her back to school good news, she was pleasantly surprised at the overall positive reception by her peers. Megan described a similar experience of how supportive the faculty was when they found out that she and her then girlfriend were getting married. She said, "They even threw us a wedding shower with two veils on the cake... a big shrimp boil at someone's house...champagne...[and] a huge \$300 cook set. They treated it like it was totally normal."

Julian and Sara described the closeness that they felt with certain faculty members as well. Julian indicated that it was important to him to have someone close at work in whom he could confide.

I have this one teacher on my same grade level. She teaches math, and I teach history. We met when I was an undergraduate. We are like brother and sister. We tell each other about our relationships. We were friends before we were co-workers, so she never turns against me. Basically, she is my confidante.

Sara described the overall faculty relationship at her small school as “different...more like an extended family than just people that I work with.” She elaborated by saying, “Our boss refers to us as the faculty family...We are very aware of each other’s troubles, family lives, and prayer requests. We have faculty socials...dinner and breakfasts together.” Janet also saw the value of close collegial relationships but spoke more specifically and extensively about how she believed being able to be open and honest about her sexuality with her peers made her a better teacher.

I think the positive relationships [with colleagues] have helped me be more confident in myself to the extent that I allow myself to be more vulnerable, which really is a good thing for my students. Even though my students may not know about my sexuality, I think the relationships with them are better and they can see deeper into me, because of the trust and support that I have with my colleagues.

Janet provided a specific example of a friendship that positively affected her working relationship with the other P.E. teacher at her school and how it affected her when they were split up in a district/school reorganization.

When my colleague from the previous school and I worked together (two gay women sharing an office) we were great, great friends. We were able to work well together, just because we kind of had the same work ethic, the same belief system. The two of us were just such a powerful team that it allowed our colleagues to respect what we did. Even though she was not completely out, I think seeing the positive support that I got allowed her to feel more accepted...willing to tell her story as well.

However, when the district reorganized and split her school into two schools, Janet found it difficult not having “someone who I’m able to connect with...not having someone who gets

me,” and described it as feeling like a “real drain.” She also added that, even though she was not explicitly out to the parents, she believed that the strong collegial relationship with her P.E. partner teacher “help[ed] with parental relationships...as far as the P.E. program goes...allows us to get a lot of buy in and support.” Finally, Janet added:

I think that when you work with someone who gets you, your working environment is enhanced. When your working environment is enhanced, you are able to put in a lot more passion and enthusiasm. Then your students are going to benefit, and student learning and engagement is going to increase. As far as being an out teacher, I wish I had done it years ago. I really believe that the more people get to know someone, when they realize that they are gay, it’s a lot harder to be homophobic because they’re someone that they love. And so I just really want people to get to know me - know me as Janet, but that [being gay] is part of my story.

Regardless of how much participants disclosed to colleagues, they all tended to be more secretive when it came to the students, and distinguished between having explicitly disclosed certain amounts of information about their sexuality to colleagues versus disclosing such information to students. They had varying philosophies regarding the appropriateness of disclosure to students and were primarily concerned with potential negative repercussions of doing so. The closest that any of the participants came to an admission to a student of being gay or lesbian was Sara when she ran into a student at a Gay Pride skating social. She recalled that the student was so shocked to see her there that he skated directly into a wall. Upon going over to ask if he was ok, the student asked, “What are *you* doing here?” Sara laughed and said that she simply replied, “The same thing that *you’re* doing here,” and that she left it at that.

Thus, the participants pointed to various structures that governed if, and to what extent, they chose to exercise their agency in choosing to disclose information about their sexuality to colleagues. These structures, for the most part, provided a sense of protection and a feeling of confidence for the participants. In the absence of such structures, the only way that some of them felt that they could somewhat protect themselves was by being “the good teacher.”

Theme 2: Re-Orientation Toward the Good (Gay or Lesbian) Teacher

Good teachers are not only expected to be strong in their content areas and their ability to effectively teach that content but also to be empathetic, caring, and compassionate. Such qualities govern their ability to build rapport with their students, thereby ultimately increasing their effectiveness in working with their students. Good teachers strive to build a culture of inclusivity by providing safe and inclusive classrooms. Such classrooms are ones in which all students should be protected from bullying, including but not limited to derogatory name calling. Good teachers serve as positive role models and advocates for all students. Whereas any good teacher understands the importance in attempting to be all of these things for all students, many gay and lesbian teachers struggle with how to balance their desire to be the good teacher with the potential associated risks of being a gay or lesbian teacher. For the participants of the current study, their ability to “see straight” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 65) was impaired by the fact that they were always oriented queerly toward the heteronormative spaces in which they worked. Thus, that meant constantly using various strategies to re-orient themselves toward that space, one of which was by striving to be the “super teacher.”

Empathizing with students

One way that teachers felt that they were able to orient themselves toward being a super teacher was by empathizing with students. On being empathetic, caring, and compassionate teachers, all of the participants in this study felt that their being gay or lesbian had positively influenced how they related to their students in general. The following story from Megan captured the essence of how the majority of the participants described their approach to understanding their students.

I think that being lesbian, gay, or any kind of minority situation gives you a lot of tolerance and acceptance in your heart...because of the things we face. Ultimately, the

relationship with my kids is one of the most important things to me, because they can't learn from me if they don't trust me and know me well. I think that going through what I've been through...has made me a better person to be their teacher. I feel like I can empathize with any situation and also accept *them* for who they are and where they are. I definitely think, from a personal standpoint, that [being a teacher who is lesbian] has shaped who I am. I think that if I wasn't the person I am, I don't think I would even have the patience that I do. I like to pride myself on giving the students the benefit of the doubt. If a kid is exhibiting bad behavior or apathy, I try to think about the root of the problem. Kids usually, by nature, want to please you and get that praise and attention. What it means to me, I guess, is that it gives me a chance to show the kids a kind of person that they may not get to see all of the time. If at any point they find out later in life that I am a lesbian...I hope they will see that gay and lesbian people are just like anybody else.

Thus, the participants saw themselves as empathetic, particularly to those who do not fit into traditional boxes, and more open to diversity of all kinds. Sam said, "It's made me probably see kids who are picked on, discriminated against, or bullied in a different way. I was one of them." Sara also recalled feeling "really isolated in high school" and credited that feeling for being "more sympathetic toward...the kids that don't fit into the nice little cookie cutter mold that school is sort of designed for" and for "feel[ing] for them a little bit more than I otherwise might." Ricky attributed his awareness of diversity issues to "being black as well as gay" as he recalled questioning the disproportionate representation of people of color (specifically Hispanic students) in the gifted programs at one of his former schools. In each case, the participants expressed a concern regarding issues of diversity and related that concern to their personal experiences as gay or lesbian individuals.

As a parent in a same-sex marriage, Janet talked not only about the importance of having empathy for students who are different but also of being open-minded when it comes to diverse families.

My wife and I have pretty much declared that when we go into a school, we are going to present ourselves as a family and as a couple. And I know that here at this school and at our other school, there were [gay] parents who didn't feel comfortable doing that. They were fearful of how the school would react. I think our [previous] school would have

been fine, but obviously there was a reason that those parents were hesitant about presenting themselves that way. So I think school culture has to evolve in a way so that all families feel comfortable walking into the school doors. And that's one thing that I try to do. If I'm doing something in my classroom or the gym where parents are coming in, I try to think about how it would feel with my wife and daughter and I walking in. If we would feel comfortable, then I'm pretty sure that our Hispanic families and interracial families are going to feel ok.

Janet went on to say that she had discussed such issues with the school counselor with whom she was close. Janet wanted to help create a school culture in which diversity is valued and welcomed, one in which its members are not only able to have discussions about how to act on those values but also how to instill those values into the students.

The empathy that was expressed by the participants is evidence that they were indeed concerned about their students and wished to do what they could to help them. However, many indicated that they felt limited as to what they could actually say or do to let the students know that they cared about them and issues of diversity in general. This was particularly the case when it came to issues of sexuality.

Participants specifically talked about the need to avoid any type of physical interactions and being careful with the amount of personal information shared with students. The following quote from Madelyn illustrates how she felt that she had to be so careful regarding physical contact with female students.

It wasn't until the last couple of years I thought, these kids are really missing out because I'm afraid. If I put my arm around a girl's shoulder, clearly coach to player, it could be misinterpreted. Another coach could put their arm around a girl, and no one would think anything of it. I'm just really careful not to do that. I *don't* do that. So they may not get the warm and fuzzy from me...the idea that I really do care about them. They might not get that, because I have to be careful...don't want anyone to think something negative. So I just avoid the situation.

Although this quote addresses a non-sexual physical interaction with students, a concern for not only gay and lesbian teachers but also for straight teachers, there does appear to be more of a

perceived threat regarding such interactions with students in general by gay and lesbian teachers. This quote, as well as others shared by the participants, illustrates how some felt that they had to limit their interactions with students and how that also limited their ability to show genuine compassion for their students. A similar quote from Julian echoed Madelyn's concerns:

As a teacher, I look at the media. You have to be so careful, because there are so many possible false allegations that could come. So I'm kind of careful in the classroom. I don't get close to students. I don't accept hugs. I keep my distance. I try not to even give them a pat on the back. Kids want to be loved. They want to give hugs or high fives, and I run the other direction. When they ask why I am running away, I just tell them that I am not feeling well today, and I don't want them to catch whatever I have today. Then I kind of do an air high five.

However, it is not just the possibility of a physical touch being misconstrued that worried some of the participants. Some felt that they could not make meaningful connections with students through the sharing of personal experiences. Megan explained:

Sometimes you do like to relate your experiences to theirs to make connections and form background knowledge...it's hard when I try to relate an experience. For example, we [Megan and her wife] went on a cruise to Mexico, and I wanted to share that with the girls, because a lot of them are from there. They have family there. A lot of the pictures had my wife in them, and it was very hard to edit them, what I showed them, what I didn't. They were all excited when they knew I was going. I could connect more often, particularly with the older kids, if I could be more honest with them, 100% honest.

Megan also lamented that she had hoped to have a swimming party at her home for the girls in her classes as a reward for working so hard in the summer academic camp, but was afraid to do so for fear of a parent finding out that she was a lesbian and thinking anything inappropriate might have been happening (even when she had planned to invite the parents as well). This definitely highlights a difference in the perception of what might be viewed as inappropriate, depending on whether or not a teacher is known or suspected to be gay or lesbian. It also presents certain limitations when addressing LGBTQ issues and establishing a culture of inclusivity in a space where sex and sexuality are not openly discussed.

Creating a curriculum and culture of inclusivity

A second way in which teachers tried to orient themselves toward being a super teachers was through the creation of curricula and cultures of inclusivity. In general, none of the teachers in this study reported any direct inclusion of LGBTQ issues in their teaching. Although they felt that it was important for students to be exposed to such issues, they also indicated that they would not have necessarily felt comfortable being responsible for leading such discussions or lessons. Janet acknowledged:

It takes people, students, understanding about diverse families and understanding about relationships. I think those conversations have to start in elementary school, because by the time this conversation is in middle school, it's already too late...the bullying has already started. So it is very conflicting to me, because I think this conversation should happen. I just struggle with me being the one to start these conversations.

Some did use specific incidents/conversations between students as teachable moments to let students know that they would not tolerate homophobic behaviors in their classrooms. However, the majority felt that it would be difficult to present such information directly without it appearing to be out of the context of their class and felt that such topics were most easily incorporated into courses such as history, literature, or health.

Sara, for example, half-jokingly said, "There's just nothing gay about physics." At the very least, she, like most of the other participants, indicated that she would address issues of sexuality if they came up, particularly as part of a situation that could be seen as bullying. Participants indicated that the primary way in which the topic came up was through the derogatory use of terms like "gay" or "fag" toward other students. Whether or not the target student was in fact gay, was not the point. Sam, Sara, Liz, and Gina each said that they taught students that derogatory use of such words was no different from the use of racial slurs, neither of which would be tolerated.

In one follow-up question, Sara shared two instances in which she briefly broached the subject of sexuality in class. Some of her physics students had recently watched the movie, *The Imitation Game*, about Alan Turing's development of a machine that could theoretically help computer scientists analyze computer algorithms and were discussing it in class. One of her students asked, "Why did they have to make such a big deal out of the fact that he was gay in the movie?" Sara took the opportunity to explain, "Well, he was gay in real life. They didn't make that up for the movie. He was, in fact, gay. And he was persecuted for it. To have left that out would have been not honest." Thus, in this particular instance, Sara was able to provide insight into the historical implications and dangers of being gay within the context of a scientific discussion.

Others teachers used specific lessons or stories dealing with civil rights and/or diversity to indirectly address issues surrounding sexuality. Drew, for instance, spoke a lot about his belief in the importance of "age-level appropriate conversations and teaching methodologies" with his high school students, ones that forced them to "think outside the box" and "define their thoughts and opinions backed up by the facts." Through discussions surrounding 14th Amendment due process, Drew explained how he was able to take students from the 14th Amendment's original intent of guaranteed rights for black persons and get the students to apply it to other situations such as legalized abortion and same-sex marriage. He said, "If you handle it from an academic perspective, from a non-biased perspective and present both sides of the coin...it's good for the kids to talk about that kind of stuff." Again, Drew was emphasizing the importance of keeping sensitive discussions objective and within the context of his curriculum.

Ricky used a similar approach with his elementary students, one in which he used curriculum to address a culture of inclusivity. He explained that approaching topics of others'

differences often needs to be handled differently at the elementary level. Whereas he did not have any incidents directly related to sexuality, Ricky said that he took the opportunity to teach about valuing others' differences by using story lessons such as Dr. Seuss's *Sneeches*. By using this particular story of people who have stars and those who do not, he said that he was able to teach that differences among people are a good thing. He said, "I try to teach that it doesn't matter if you're different...to embrace who you are...to embrace others for who they are...it's about mutual respect...understand[ing] that they are different just like the next person, that there is common ground." Ricky added that his own identification as both a racial and a sexual minority motivated him to always teach in this way.

Sara recalled another conversation, in which she supported a culture of inclusivity by correcting a male student in front of her class for calling another male student a fag.

- Sara: I wouldn't let you call somebody a nigger, a wetback or whatever else in my classroom. So you're not going to use that word either.
- Student: Well that's different from being black, Mexican, or whatever, because *they* [gay people] are *that* way on purpose.
- Sara: That is your personal opinion, and not everybody agrees with that, and it's inappropriate language for the classroom.

Sara went on to say that there has not been an issue like that in her classroom since. She said, "I think that's how I got the reputation as being the teacher who defends people. I think the word got out that it's probably not a good idea to call somebody a fag in Ms. [her last name]'s classroom." Sara, incidentally, said that she did not even think the boy who was being called a fag was actually gay. Pascoe (2007) uses her notion of "fag discourse" to explain how a boy can be labeled a fag for acting in any way perceived as contrary to the normative masculine ideal, regardless of whether or not his heterosexuality is actually in question. In this context, the fag discourse is used by boys to discipline their behaviors (i.e. compel them to behave in a masculine way) in certain spaces. While Pascoe makes a valid point, it is important to note that Sara took

the opportunity to take up for the student while teaching a lesson, an issue that may have been safer for her, as a lesbian, not to address or at least easier to just ignore.

When it comes to issues of sex and sexuality in general, it is often easier or at least more comfortable, for some people to just not discuss them. However, this does nothing to address the underlying problems and, as Megan explained, serves to perpetuate a lack of understanding and fear.

I think we just need...[to realize] that this is part of society. If they [students] are not gay themselves, they are going to know someone who is gay or work with someone who is gay. I think they need to know and...I do think it is important to treat it as something that is normal. I think that a lot of the problem people have is that they do not have a lot of direct experience with anyone who is gay. And you always fear what you don't know, or you make assumptions or draw conclusions before you get to know someone.

Based on the information provided by all of the participants (with the exception of Ricky) the approach to issues of sex and sexuality at their schools tended to be more reactive than proactive. In other words, it was not really discussed or recognized as an issue until something happened that brought it to the forefront. However, as the participants illustrated, some students are sexually active, are struggling with or exploring their own sexuality, or all three. Just because it is not discussed does not mean that it is not happening. The participants believed that as more young people feel empowered to act on feelings and express their sexualities, it will become even more important for schools to proactively address such issues in positive and effective ways.

Julian, Megan, and Liz (all of whom teach or have at one point taught in both elementary and middle school) felt that there is not much sexual activity at the elementary level. Rather, they reported that most sexual conversation and activity starts around fourth or fifth grade and really starts to become prevalent in middle school. Julian's first reply to my request of him to talk about the discourse surrounding sex and sexuality at his school was:

We have so many issues with sexual activity going on. And this is a middle school! There were the two male basketball players getting caught by a custodian performing fellatio on each other behind the stage. There were also the two seventh and eighth grade girls who posted about their relationship on Snap Chat after having had a tug-of-war with their panties in the girls restroom before stopping up the toilet with them.

However, Julian spoke about an issue that was even more disturbing. There was an eighth grade male who was very open about being gay. In fact, Julian said that he would tell everyone, ‘The men love me. They pay for mine. I got this man, that man. I love me some mens. I got five mens waiting on me.’ Now how much of that is true, Julian did not claim to know. It does, however, speak to several issues, one being the fact that this young man was engaging in graphic sexual conversation, if not the actual act of sex itself. The other scarier issue was that he was possibly engaging in sexual acts with males older than himself. Julian did say that the counselor was aware of the situation. However, there was no kind of education in place to prepare teachers and students for such situations. All of this caused Julian concern about small things like simply allowing his sixth graders to go to the bathroom alone.

Liz spoke of two incidents, one that proved awkward for her and the other that proved awkward for both her and a group of her track students. While attending a middle school ball game, Liz was greeted by several former elementary students who were now in middle school. One of the girls was wearing a shirt for a different middle school than she attended. When Liz questioned why she was wearing the shirt, another girl remarked that the shirt belonged to her girlfriend who attended another school. At that point, Liz did not comment further and listened to the girls talk about that relationship very openly. On another occasion, Liz had taken her track team to a meet where there was what appeared to be a girl running on a boys’ team for another school. Of course, the students on her team were confused and began to ask questions. Liz found out from the boy’s mother that he was “trying to find his identity.” Being at a loss of words to

explain the situation to her own students, she simply said, “We know there’s a girl running in the boy’s event. Just leave it alone.” Some may feel that Liz’s response to the situation lacked sufficient explanation. Others may feel that a full explanation would have been inappropriate for her grade level. Regardless, Liz offered the only explanation to the students that she felt was safely within her power to say at the time.

Janet faced similar dilemmas in her school as an elementary teacher. Even though Janet was outed due to a very public lawsuit and was open about herself with her colleagues, she still found herself conflicted when it came to addressing certain issues with elementary school students. She believed that “there is a huge disconnect in our character education curriculum and homophobia. LGBTQ issues are never a part of the conversation.” She claimed that she had talked to their counselor a number of times about trying to incorporate more inclusive language in the curriculum and how to address situations such as hearing students use terms like “gay,” “faggot,” and “queer” in a derogatory manner. She said that the staff as whole just did not know how to handle it. Again, she was conflicted when telling a student “You know that’s not a word we use,” because she did not want them to think that the words were always necessarily bad. Rather it was about the appropriate use of the words. But how do you explain that to an elementary school student (or any student for that matter) without crossing certain taboo lines? Janet ran into a more personal situation between her daughter and the librarian at her daughter’s school over one of her daughter’s book choices. The librarian told her daughter that she did not need to read a particular book because it was “too delicate and included a gay character.” Considering that her daughter actually lives with same-sex parents, Janet found this a bit ironic and decided to fight the issue. After a conversation with the librarian and a few calls to the superintendent, the book in question was added to the school library.

None of this is to say that there were not some schools in which proactive approaches to dealing with issues surrounding sex and sexuality were starting to emerge. Sara spoke of positive and supportive conversations at her school regarding gender non-conforming attire at the prom and same-sex prom dates. Megan and Ricky also spoke of some of the more progressive moves made by individuals at their schools to begin establishing a culture of acceptance and understanding.

Megan, who claimed to be completely out with all of her colleagues, said without hesitation that “Sexuality is really not discussed at the school.” She followed with a clarification that someone being gay or lesbian was a “non-issue...not talked about a lot...just kind of perceived as normal.” As for how that transfers to the students, she recalled:

Actually, we have a few [students who are gay]. Last year we had a couple of girls who were definitively together. Our counselor in response to that put up a safe space sticker with a rainbow sign on it, and told them to come talk to her. There was a male student who totally identified as gay. He was in 8th grade and new to our school last year. He felt uncomfortable in the gym. He said the kids were making fun of him, calling him a faggot. So the principal allowed him to be an office aid to get his P.E. credit because she wanted him to feel comfortable. She was very accommodating because of the way he felt.

Thus, the administrator attempted to be supportive of the student by offering different accommodations. However, this solution did not address any of the underlying issues relating to systemic homophobia or a school culture in which bullying based on differences occurs.

Perhaps the most progressive school environment of all of the participants is the one in which Ricky worked. That being said, Ricky’s school was a special case since it was a school within a medical facility. Ricky described the discussion surrounding sexuality at his school as “becoming more prevalent, particularly regarding transgender.” The facility where he worked actually had a department that specialized in patients/students who were gay or lesbian. The facility also had plans of possibly opening a separate section for transgender children. He

explained that the staff was conflicted about having to go with what was on a child's medical record versus how the child identified. In response to the concern, his facility began to be more proactive in its approach to such issues. Ricky explained in detail:

We have had...physicians who specialize in that to come and talk to us about it. I'm part of the school initiative to talk to outside schools about behaviors, what we are seeing, and what we can do. So the discourse is positive in as much as, we don't see it as a problem but as a question of how we can better help these students. It's not just transgender, but some of our gay students who are being bullied are coming to inpatient psych. We have had a lot of training, what's appropriate and what's not, what it is and what it's not. So the discourse is about *not* ignoring the issues, making sure the proper procedures are in place, and helping these patients with their coping skills. Part of that came about because we had some issues with people not knowing what to do or say, or having their own personal beliefs. So I think...there are still personal beliefs about LGBT and other things; however, it's not as an overall institution and is not allowed. It is about the overall direction that our institution is going in, and it's a positive one in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Thus, Ricky's institution could definitely serve as an example for how to develop a culture of inclusivity and care surrounding students who are struggling with issues of sexuality and/or gender identity. Again, as many of the participants have suggested, the supportive leadership must be in place in order for this to happen. Ricky mentioned above that he is available to speak to outside schools about how to deal with certain sensitive issues. If we could get people like Ricky into more schools to educate administrators and faculty/staff and open up real discussions about these topics, we could go get a lot closer to establishing a productive dialogue and inclusive culture in schools.

Thus, even though none of the participants necessarily felt comfortable being responsible for directly talking or teaching about issues surrounding sexuality, some were able to indirectly address issues of diversity or at least present a platform for students to begin discussions of sensitive issues. Some impromptu lessons stemmed from conversations between the students themselves in which participants intervened to turn the situation into a teachable moment, one in

which the teacher made it known that disrespectful behavior toward those who are different would not be tolerated. Other lessons, although still indirect, were more deliberately focused on issues of diversity (including sexuality) through application of topics within the curriculum.

Serving as role models and advocates

A third strategy used by teachers to orient themselves toward being a super teachers was through service as role models and advocates for students. All participants spoke of the importance of being positive role models and advocating for all students and particularly the gay and lesbian students. Madelyn, who was by far one of the most closeted participants, described herself as a sort of “safety net” for gay and lesbian students in general and for one male student in particular.

I think a kid that’s facing the challenges of being gay in today’s society probably has their gaydar and would come to me, and it would be ok. You know. ‘There’s that teacher, and I think they are [gay], and they survived.’ I base that on students that I know...my gaydar went off for them, and I spoke to them, and they always spoke back. They would come hang out after school. If they were ever in public and saw me, they would always speak. I think I was [one student’s]...safety net. He knew if he ever got into a conflict with someone...he could come hide (for lack of a better word) in my office and talk about it. He knew I was there, without anything being spoken, or anything being revealed. I mean, the kid was out. He wore red high heels to school. Come on! But he always made sure when he was in a big crowd...when they came in for an assembly or a pep rally or something like that, he always knew where I was. So I put this façade on like, you know, I’m fine. Everything’s cool. You’ll be ok. They [the gay students] know where I am. If I go to a function that is not at the school, those children come and speak to me and sit by me for a little while. They make me feel like I’m a safety net...like ‘I know she’s here...I’m going to be fine.’

Madelyn offered the assurance that if a student came to her and needed help, she would not hesitate to help the student and added, “If they are having a hard time facing their own sexuality, you can...be supportive...and not out yourself, I think. It hasn’t happened yet.” Madelyn’s words not only provide examples of the empathy and support she had for students but also illustrate the importance of positive and successful role models for gay and lesbian students.

Regarding role models, Sara recalled fond memories of a lesbian college professor who “recognized how freaked out I was and kind of mentored me.” Sara went on to say that the professor was really the first person to ever say to her, “This is not the end of the world. You really *can* have a completely normal life and be gay.” Likewise, Janet and Megan both spoke of the importance of not only advocating for gay and lesbian students but also being seen as a role model by them. Janet said:

Every now and then I can already see those kids who may fall somewhere in the middle of the sexuality spectrum...kids who may eventually identify as something other than straight. And I haven't yet figured out how I can connect with them. As a lesbian, I certainly want to find a way that I can be a role model, even though they may not know that yet about themselves. Hopefully, I could be someone that they could look up to as a successful person.

Megan echoed Janet's sentiments by saying that she wished she could be more open with her younger students who are struggling with their own sexuality to let them know that things can and do change. She explained:

They need to know that they are not different, that it is just who they are. I think it could really benefit a lot of our children and stop some of these suicides and bullying, if they could have more gay role models.

However, for participants like Janet and Megan, who felt passionate about the need for positive role models for gay and lesbian students, trying to actually be that role model without being explicitly out presented a dilemma for them.

In a partial refutation of this dilemma, some participants explained that they did *not* necessarily have to be explicitly out to students in order to be that role model. Instead they believed that the mere suspicion by gay and lesbian students that there were also gay and lesbian teachers present who would support them often served as a source of comfort. Sam, Sara, Madelyn, Gina, and Julian each indicated that they had gay and/or lesbian students confide in them about their sexuality or at least appear to find comfort by remaining in close proximity to

them in times of need. Each believed that students' confidence was founded in the assumption that they would not be judged by someone they possibly perceived to be like them and thus felt comfortable talking to them. For example, Sara recalled that she had a number of students (suspected of being gay or lesbian but not necessarily confirmed) who hung out in her room before and after school for no particular reason that she knew of, other than the fact that they seemed to feel comfortable there. She jokingly remarked, "I'm sure some of them have figured out that I'm gay. You can sort of look at me and see that I have a sort of butch look going on." Sara referenced her short hair, lack of makeup, jeans, and the "science nerd" Superhero Periodic Table t-shirt she was wearing, all part of her usual attire, particularly on casual Fridays. Incidentally, all of the participants indicated that, to a certain extent, their look and mannerisms did not necessarily conform to the normative expectations for their gender.

While some participants told of instances in which they supported students simply by listening to confessions and problems or providing a safe space for them to come whenever necessary, others indicated that they had entered into some direct form of advocacy for gay and lesbian students. We have already heard for Sara's stories of her participation with another group of teachers in successfully advocating for a change in the prom dress code for a female student who did not wish to wear a dress, as well as the decision to allow same-sex couples to attend the prom. Sam also explained that, when he was a school administrator, he had to deal with a number of issues involving gay students. One 9th grade female he recalled as being an "out, Out, OUT" lesbian was trying to date an 8th grade female in the adjoining middle school. According to Sam, the middle school principal was making the 9th grade girl out to be an aggressor and called her mother (who was already struggling with her daughter's sexuality) and got her even more agitated. Sam said that he counseled both the 9th grade girl and her mother (separately) for

an extended time period. Although he felt that he crossed numerous risky lines at the time with some of what he said to the girl and her mother, he was able to comfort the girl by telling her that he could not condemn her for what she was doing and advising her to be herself while being mindful of her surroundings. Sam felt that he was able to get her mother to better understand what her daughter was going through as well.

Julian also described how he was able to help an eighth grade student who was being bullied about his assumed sexuality.

I had a student come to me one time and ask to sit in my classroom. He said he didn't want to go to band because the other students talk about him...that he liked men and posted stuff on his Facebook. I asked if he wanted to talk to the counselor, but he said he just wanted to talk to me about it. I don't know why he came to me. I'm not even an 8th grade teacher. I'm way around on another hall. He just unloaded. I told him not to let rumors like that bother him. When he told me who it was that was bothering him, during our break time, I went and found that person. I didn't say that anyone in particular had said anything, but that I had heard some of the things he had been saying about some people. I told him he shouldn't say things about people that aren't true. We talked a bit, and he said that he was sorry. That seemed to squash that. Since that first guy came to me, two more guys and a female have come to me. I guess that they just felt safe coming to me.

Julian never did say if this student actually confirmed that he was gay. However, he assumed that the student was gay and felt comfortable coming to someone who he may have suspected as also being gay.

Even though some of the participants were able to effectively advocate for the rights of students, there were other times that some of them felt helpless to do so. Gina admitted feeling as if she had failed as a positive role model for some of her gay and lesbian students by not being out, because she often felt that she was not in a safe position to say or do anything when she witnessed certain homophobic behaviors by both students and colleagues. Gina described one instance when she tried to protest some homophobic language used by an administrator toward a student (not necessarily a gay student).

The policy was that the students wore belts around their pants, and they didn't want the pants to sag. A lot of the kids would wear their pants down. He [the administrator] would go over to the students and pull them up and say comments to them about, 'Are you gay? You don't need to wear your pants down like this. This sagging pants came from being in prison. It's a gay thing. You're asking for trouble when you do that.' It really angered me. I went up to him and said you don't need to say that to these kids. That is not a good thing for you to say to these kids. And he told me to mind my own business. It just really angered me. But he did it all the time. If they didn't have a belt, he would put string in their belt loops and tie it in a bow.

Thus, the one time that Gina did try to stand up against homophobic language, she was essentially silenced. Gina indicated that she really believed that students, gay and lesbian students in particular, needed role models and described how two gay and lesbian students approached her.

There were a couple of times I did have students come to me that identified as being gay...one was a male...one was a female. They were both in the 8th grade. One of them...told me that she was bisexual, and that she liked another student. She wanted me to give her advice on how to talk to this person. She was kind of shy and bashful. I felt like she either felt very comfortable with me or thought that I was gay also. The male student...he was out...you know...he was just very confident with who he was. He would talk to me all the time. I feel like there are a lot of students who still need an adult role model. And I felt like, maybe I failed there, because I wasn't out.

Although Gina felt that she was a failed role model due to not disclosing her sexuality, it is important to note that Gina did as much as she felt that she safely could at the time just by listening and letting the students know that she cared. As she said, it was very possible that the students suspected that she was a lesbian and felt comfortable speaking to her for that reason.

Some gay teachers may identify with the participants who developed a deep empathy for students who were different, particularly those who may have been struggling with their own sexuality. There may also be those who have tried to subvert the largely heteronormative mindset in their schools through targeted lessons or taking advantage of teachable moments related to sexuality. Still, other gay or lesbian teachers may empathize with the feelings of Gina and Sam above, yet still feel compelled to capitulate in similar ways. Regardless, for those teachers

already struggling with the notion of being out or not, there may also be the added feelings of guilt or anxiety about not doing what they feel is right when it comes to speaking out against certain issues. It ends up being a kind of damned if you do, damned if you do not feeling for some of them. Much of how issues of sex and sexuality are handled and discussed (or not discussed for that matter) at their schools has to do with the overall practice of avoidance of the issues.

Maintaining respect and an image of effectiveness

Finally, a fourth strategy used by teachers to orient themselves toward being a super teacher was through maintaining respect and an image of effectiveness. Because of their concerns about heteronormative assumptions and misconceptions, a commonly held belief or hope among some of the participants was that their reputation as a “good teacher” would in some way protect them, should their sexuality ever come into question. Madelyn, for example, said:

[Being gay] makes me work harder and be cautious *every* day. I’ve forced myself to believe that if I did my job correctly and to the best of my ability, people would leave me alone and let me do what I need to do...and I do believe that, for the most part...if you do your job to the best of your ability, you’re going to be ok.

Relatedly, some worried that they would lose the respect of colleagues and students or be perceived as an ineffective educator if assumed or known to be gay. Sara and Sam both expressed concern that knowledge of their sexuality may, in some way, preclude their reputation as a good teacher. Sara remarked:

I think, unfortunately, for a lot of people that would become the only thing that they knew or wanted to know about me. The whole concept of me as an effective teacher would go out the window. I would go from being a teacher to...the monster under the bed.

Likewise, Sam felt that as a principal, coming out “would have been an impediment to my effectiveness to lead, because of people’s ignorance and their prejudices.” However, Julian, who teaches in a very low-performing school, felt that:

The only thing anyone really looks at in terms of teaching quality is how kids do on the standardized test. You could have the most flamboyant teacher, and if the kids are making strides and learning, then who gives a damn? That's how it is at my school. We have to make sure that everything is legit, that our benchmark scores are lining up, everyone is doing what they are supposed to do, etc. They are not really concerned...if you like men or women or both. They are looking at what the kids are learning. When they come to do your observation, you can be gay, skinny, thin, black, Caucasian, whatever. If you're not up to par, you're gone. The heat is on. Our district is getting taken over by the state.

Julian made the point that as long as he was getting the job done to ensure the success of the students in his high needs school, he felt that he would be safe. Thus, he was working really hard to be a good teacher. Although this created an undue pressure on these teachers, some still claimed that their need to be viewed as a "good teacher" also positively influenced their work ethic. Janet, for instance, explained:

I think being a gay teacher, especially at the beginning before tenure, knowing that I could ultimately be fired for being gay made me have a stronger work ethic. It made me want to be the very best teacher that I could be, because I certainly didn't want to lose my job for any reason. But I really felt that if I was a quality teacher, if something had happened...then the record would show that I was a quality teacher. After those three years...I saw what a great work ethic does and how it positively influences student achievement, student engagement, and community involvement. I think that really was impacted.

Gay and lesbian teachers involved in other research have also indicated the importance of maintaining the "good teacher" image. In addition to good pedagogy, this image was found to be linked to a self-expressed level of confidence, their commandment of respect by both students and colleagues, and their popularity among students (Brockenbrough, 2012; Rudoe, 2010). The absence of these qualities was felt to increase the possibility of attempts by students and/or colleagues to attack gay and lesbian teachers (confirmed or suspected), undermine their authority, or otherwise view them as ineffective.

Thus, one of the biggest concerns of the participants was that they be seen as a good teacher. For them, that meant not only possessing the necessary content knowledge and the

ability to apply appropriate pedagogical methods but also developing a good rapport with their students. They saw their relationships with their students as particularly paramount to their being able to effectively relate to them in a way that not only nurtured their learning but also ensured that the students knew that they cared for them and would protect them. All of the participants claimed a certain level of empathy for students who were different and credited that empathy to their own experiences of growing up gay or lesbian and dealing with all of the associated issues. They felt that their own experiences offered a deeper level of understanding of and concern for the difficulties their students may have been experiencing, particularly students who were gay or lesbian. Although that level of concern led some of the participants to stand up against certain homophobic behaviors and to advocate for gay and lesbian students in certain situations, others still felt that they had to tread carefully for fear of outing themselves or crossing a line beyond which their administration might not have been able or willing to support them. Regardless of how hard the participants worked to maintain the “good teacher” image, their efforts still did not protect some of them from various forms of discrimination and other personally disorienting effects of working in the predominantly heteronormative space of their school.

Theme 3: Teaching While Gay or Lesbian – Fear and (Dis)Orientation

The third and final identified theme addressed how the participants worked through what DeJean (2004) described as a “taxonomy of fear” (p. 20) and how that system often served to dis-orientate the teachers away from what they recognized as their true selves at work. By re-orienting themselves toward heteronormative space, the teachers were attempting to bring themselves “back in line” by “following the *straight* [my emphasis] line toward what [they were] not” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 71). However, this re-orientation often had a dis-orientating effect on participants, resulting in what Ahmed calls “queer moments” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 66) in which

things can appear “slantwise” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 66). In this case, it was often the teachers’ perception of themselves that appeared “slantwise,” to the extent that they did not always recognize themselves at work. Participants’ decisions regarding disclosure about their sexualities at work were complex and guided by effective policies, networks of support, and personal fears and principles. Fear of some form of homophobic backlash was cited most often by participants in this study and related studies (DeJean, 2004; King, 2004; Wood, 2005) as one of the factors influencing their decision to come out at work or to remain in the educational closet. Although we have already heard Sara’s story about her learning of the addition of sexual orientation language to her district’s non-discrimination policy and the relief that it brought her, Sara’s time at work before her discovery was quite stressful. In fact, Sara recalled her first nine years of teaching as “terrifying” due to the answer she received from a human resources staff member regarding a question about the terms of her first contract. Recalling the experience, Sara said:

On the day we signed our paperwork in new teacher orientation, I carried my paper up to the HR lady and asked, ‘What is the moral turpitude thing? Is that the thing where you get fired if you turn up pregnant?’ And she laughed and said, ‘No. We haven’t done that in years.’ And then she said to me, and I quote, ‘It would have to be something really horrible. Like, you’d have to turn out to be queer or something.’ End quote. And I said, ‘Oh...well, that won’t be a problem.’ [laughs] And I signed my contract, turned it in, and thought that I would be so far back in the closet that I’ll be mildewing for the rest of my career.

For some, being a new teacher is hard and scary enough as it is. To essentially be told on your first day that you could be fired for simply being yourself does not help. Whereas Sara never really knew if the human resource staff member’s answer was just her interpretation, or if it was somehow directed at Sara due to a suspicion the woman had, it certainly made a lasting impression.

Unfortunately, the risk of losing one’s job due to being gay or lesbian is still a very real possibility in many places, especially in conservative areas like the Deep South where this study

took place. When one speaks of the Deep South, one is generally referring to the geographic area that includes, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Although one can often find pockets of liberals in certain cities (i.e. the blue dots in the seas of red), the overall area is typically known for its socially conservative politics which are often guided by deeply rooted religious influences. In fact, the geographic area that includes these and a few other states is widely referred to as the Bible Belt due to the strong evangelical Protestant influence, higher church attendance, and lower non-religious affiliations as compared to other areas in the country (worldatlas.com). It is not uncommon to see signs and billboards displaying messages such as “Jesus Saves” and “Go to church, or the devil will get you” when traveling the roads in this area. However, do not be fooled into thinking that this means that everyone is welcomed and can simply come as they are. The same organized religion that is meant to bring people closer to salvation is often used to influence politics and laws that justify violence and discrimination against those who do not fit the conservative “Christian” blueprint. Gays and lesbians, specifically, are still one of the primary targets of such hatred and have no statewide protection against discrimination in areas such as employment. Additionally, because teachers work with children, they are even more heavily scrutinized and vulnerable.

According to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), none of the Deep South states have any laws prohibiting discrimination against individuals based on sexual orientation or gender identity (glsen.org; hrc.org). GLSEN further reports that none of these states have any enumerated anti-bullying laws or non-discrimination laws to protect even the students based on sexual orientation or gender identity. In fact, four out of the five Deep South states actually have “no promo homo” laws which:

... expressly forbid teachers from discussing gay and transgender issues (including sexual health and HIV/AIDS awareness) in a positive light – if at all. Some laws even require

that teachers actively portray LGBT people in a negative or inaccurate way.
(GLSEN.org)

The combination of such laws and the lack of other specific protections makes for very tenuous, and even scary, conditions for gay and lesbian teachers as well as students.

As such, I was interested in learning how homophobic and heteronormative discourses in the workplace affected the gay and lesbian teachers in this study. The majority of their concerns involved experiences related to homophobic assumptions that people made about them, misconceptions that they felt heteronormative society (particularly parents of students) held about gays and lesbians, and discrimination against them personally. Many of them also described feelings of disorientation when unable to be their true selves at work. Although the participants stressed how important it was that they be viewed as a “good teacher” in case their sexuality ever came into question, this did not always protect them from the negative experiences that some reported.

Working individuals spend nearly half of their waking hours on the job. For gay and lesbian teachers, that means spending the majority of their time in a predominantly heteronormative space, one that is not necessarily always safe for them, one in which many must constantly surveil themselves. All of these factors worked together to create for the participants what DeJean (2004) described as a “taxonomy of fear” (p.20), the main idea being that many gay and lesbian teachers live and work in constant fear – fear of being outed; fear of being falsely accused of recruiting children into a gay lifestyle; fear of being viewed as a child molester or some other form of pervert; and ultimately fear of being fired. It is predicated on the expectation that everyone is heterosexual. Even if presumed gay or lesbian, there can be many negative assumptions and repercussions for these teachers.

Assumptive homophobia and heteronormative misconceptions

Endo et al. (2010) and Rudoe (2010) found that some teachers, regardless of whether assumptions about their sexuality were true, claimed to be victims of “assumptive homophobia,” (p. 1029) because they did not fit heteronormative gender stereotypes. In other words, if one was assumed to be gay or lesbian, they may have been victims of homophobic remarks, discrimination, or other negative assumptions perpetuated by misconceptions about gays and lesbians. Regarding assumptions that are made within a predominantly heteronormative society, Drew said:

I think that society in general assumes that you are not gay. That’s just the way society works. Ninety-five percent of the people in the world are not. Everybody is selfish, I believe. Everybody sees the world from their own point of view. I’m sure there are [things people don’t say or talk about with me]. I’ve gotten little hints here or there.

The above statement from Drew provides a glimpse into what is meant by heteronormative assumption, the assumption that everyone does, or should, fit into a heteronormative narrative. And if one does happen to be gay or lesbian, Julian claimed that, “being out at school is risky business,” because others “might be ok with it at a distance, but not when it gets close to home.” Several of the participants, like Julian, mentioned that it was one thing for rumors about their sexuality to exist but could be quite another for someone to have confirmation.

Sam, Sara, Liz, Gina, and Ricky all reported that they did not exactly fit the heteronormative stereotype for their respective genders. Based solely on assumptions about their sexuality, some of these teachers became the brunt of homophobic remarks and/or endured various forms of discrimination. Sara, for example, told of a student who called her a “fucking dyke” in front of the class. Although she described the child as “emotionally disturbed” and having had outbursts in other classrooms, as far as she knew, she was the only one to whom he had referred in this particular way. Recall that none of the teachers in this study had come out to

their students. Thus, the student, regardless of his emotional state, had obviously made an assumption about Sara that led him to use those particular words during his rant. Fortunately, Sara said that an administrator took him away and he was not there at the school much longer.

One of Gina's experiences was unmistakably and directly related to a suspicion of her sexuality. Gina remembered:

My first teaching position...I was asked by the principal if I was gay. At that time, I was struggling with it. I had not really dealt with it myself. He told me that if I *was* gay, I would lose my job...that he would not hire me back. So I had some difficult times with it.

Thus, Gina felt that she had to lie about not being gay to protect herself, something that made her feel as though she was being dishonest not only with others but also with herself.

Sam and Liz both received second hand comments regarding assumptions that others had made about their sexuality. Sam had multiple experiences. At one point, he heard from a band student that one of the male athletic coaches had made references to "the faggoty band director" and how all the band guys "must be fags." Likewise, a colleague with whom he was very close shared that another male athletic coach derogatorily described how Sam was eating a banana at lunch one day by making a visual reference to oral sex. At one point early in Sam's career, his principal (who happened to be very supportive of Sam) shared a concern regarding the talk amongst the faculty of the silver band that Sam wore on his left hand. Sam said:

He [the principal] said that people were talking and wondering why I was wearing the ring. They knew I was not married to anybody and didn't know if it was a gay partner ring. He just asked me not to wear it.

And on another occasion, Sam was also told by the principal that one male parent, in particular, did not want to help out with the band, because "he had discerned through the power of the Lord that the band director was a homosexual." Similarly, Liz was questioned about a picture she had

on her desk in her athletic office that included her, her brother, her wife (then partner), and her wife's daughter. She said:

Some students went in my office and said...oh, she's got a picture of her girlfriend on her desk. I never said anything. They just assumed. I mean...my brother was also in the picture. The kids had said something...and one of the parents...oh she's got a picture on her desk. The principal asked [the parent] what the problem was...[and said] I also have pictures on my desk. I told the principal that the picture was in my office where no one could see it but me, unless someone went in who wasn't supposed to be in there. The principal said she was just making me aware. After that, I didn't put any pictures of [partner] in my office.

Although at that time, neither Sam nor Liz had not told anyone at work that they were gay (and certainly no students or parents), the combination of their gender non-conforming personae and displays of personal effects led to questions about their sexuality.

Assumptive homophobia also serves to perpetuate certain negative beliefs that some of heteronormative society holds for gay and lesbian persons. When asked about some of the primary concerns they had as teachers who identified as gay or lesbian, Sam, Sara, Liz, and Ricky all admitted that they worried about the commonly held homophobic belief that gay teachers are pedophiles, or that they may try to "recruit" children into a gay lifestyle. These same fears are also seen throughout previous research conducted with gay and lesbian teachers (Bishop et al., 2010; Graydon, 2011; King, 2004). Sam said that something he would like most for people in general society to know is that, "Gay does not mean child molester."

Unfortunately, such assumptions about gay and lesbian teachers have deep roots which were cultivated by the likes of American celebrity and political activist, Anita Bryant, in the 1970's claims that gay and lesbian teachers would most assuredly molest, corrupt, and attempt to recruit children into the homosexual lifestyle (Blount, 2005; Graves, 2009).

Liz, being a P.E. teacher who often had to be in the girls' locker room, recalled that she "stayed up front when all the girls were changing" to avoid anyone "assuming that I'm always

looking at them...in that [lesbian] kind of connotation.” This feeling of vulnerability, along with the general stereotype of the female P.E. teacher as lesbian, were mentioned by Liz, Janet, and Gina. According to Woods and Harbeck (1992), even some heterosexual female P.E. teachers are not immune to the stereotyping. Janet claimed that it bothered her a bit that even her own wife often referred to some of her P.E. conferences as “lesbian festivals.”

Perhaps Ricky summed up the whole assumption surrounding the equation of “gay” and “pedophile” best when he said:

...misconstruing gay and pedophile together. That’s a huge...thinking that gay [laughs] means that you’re going to abuse kids...just that really negative and very stereo- [stops in mid-word]...I can’t even say it’s a stereotype, because I think it’s just misinformation. Or it’s not even true. So I would hate that to be misconstrued. I think when you are dealing with...I guess...an alternative lifestyle [uses air quotes and laughs], people sometimes have misinformation. And then when you’re dealing with kids, especially younger kids, I can imagine maybe older kids as well...them thinking...’oh you like little boys.’ And that’s not it. Gay does not mean pedophile. That’s always in the back of my mind...and pretty much in the back of my mind just being a male teacher in general. So I wouldn’t want being a male teacher, and then being a gay male teacher on top of that to interfere.

Relatedly, Sara spoke (seriously but also comically) about another commonly held belief that gay people wish to recruit children as part of a “gay agenda.”

There are times I hear people get on their soapbox about a gay agenda. Oh my God. There might be gay teachers in the school, and they might be teaching the gay agenda. I don’t have time to get through the content that’s in my pacing guide. I don’t have time to slow down from teaching periodic trends long enough to go into the gay agenda, even if I knew what that was. [laughs] I mean, what am I going to say? Fluorine is the most electronegative element...be gay! [laughs] Really?!? [laughs] And to some of those people I want to say, ‘Have you met your kid? We don’t want your kid. You can keep your kid over there on your side of the fence. [laughs]

Potential parental reactions to knowledge about their sexuality were a big concern, in general, among the participants. While many of the participants seemed to feel that a majority of their students had changed with the times and were not necessarily concerned much with their teachers’ sexualities, they worried that parents would not be as open-minded. Drew, Liz, and

Sara all worried about the conservative nature of their schools and communities. Drew described an atmosphere of tension surrounding both race and sexuality (e.g., references to lynching on a school/community social page and denial of the formation of a gay-straight alliance at the school), which led him to believe that the community probably would not take kindly to learning of gay teachers in his school. Another more personal incident confirmed Drew's fear:

I used to be in a position where I traveled a lot with kids, so I was not about to let people know [about my sexuality]. I had a situation a couple of years ago where I posted some pictures of myself on Instagram. In one of the pictures, I had my shirt off. There was another picture in [city in Florida] that a friend of mine took of me with a street performer...a man dressed as a caricature of a woman...not a drag queen...more like a clown...a man sort of dressed as a clown woman. Then there was a picture of me in front of [building in India]. And parents were really upset about all three of those pictures. The first one was too sexual. The second one was because of the 'drag queen.' The third was because I was trying to 'indoctrinate kids to Islam.' Parents lost their minds...and were calling the superintendent. So the superintendent calls me and tells me...that I might want to think about what was on my Instagram account. Just for the sake of dealing with that, I took two of the pictures down. I left the [building in India] picture. It was one of those things that kind of irked me. It is so ridiculous that I have to even think about this.

Sara, likewise, said that she was afraid that "the whole First Baptist Church could be on the school's doorstep on Monday morning," if they learned of gay teachers being in the school.

Megan, who works specifically with English Language Learners who are from very conservative Islamic cultures (e.g., "...they still execute people who exhibit homosexual tendencies..."), worried that knowledge of her sexuality would destroy the trusted relationship that she must maintain with her students' parents in order to effectively communicate with them.

Liz, who also drives a school bus as part of her job duties, perhaps had the most direct interaction with parents regarding suspicion of her sexuality. She told of how she had to call home about a student who was misbehaving on the bus. The father told her that "he didn't need a person of my lifestyle calling his house," and that he did not appreciate it. Liz said that the mother finally got involved, and that the student actually asked the parents to "leave Coach

[name] alone, because I really like her.” She was also confronted by a “drunk and belligerent” mother at a sporting event, during which the woman “went off on me about being a lesbian,” because her son had gotten in trouble for not participating in P.E. Liz did say that she stood up for herself, and the child eventually went on to play basketball both in P.E. and on her team. Again, because Liz had not come out to anyone at the time these incidents occurred, the parents were acting solely on rumors or assumptions they made regarding Liz’s sexuality.

Lastly, Ricky spoke of something that he did not necessarily view as a negative experience but which still spoke to the issue of heteronormative assumptions about gay people. Speaking about his interaction with some of his female colleagues, Ricky said:

I can see the reaction with my female colleagues being more like I’m one of the...one of the girls [laughs]...like...oh, you can ask me anything. And I like the openness, but the stereotype of what a gay man is...I can see that’s the way a lot of my colleagues see me. They don’t mean that negative in any way, but you know...thinking that’s how gay men are, how we all are. And that’s not the case. Or just not knowing that I’m gay in sexuality, but I have a whole different personality.

In other words, Ricky felt that sometimes the only interaction he had with his female colleagues centered on some form of girl talk, which he likened to an episode of *Will and Grace*, a popular television sitcom featuring the adventures of three gay male friends and their two straight female friends. Ricky did not wish for his colleagues to know him just in terms of his sexuality; rather, he wanted them to know that being gay was just one part of him.

Aside from personally overheard and/or second hand reports of homophobic remarks made about them, some of the participants described being victims of more direct forms of discrimination or being obligatorily complicit in the discrimination against other gay people. Julian’s experience actually occurred when he first started interviewing for teaching positions. He described his first interview:

There were three ladies and a guy asking questions. The ladies liked me. I could sense that the other guy didn't like me. His tone during the questions was very different from that of the ladies. And he would say that he just didn't understand my answers. I was giving good answers and could see that the ladies agreed...[and]...wanted to hire me. I saw one of the ladies again after I didn't get the job. She told me that he didn't like me, because he felt like I was gay, and that I would not have been a good asset to the school.

Julian said that he really did not know much about what his rights were at the time, and thus, did not give it much thought. He just figured that it was not meant to be and went on to interview and receive a job at another school. He later added that the school that did not hire him called to offer him a job a year later once the man who initially prevented his hiring left. However, he refused the position. Julian also described a situation in which he helped to thwart an attempt by a student to disrepute another gay male colleague and how it necessitated his own awareness and cautiousness at a gay teacher.

I worked [at another school] with this other guy who was very out. And the kids just dogged him out. He was real flamboyant and didn't keep order in his classroom. One of the kids told a lie on him, and he got put on administrative leave. I went and asked the kid if the teacher really did what he was accused of. The kid said they just didn't like him. I recorded what the boy said on my phone and took it to the administration to show that the allegations were false. That teacher still thanks me for that. That's why I'm so careful myself. You never know. If a student gets mad...they may say something. I have this fake camera in my room that I bought at a garage sale. I tell them that I and everyone else can see them. So they don't do anything.

Megan, on the other hand, believed that her contract was not renewed because of her sexuality before getting tenure in her first school district. She explained:

I had never really been that open about my sexuality except with my grade level teachers, but they respected my confidentiality. What happened that particular year was...the vice principal became the principal. She had known me and my work for three years. [My girlfriend] asked me one day if she could bring me lunch. I figured she would just call me, and I would run out and get it. Well she just went to the office and signed in to bring it to me. I date butch women, so it was very obvious. I mean, they figured it out pretty quick. My principal began questioning me a lot about my personal life. She would say things like, be sure that you watch what you post on FB. Since she wasn't my friend [on FB], I knew someone was watching my page. And there was nothing on there, nothing that I considered inappropriate, because I DID have teacher friends on there. My instructional evaluations were great. I had no problems. I had great scores. I always got

great remarks on walk-throughs. I was chosen two years in a row to be the inclusion teacher for the system for first grade. So I didn't think anything was wrong. At the end of the year, we had a conference with a parent for a student that I was retaining in first grade. It was a good relationship. The mom knew that this needed to happen, that he needed more time to mature. She asked me in front of the principal if I could have her child again when he repeats. The principal said that was fine if that was what she wanted to do. And then when the Mom left, she called me to the office and pink slipped me. She just told that to the Mom to her face, knowing that my pink slip was in her office. I told her that I had no indication that I had done anything wrong instructionally...my job performance; I was never late; I had nothing that I felt would be cause for dismissal. And she wouldn't answer. She said she wasn't going to discuss it. I feel that she either straight up had a problem with it or was worried that parents would have a problem with it.

Sam told a story of what he described as more of a "reverse discrimination," one in which he felt strong-armed by the administration to discriminate against a same-sex couple of parents who wanted to chaperone a band bus trip with their son.

They didn't come in proclaiming to be partners, but people knew. All the parents started calling the principal to say that they would not let their kids ride the bus to the ball game. So the principal calls me in and says I needed to...tell them that they couldn't chaperone. It was the most awkward, hypocritical, nasty feeling. So Dad and the partner come in. So I just said...look. I don't agree with this at all. But apparently, there are going to be a lot of kids that can't go with us...because you're chaperoning the bus. At first he was mad and angry. I just kept reiterating, I hope you know that I don't feel this way. I don't have an issue with it. I never confessed or told. I finally said, I agree with you that you shouldn't give them the satisfaction. But let's think about it like this. It's going to make your son feel really bad. It's probably going to hurt him more than it hurts your feelings...But he is still a child, just in seventh grade. It's just going to create a situation for him. If you can't do it for them or for me, if you could just bow out for him, it would be easier. And I guess he could have taken a stand. And I really couldn't have blamed him. But that worked, and I got out of the situation.

Sam felt that he was forced to perform this task because his administrator knew that he was also gay and could make it go over more easily with the parents. However, it was very difficult for Sam, because he had never come out to these or any other parents. He said that, even though he felt like the parents had to have known that he was also gay, it made him feel like a real "jerk" for having to act in such a hypocritical manner.

Finally, Liz told a story about an uncomfortable situation between herself and a close female colleague that stemmed from an insinuation made by a new administrator about their relationship. Although the insinuation was later determined to be fueled by pure jealousy on the administrator's part, it was still ultimately predicated on an assumption made by the administrator related to Liz's sexuality.

A couple of years ago, I had one of my administrators tell me that I needed to watch what I was doing with a certain [female] teacher. [My mind automatically went to the lesbian thing] because the principal said I should make sure I was being appropriate with that teacher. And I thought, I've never done anything inappropriate with that teacher. I've never touched her inappropriately. I've given her a shoulder hug and said good morning. That's it. One morning she was upset while going through a divorce. So I watched her kids while she went to the restroom to gather herself. That's the kind of relationship we had. We [gays and lesbians] automatically set up that wall of defense. So in my mind, I was trying to figure out what had been said about anything I had done with her. This was told to me in the summer. So when school started, I was kind of stand-offish with that teacher. I didn't go into her room. I avoided her at all cost. If I did talk to her, I made sure I had someone else there to hear the conversation. One day, she kind of looked at me and asked, 'What are you doing?' I said that I was just being professional. And she said, 'What the hell?' I was on an emotional roller coaster, because she was a good friend, and I thought we had a collaboration going. So I said that I would just tell her...that I was told that I needed to watch myself around her. I told her that I assumed that she had said I was being inappropriate with her. She said, 'If you were inappropriate with me, I would tell you. I don't have a problem with you. Apparently, someone else does. And it's not me.' We realized that the principal at that time was kind of jealous, because for that teacher's birthday, I had the kids blow up balloons to give her. The principal kind of got upset because she was not included. Then we didn't do it for her [the principal's] birthday. But this was a new employee, a good employee, very personable. So I was just trying to make her feel at home.

Thus, some of the participants felt that they were being discriminated against when applying for or interviewing for jobs, while another felt that she was pink slipped because of her suspected sexuality. In another case, a gay teacher felt that he had to discriminate against a set of gay parents. Another teacher's cordial, yet professional, relationship with a colleague of the same gender was nearly compromised due to an incorrect assumption made by an administrator. These assumptions, misconceptions, and discriminations all worked together to materialize a space in

which the gay and lesbian teachers of this study often found it difficult to be themselves. Contrary to their sexual orientation, many ended up feeling *disoriented* and found themselves doing (or not doing) certain things which directed them away from their sexual orientation and ultimately their true selves at work.

(Dis)orientation and the difficulty of not being oneself

In discussing the distinctions often made by non-heterosexual persons between “being themselves” in public versus private places, Freitag (2013) claims that performativity for queer subjects often “hinges on where they are standing, many times quite literally” (p. 17). For gay and lesbian teachers, this often means performing some other version of themselves while at school and even out in public when they encounter students, parents, and colleagues. All participants spoke on some level about how certain situations at work caused them to remain cognizant of their sexuality and to ultimately police their words and actions. Many recalled specific things that they would do/say, or more specifically, *not* do/say in an effort to prevent their sexuality from being suspect or becoming an issue. The constant reminders of their sexuality at work and the act of performing in some way that was contrary to their nature often served as disorienting forces that pushed them further away from their true selves at work, thereby further adding to their worries, fears, and stress.

Ricky, who was one of the youngest participants, and one of the most open at work of all of the participants, recalled what it was like when he first started teaching. He said, “It’s a little tough using gender neutral pronouns or blatantly lying or not participating. You’re not being *who* you are. And that’s difficult in any situation.” Likewise, Sam stated:

It’s not fun having to lie and play games with people...like mind games...trying to keep yourself hidden. It’s not fun having to practice how to stand or to speak...mannerisms you catch yourself doing. It’s not fun being quizzed...about your personal life.

Still other participants remarked that it would be nicer and so much easier, if they could just be who they really are at work (i.e. not have to hide their sexuality). Liz commented on how much less stressful it would have been if she could have expressed her true feelings and talked about her family like everyone else did. Finally, Sara explained that in the beginning of her career, it was difficult and scary to interact and participate fully in conversations with people who did not really know who she was. She said, “When it’s the whole larger group, I’m much more conscious of *not* saying anything that’s going to cause the people who don’t really want to know, to *have* to know.”

All six female participants reported that they had been in some way asked about being married or had assumptions made about their marital status at work. Such questions came primarily from curious students but occasionally from parents and/or colleagues. In most cases, they practiced a stock answer that did not provide any real detail, attempted to change the subject, or otherwise just ignored the question. Regardless of whether the questions were from someone who was genuinely interested in getting to know the participants or from someone simply searching for confirmation of an assumption about them, the participants were again made cognizant of their sexuality at work and had to make decisions about how to respond in a way that would not cause undue suspicion or confirm certain assumptions.

Although Madelyn was never asked directly about her marital status by anyone at work, she assumed that it was “because I’m old, because I do have a daughter and grandkids.” For some teachers like Madelyn who had children from an assumed previous heterosexual relationship, Ferfolja (2007) found that “children reinforced one’s position in discourses of heterosexuality because the commonly perceived mechanics of conception requires sexual

intercourse between two people of the opposite sex” (p. 580). However, curiosity often still got the better of some of Sara’s students.

Teenagers, as you well know, are usually founts of personal questions, and in some cases, inappropriate personal questions. I’ve had a couple of students over the years who were really, really interested in whether or not I’m married. When I say that I’m not married...then [they ask] why I’m not married...do I have kids...do I want kids...am I ever going to have kids? All of the questions they asked me, I just answered truthfully. Are you married? No. Do you have kids? No. Do you want kids? No. [laughs] My stock answer to why are you not married is, I’ve never met a man I felt like marrying, which is true. [laughs] So you don’t have to tell everything you know to *not* lie.

On the contrary, Sara said that she was definitely struck by the number of students who did *not* ask if she was married or had children. This was because she knew that the students almost always asked those questions of the other female teachers, particularly at the beginning of the year when they were trying to determine the proper salutation (Miss or Mrs.) for those teachers. She said that she just assumed, “Clearly, some of them have figured out that, in some way, that might be a fraught question with me.” However, at the time of her last interview, Sara had already begun to think about how she would address the marriage question when she returned in the fall wearing a wedding band after her summer wedding. It was a discussion that she planned on having with her administrator. She had made up her mind not to lie to the students about being married, but if questioned further, would go with “I don’t talk about my personal life at work” as an answer.

Liz and Janet indicated that, even at the elementary level, students would ask questions about marriage that made them uncomfortable. Liz said:

When the kids start asking me if I’m married...I just say that I am married and don’t elaborate. Since I’m dealing with elementary children, I don’t want to talk to them about something their own parents may not have discussed with them. I want that to be something their parents explain to them rather than me. I don’t really talk about it that much. I don’t put myself in certain situations.

Janet reported similar awkward situations, but added that some of them stemmed from the changing of her last name when she got married. Janet and her wife originally decided to hyphenate their last names for the sake of her wife's biological daughter having both of their last names upon Janet's legal adoption of her. However, she claimed that if they had really thought about it, she and her wife should have never hyphenated their last names when they got married, because it had caused confusion among students, parents, and colleagues. Little details during the transition period of marriage and the merging of two schools (e.g., her maiden name remaining part of her email address, student-parent correspondence/emails having both the maiden name and the newly hyphenated last name on them, and the difficulty younger students had saying the longer hyphenated last name) all added to the confusion of how people were to address her.

We should have just become Smith or something. But another reason we decided to hyphenate was, if I came to school with a completely different last name, then the kids would want to know why my name was different. I would have to tell them that I got married. The next question would be about who my husband is. And then that's a whole other issue. When I have kids who ask if I'm married, I usually say yes. When they ask the second question, I try to completely change the subject, because I know that's not a road I'm ready to go down. Maybe with the older kids, but not with [the younger ones]. I've been lucky so far that an older kid hasn't asked me anything.

Janet went on to say that she knew she needed to clear up some of the confusion, but had still not really told everyone what she wanted them to call her, because she did not really know herself.

Although Janet claimed that it was "not a huge issue," it was just another one that she had to deal with as a gay teacher. Gina also described being asked by students if she was married or had children as "stressful." She remembered one incident with a student as follows:

I even at one point had a student ask if I was bisexual, because my assistant would bring me gifts. I only had this assistant for a year. He was just a very giving person, and some of the kids evidently thought I was gay...and then when he started giving me gifts...they assumed I liked guys, too. So she must be bisexual.

Gina, like the other female participants, said that she would try to figure out a way to “just kind of laugh it off” and change the subject when asked such questions by students.

Megan’s story best summarized what the other female participants said regarding personal questions about marriage/children, and how such situations led to a feeling of disorientation. When asked to explain this feeling, Megan said:

Sometimes I do [feel disoriented] with parents. I feel like it’s hard to lie about your life. But sometimes I feel like I have to do that. I mean, they see that my name has changed...[and]...my ring. They want to be happy for me. They’re not being intrusive. They are just like, oh are you married? What does your husband do? And I say...drives a truck...I’m not lying, but I’m not fully disclosing. It makes me feel sad sometimes, because I am denying who I am and...the person I love. And it’s very hard to lie about your life, to cover up or edit your life. People ask if you are married. When you say yes, they automatically assume you are married to a man. So you either have to lie and chase that rabbit hole and cover your pronouns, or you just be who you are. It’s just hard for me...feeling that I have to hide who I am, because I have no problem with anyone knowing. I get very comfortable in my school environment. And then a parent comes in, and I have to draw back and edit a little bit. Just little things get to me. I don’t put a family picture in my room. The older kids would know right away what that is about. It’s not that I don’t want them to know. It just scares me. It just takes one phone call, one kid making something up to ruin your life. I’m just trying to be overly cautious.

Thus, Megan’s story served not only to relate back to heteronormative assumptions discussed earlier but also to connect how these situations caused a feeling of *disorientation* for the participants. In other words, there was an *orientation away from* their true selves. Part of that disorientation often involved policing their own words and actions, or essentially performing a different version of themselves, in an effort to *reorient* themselves toward their heteronormative work space.

Many of the participants listed specific situations or settings that caused them to actively think about their sexuality at work, when they would ordinarily not do so. In each case, the participants claimed that the experiences made them feel uncomfortable, and in some cases, left them at a loss as to how to handle the situations for fear of fueling the previously mentioned

negative assumptions and stereotypes of gays and lesbians. Some spoke specifically about feeling disoriented, because they were not being true to themselves, their beliefs, or others.

Some participants spoke about things that they did not do or situations that they tried to specifically avoid at work. Liz and Madelyn related their concerns directly to being a P.E. teacher of young girls. Referring to scoliosis testing and being alone with female students in general, Liz said, “I don’t put myself in certain situations.” She explained that she always had a doctor come to do the actual scoliosis testing while she just remained in the room as a witness. Although, she said that thankfully, no one had ever said anything about her touching a child inappropriately, Liz always worried about having to physically interact with the students when teaching them how to use a jump rope or perform some other physical activity. Liz and Madelyn both expressed concerns about having to be in the locker room with girls. Madelyn said that the locker room was one of the things that expressly caused her to be the most cognizant of her sexuality at work and was thankful that she did not have any “big problems...fighting or anything like that” which required her to remain in the locker room for any period of time. She said fearfully, “Being in the girl’s locker room could be an issue, if somebody chose to make it one by saying that I’m gay, and that I’m just in the locker room so that I can see naked girls. Not happening.” Madelyn also added that she was “really careful about calling someone a generic name like sweetheart or baby” for fear of having her words misinterpreted. Sara shared a similar concern that she had regarding her assignment of restroom supervision duty one year. According to Sara, the administration had implemented this teacher duty as a way to prevent some inappropriate cell phone use by the students in the restrooms. The teachers were to actually stand in the restroom as opposed to standing outside the door. Sara said:

I had to go to my boss and say that I was not comfortable standing in the girls bathroom, and this is why. With the current conversation occurring nationwide about who belongs

in which bathroom in public schools, this would be a lawsuit *waiting* to happen. I could just imagine some irate parent coming to the school and saying, that pervert followed my daughter into the bathroom.

Sara added that she continued to think about the absurdity of the situation and how it affected her every time she saw another teacher entering the restroom for restroom duty while she was performing her hall duty during class change.

In other cases, participants recalled specific ways in which they performed to orient themselves toward a predominantly heteronormative work space and how those actions produced feelings of disorientation. Sara, Janet, and Liz all recalled various times in their career in which they had dressed more femininely. Sara, who claimed to generally wear khaki pants and polo shirts to work each day, said that she was just “not really capable of femming it up.” At one point, she had grown her hair longer and made more of an effort to “dress like a girl.” However, she described it as “horrible” and said that she felt as if she was “teaching in drag.” She was thankful that her position as a science teacher allowed her to dress down a bit and cover up with a lab coat, because she had not “even owned a dress in so many years” and found it “a horrifying thought.” Sara, on the other hand, said that she was quite comfortable when she realized that she would be wearing a suit and tie during the gender swap faculty fashion show. Janet, who generally preferred wearing gym attire (as P.E. teachers generally do) said, “Whenever there is something at school - a PTO [Parent-Teacher Organization] meeting, or something like that - I try to dress up so that they see me in more feminine attire. However, Janet also claimed that such attire was less comfortable for her and even seemed to “kind of catch [colleagues] off guard.” Liz recalled dressing up for various days during spirit week fund raising events at her school and how it made her feel. She told of wearing a dress for “professional day” and how it was not only awkward for her but also shocking for the students.

Just as some of the female participants occasionally conformed to the expected attire for their gender, some of the male participants also performed in specific ways to orient themselves to their predominantly heteronormative environments. Sam described how he “tried to portray the image of an old grouchy bachelor...just a lost cause for marriage...that nobody wanted to have anything to do with.” He said that he had gotten confirmation from one of his close colleagues that his performance seemed to be convincing for most. Ricky said that he would generally try to be “a little bit more masculine or macho” by deepening his voice when working with the upper elementary grades and when interacting with other men at work, particularly other black men.

Since Ricky and Julian were the only two African American participants in this study, I asked them to comment specifically on issues that they felt related to being a teacher who identified as both gay and African American. Similar to some of the African American males interviewed by Brockenbrough (2012), Ricky and Julian indicated that their blackness was more influential in shaping their identity than was their sexuality. They also explained how being black intersected with their sexuality to make being themselves around members of their own race even more difficult than being out in general.

Because he worked primarily in the elementary school setting, a setting in which the majority of teachers are traditionally female, Ricky explained how it felt to be not only the only male within a work space but also the only person of color in a southern rural school. He spoke specifically about how he was perceived as not fitting certain black male stereotypes, a perception that Cooper (2005) warns against and refers to as “bipolar black masculinity” (p. 863). Ricky elaborated:

Being a person of color, especially being the *only* person of color, has affected the sense I’ve made out of all of this. I’ve worked in three public schools. I was one of two people

of color in the first school, one of three in the second school, and one of four in the third school. And I was usually the only male. That is the case with the current group of teachers that I work with. When you *are* the different one, it affects how people think based on stereotypes regarding race and sexual orientation. You still have to constantly deal with it. In the south, I have more problems with race than I do the gay thing. One main thing since I've started teaching has been articulation...how well I speak. A lot of people say, 'You don't sound like a black guy?' I get that all the time. And that's one. When I first started teaching...and I won't say that it was rural, but it was a little further out in the county...I got along great because I wasn't perceived like the rest of the black people, maybe because of how I dressed, my skin tone, or how 'well-mannered' I was. I guess I didn't fit whatever stereotype they had about black people. So I've seen that a lot...not so much at my current school but most definitely at my first two schools.

Although Cooper (2005) was specifically referring to representations of heterosexual black men as "Good Black Man" versus "Bad Black Man," Ricky's quote addresses what Cooper described as "the exclusion of most black men into jail or the lower-classes and the inclusion of only a token few white-acting black men into the mainstream" (p. 853). Ricky felt that he was more accepted because he was perceived as acting more like a white person. It is also almost as if Ricky was channeling Fanon (1967) in that, even if he rejected the racialized constructs, he could never escape blackness as read by white society. No matter how educated he was or what good deed he did, the only thing ultimately noticed was his blackness, the qualities of which would always be compared to standards of whiteness.

When I initially commented on not being able to recruit many black male gay teachers for this study, neither Ricky nor Julian seemed surprised and attributed it to a larger concern of how black gay males are not really supported or empowered in the black community, because they produce the image of an emasculated male. Because blackness is seen to be authenticated by the heterosexual black male (Johnson, 2003), blackness is viewed to be further diminished by being gay (Riggs, 1995). Marlon Riggs (as cited in Carbado, 2005) further described being a black gay male as a "triple negation." In other words blackness is negated by whiteness; black maleness is negated by white maleness and the historical feminization of the black male by a

matriarchal family structure; and maleness in general is negated by being gay. Ricky described being black and gay as follows:

It's mostly a white thing - the openness. It's not really as open in the black community. It's not the way males are supposed to be...what gay males are in the black community...and this is a very derogatory word...the sissies...your more effeminate males...that's the stereotype. It's a lot worse in black culture, being gay. You know, that's where the term down low comes in. You're supposed to be what a black male is supposed to be, strong and needed. That is a stereotype itself, but that is actually in the black community.

Ricky later remarked that, if I did find a black male teacher who happened to be gay, he would probably be closeted not only at school but also around his family. He also added that those teachers would probably be reluctant to participate, an issue that Brockenbrough (2012) also reported when trying to recruit black gay male teachers. Julian's claim supported that of Ricky and also described how religion greatly influenced the view of black gay males within the black community. Julian said that being a teacher who is both gay and black:

...is different because you always have to be on your p's and q's. You have to be so careful depending on what circle you are in and how people are going to talk to you or act around you. Particularly in the African American culture, we are so highly religious and want to follow a religion that says that a bond is only between a man and woman. I think it's harder for the men than the ladies...because the men are looked upon as being the bread winner, the athlete, the muscular strong man. He is supposed to have a family. He is like this god on a pedestal.

Ricky also related the black male stereotypes specifically to his own level of discomfort with interacting with straight black males, particularly at work.

Being black and gay...with other straight black men, it is different. It's probably out of my experience one of the hardest groups to actually be myself with. It's odd for me. I'm ok with white men and white women just saying or being me. With women, it's fine. But being black, male, and gay, there is a difference between places I feel comfortable. It is just the culture. My voice goes deeper. It's a different me when I am around straight black males. It is hard to be comfortable and authentic in that space, which is unfortunate.

The comments of both Ricky and Julian serve to illustrate how race and sexuality intersect to form an additional layer of the black gay male identity with which they had to contend. One can

certainly see how the pressures to fit into a heteronormative society (both within and outside of the black community simultaneously) also govern how black gay male teachers perform at school.

Sara, Janet, Gina, and Ricky each also mentioned how specific situations caused feelings of disorientation. Sometimes these were observations of homophobic interactions/comments between colleagues or students. The participants said that they were often given pause in standing up for what they knew was right for fear of calling attention to their own sexuality. In these cases, they reported that their inactions also made them feel as if they were not being true to their own beliefs and values. Sara said that she most often thought about her sexuality:

...when a particular student sets off my gaydar. That's definitely a big one. The community where I teach is still relatively rural and not super progressive. It's not an easy place to be gay and be a teenager. So when I realize that one of our students probably is gay, I always feel bad for those kids, because they are probably not having an easy time of it. I wish that it were more acceptable for me to explicitly reach out and say that I've been there, and that it gets better. But that wouldn't go over well. In some cases, even the kid himself is in denial, so obviously, that is not a situation that you can touch with a ten-foot pole. But that always makes me wish things were different.

Janet said that she became more cognizant of her sexuality and struggled with what do to:

...when kids use derogatory words toward each other, just calling each other names. I guess if I was a straight teacher, I'd feel that it would be easier for me to handle it. As a gay teacher I kind of struggle with how to resolve those conflicts that the kids are having...I'm always fearful that if I am too accepting or handle the situation in a way that would be in opposition to the way that they think, then they would automatically assume or would start questioning my sexuality as well.

Likewise, Gina said that it was hard overhearing homophobic comments by students and colleagues and not feeling comfortable enough to counter the comments.

There were many times that I would hear comments from students and adults. A big thing that kids would say was, 'That's gay.' For just a minor example, when we would play flag football, they would go to grab the flag and miss the flag, and maybe hit the other student on the behind. And they would say, 'That's gay. I don't want to play flag football.' So there were times when it was difficult. I didn't really know how to handle the situation. And then I heard teachers say things...in passing...they say they thought

another student was gay. You would hear the other teacher respond, 'I hope not. I hope he's not like that.'

Finally, Ricky's story provides an excellent glimpse into what the whole notion of feeling disoriented means and some of the negative personal effects that it can produce. One of the ways in which Ricky experienced a sense of disorientation stemmed from his frequent feeling that he was "...suppressing...my own sexuality or not being...forthcoming...not really being myself."

He added:

I do feel like, at those moments, a way to orient myself is to be more like *them*...but it seems false...not open, not honest. I don't think of that in a negative way, as in I'm a liar. But I'm not personally invested in colleagues or talking to them. I'm there physically but not there in terms of engagement...like it's putting on an act...being fake. Because I internalize things, I think negatively of myself sometimes about being fake. I try to be authentic to people I'm with. To have to feel like I'm suppressing who I am, that's an emotional thing when you have to start thinking about how you're presenting yourself.

Sometimes when Ricky was feeling disoriented and did not wish to deal with certain situations or people, he indicated that he would try to avoid them by saying nothing or otherwise seeking some way out of the situation. However, he said, "Unfortunately, that's not getting [re]oriented; that's escaping," which left him with "...a feeling of...resentment...a distaste for certain people."

Ricky also described how that resentment often developed into prejudices of his own against those people.

The same people who can be prejudiced against you, you kind of distance yourself and think negatively about them as well. I struggle with that. I get why people have their own prejudices, because I feel it and start having the same prejudice toward them that they have toward me. Sometimes I feel like mine are more justified than someone else's, but it's still the same thing.

Ricky added that, even though he "knew the difference," these thoughts still bothered him.

When asked what their experiences of teaching while gay or lesbian meant to them, several of the participants commented about how they saw their experiences and the current climate of sexual orientation in education as influencing their careers going forward. For

example, Drew claimed that it was “probably going to mean leaving the classroom, getting my Ph.D.,” because he felt that the K-12 classroom was “too limited” for him as a teacher who identifies as “sexually fluid.” Ricky claimed to have no intentions of ever leaving his current position within the medical facility, adding that the only way he could ever work anywhere else was if that institution had a non-discriminatory clause for sexual orientation. He said, “I don’t see myself going back to [traditional] public school. There are a lot of things to say for public school, but my sexual orientation *is* a factor. It is definitely a factor in the South.” Likewise, Megan said that she had reached the point where “I just don’t care anymore. I don’t want to be that person...who has to *not* be who I am. If it’s not the right fit for me, I’m going to go somewhere else.” Janet, although she had considered leaving her current school district to find a job closer to home, reported feeling “stuck” there. She said:

Being gay is one reason why I’ve yet to move on to a new position, because I value my tenure and being a gay teacher – that is scary. I mean, you Google my name and it’s our lawsuit or things like that. An administrator would automatically know. Whereas if that [the lawsuit] wasn’t the case, they wouldn’t know it [that I am gay] initially. It does make me a little fearful. So, I’ll probably sit right here for seven more years and get my twenty-five years in and then move on to new horizons.

Julian said that he would ultimately like to form a charter school that had a school-to-work program, in which he could “be a good advocate of hiring LGBT persons.” Similarly, Liz had hopes for the future of sexual orientation issues in schools, saying that she hoped to one day be able to “just be honest with the child when they ask me [about sexuality].” She imagined a future where politics and administration would support regularly addressing issues of sexuality all the way down to the elementary level.

Altogether, the participants have provided examples of institutions, students, colleagues, and administrators proclaiming (or at least alluding to) the assumed dangers of having gay and lesbian teachers in schools. Only two participants’ school districts included any kind of language

that offered protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The remaining participants felt certain that there was actually some form of moral turpitude clause in their original contract which could possibly be interpreted in such a way as to warrant their termination on the basis of sexual orientation. Thus, all of the participants strived to be the “good teacher,” not only because they were worth their own salt as teachers, but also because they felt that their image and reputation might in some way protect them should their sexuality ever become an issue.

All of these factors intersected to produce a material context in which the participants were repeatedly reminded of their sexuality at work and the possible dangers associated with its disclosure. For some participants, race and/or class added additional contextual layers. Regardless of how much agency the participants believed they possessed regarding their choice to come out at work, certain structures governed if or how much they disclosed about their sexuality and personal lives, thereby causing most of them to feel as if they could *not* be their true selves at work, at least not with everyone all of the time. Consequently, the majority of the participants expressed feelings of dis-orientation as they struggled to remain true to themselves regarding their sexuality, while at the same time feeling the need to distance themselves from it while at work. A few participants were left feeling stuck in their current position for fear of changing positions/districts and losing tenure. Others felt limited by the number of places they could teach, citing the widespread lack of protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Still, others seemed to hold onto a hope that sexual orientation would one day no longer be an issue for students or teachers in schools.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

Other than a few places in areas such as the Northeast and along the West Coast (which tend to be more socio-politically progressive), gays and lesbians across the United States still lack basic civil protections and thus continue to hide who they are. The lack of protection for gays and lesbians in general, coupled with negative societal stereotypes and misconceptions about them, makes gay and lesbian teachers especially vulnerable to scrutiny and condemnation due to their close contact and daily work with children. Countless researchers have pointed out the commonly held homophobic image of gay and lesbian teachers as pedophiles (Bishop et al., 2010; Graydon, 2011; King, 2004). Even though King (2004) also cites research statistics to refute this notion, comments by participants of the current study indicated that such negative assumptions and misconceptions are still alive and continue to cause gay and lesbian educators to remain fearful. Previous research also supports the concerns that some of the current study participants expressed regarding the belief that gay and lesbian teachers might promote homosexuality and/or actively recruit children as homosexuals (Bishop et al., 2010; Graydon, 2011; King, 2004). Thus, even though the possibility of the teacher influencing a child's sexuality is unlikely (King, 2004), a cultural narrative continues to play out, in which the pathologization of non-heterosexual orientations/lifestyles continues to be normalized.

Thus, the purpose of this study, rather than to make generalizations about what it means to be a gay or lesbian teacher, was to describe and increase the understanding of the experiences of gay and lesbian K-12 educators and how those experiences are shaped by the predominantly

heteronormative space of schools. The study focused on teachers who worked in the Deep South for two reasons. First, and most importantly, in many socio-politically conservative geographic areas across the United States, gays and lesbians in general still lack basic civil protections against discrimination. The Deep South not only served as a good representative of such areas but was also convenient to where the researcher was located. Secondly, because of the generally widespread lack of civil protections for gays and lesbians, many teachers who live and teach in such areas are afraid to share their stories. Thus, the majority of the research focusing on gay and lesbian teachers has been conducted in more progressive areas, thereby leaving a gap in the relative literature and, consequently, largely silencing the voices of teachers in less progressive areas. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, the recruitment of participants for the current study proved more difficult than originally anticipated for some of these very reasons, even though participants were ensured that every possible effort would be made to protect their anonymity.

I began the study with the broad research question: What is it like to be a gay or lesbian teacher in the predominantly heteronormative spaces created within K-12 educational institutions? Related to my overall question were the following questions: How do gay and lesbian teachers choose whether or not to disclose their sexuality in the workplace? How do they understand their choices as affecting them personally and professionally? How do their choices affect the ways in which they interact with students and colleagues? How are these individual issues related to the larger societal structures that govern gender and sexuality in schools?

Drawing from my own experiences as a gay teacher and informed by Sara Ahmed's (2006) principles of queer phenomenology, I employed Irving Seidman's (2013) three-interview method for conducting semi-structured phenomenological interviews to elicit stories from the participants about their experiences. By analyzing participant data, I was able to determine how

these teachers negotiated what most felt were opposing components of their identities at work, those being teacher and gay or lesbian. Their stories encompassed what it meant to them both personally and professionally to be open about their sexual orientation or remain in the closet at work; how they re-orientated themselves toward a heteronormative environment often riddled with negative assumptions and misconceptions about gays and lesbians; their efforts to still be recognized as good teachers despite such assumptions and misconceptions; and the resulting taxonomy of fear (DeJean, 2004) that led many to feel dis-orientated, or directed away, from their true selves at work.

All of the participants of this study told different stories and had varying levels of good and bad experiences. By sharing their stories, the participants illustrated that many of the negative stereotypes of gays and lesbians simply are not true. Additionally, their stories highlighted the tremendous amount of pressure that gay and lesbian teachers are under to be super teachers to counteract any negative stereotypes about gays and lesbians, something about which heterosexual teachers need not worry. Again, the purpose of this study was not to make generalizations about what it means to be a gay or lesbian teacher. However, broad common themes that emerged relative to participant experiences included: the complexities of coming out at school; the pressure to be good teachers, role models, and advocates in light of the complications presented by sex/sexuality in schools; and the dis-orientation felt by the teachers relative to their experiences. What ultimately became most evident was the collective effect that societal and institutional structures had on the teachers both personally and professionally.

Complexities of Orientating One's Way Out of the Educational Closet

Coming out is complicated! Of course, this may be the understatement of the year for many gay and lesbian individuals who have been through the process or are still wrestling with

the decision to do so. The problem, as Janet of the current study stated, is that coming out should not even have to be something that gay people have to think about doing at all. In terms of sexual orientation, heterosexuals and homosexuals are not seen as equivalent. Homosexuals are the ones thought of as having an orientation, as they are the ones understood as not following the presumed normative of heterosexuality (Ahmed, 2006). Thus, if society itself were not already oriented toward a heteronormative, there would be no such thing as “coming out.” After all, when has one ever heard of a heterosexual coming out?

However, for the teachers of the current study, the decision to come out at work proved to be riddled with complications and complexities. In response to a series of questions about whether or not they were out at school, how they made the choices they did about coming out, and if they felt that they had the agency to make an affirmative choice, the participants provided various responses based on their own definitions and degrees of being out as well as specific factors that governed their decisions.

Choice and agency

I determined that, for them, coming out at work was not necessarily about *either* choice *or* agency but appeared to be about a combination of both related through social structure. Although the participants felt that they possessed the agency to make a choice regarding disclosure about their sexuality at work, there were certain structural factors that governed their exercise of agency and hence limited their choices. This is not surprising given the ongoing debate in the social sciences regarding definitions of agency and structure, and which one is more influential in determining human behavior.

Agency, in its most simplistic form, has been defined as the freedom to act independently of one’s free will (Barker, 2005), whereas structure (specifically, social structure) has been

described as patterns of social life that are, for the most part, resistant to change (Sewell, 1992). However, some have argued that the two concepts are often defined in contrast to one another, thereby losing sight of the way that they are interrelated. Hays (1994), for example, argues that in order to examine their interrelatedness, we must first refine the static conceptualization of social culture to recognize that it is produced by and productive of people; that it is both enabling and constraining in its determination of human power and self-understanding; and that different levels of it exist, which are more or less resistant to change. Such a refinement, Hays (1994) claims, will also allow us to understand how “the capacity of agents to affect social structures varies with the accessibility, power, and durability of the structure in question” (p. 62). Further, this conceptualization of agency implies that there are various behavioral possibilities from which people may choose through their everyday practices, thereby creating and recreating social structures (Hays, 1994). Although Hays might argue that Foucault’s tendency to focus more on the constraining nature of structure may ignore the possible transformational effects that agents could have on structure, I see Foucault’s discussion of practices and power as relevant here, as they relate to the dilemma presented by the participants in the current study.

For Foucault (1995), the notion of an individual agent is problematic, because power is “relational” (p. 177) and circulates to such an extent that individuals can never completely separate themselves from the contexts in which they are known. In other words, the lines often become blurred between individual and institution. For example, in the context of the current study, the identity of teacher cannot exist without the institution of the school. Thus, we can see how the participants had an understanding of choice that largely depended on the structures in place around them (e.g., financial issues, beliefs regarding personal privacy, and school/district culture). The options they saw as available to them were informed by the institutions of which

they were a part. This is why Foucault sought to examine the interaction between individuals and institutions through what he termed “practices.” Through examining practices, one can recognize the effects of institutions on individual agency. Practices of institutions are productive of individuals, even as the practices of individuals are productive of institutions.

Many of the participants of the current study stated that, even though they possessed the agency to make a choice about coming out at work, there was not much of a choice at all. For one participant, Janet, the underlying problem did not appear to be at all about the actual choice. Rather, the issue she had was having to even consider her choices. Returning to Foucault, we understand that social structures are established by people and as such, can be changed. Unfortunately, as Foucault (1995) explains through his examples of the historical changes in the penal system, society can and will organize itself socio-politically such that the interests of the dominant groups are served. Thus, those with less power oftentimes end up making the choices that will allow them to function within society, even if it goes against the very core of their being. In terms of what Foucault (1995) describes as “relational power” (p. 177), as an individual’s overall power becomes more limited, they may become simultaneously complicit in their own subjection and that of others. Such is the case with many gay and lesbian teachers who continue to hide their sexuality at work in an effort to avoid discrimination and/or persecution. However, Ferfolja (2007) presents the thinking that being out and proud is not the only form of resistance within a heterosexual discourse. Rather, by their very ability to perform/act straight, gay and lesbian teachers “challenge through (and in spite of) their silence, the apparent normality and naturalness of heterosexuality” (Ferfolja, 2007, p. 574), or what Butler (1990) described as performativity and a disruption of the heterosexual matrix. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) explain that agency, as it relates post-structurally to performativity, becomes a performance and

simultaneously “reproduce[s] and contest[s] the foundations and origins of stable identity categories” (p. 67) rather than being “something that an individual possesses” (p. 68). Although Ferfolja (2007) saw teachers as being able to exercise agency to “reposition themselves in discourses that offer[ed] them protection, refuge and/or emotional advantage” (p. 574), I do not think that such choices are necessarily the ones that most participants in the current study wanted to make. Whereas teachers may in fact be exercising their individual agency in making such choices, I do not see the choices as really counting as “exhibiting their power as active agents” (Fefolja, 2007, p. 574) in the purest notion of agency. Again, Foucault (1995) might argue that there can be no truly independent agent due to the relational nature of power. Such arguments appear to simply make the choices that many gay and lesbian teachers *have* to make seem a bit more palatable. In her final reflections of the current study, Janet presented a strong and salient point.

First, I think it's a shame that teachers even have to *come* out. I just think people should just be who they are and it not matter. And coming out shouldn't have to be an experience or... a moment in time where that's taking place...because someone's sexuality should not even be an issue. So a teacher shouldn't ever have to be in the closet...[and]...coming out should never be something that has to happen.

Janet's statement condemns the notion that gay and lesbian teachers (or any gay or lesbian person for that matter) must make a choice at all. There again, teachers like Janet are bound up in power relations within the context of their work and the social structure in which they exist. Aside from their own sexuality being part of the structure which governed participants' exercise of agency, other related factors included financial security (class), beliefs regarding personal privacy, and school/district culture.

Financial security and class

In her book, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers*, Karen Graves (2009) provides a detailed account of how one of the largest witch hunts in history, led by the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (also known as the Johns Committee), set out to purge Florida of queer teachers in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Graves describes what she terms "A Stealth Investigation" and provides a collective account of 87 teachers, whose testimonies appear in the transcripts of the Johns Committee investigations. She also provides numerous statistics that describe the demographics of this group of teachers. The transcript excerpts presented are enough to convey just how invasive, demonizing, and grueling these investigations were for teachers accused/suspected of being homosexuals.

Graves (2009) goes on to argue that gay and lesbian teachers have been some of the most vulnerable and heavily scrutinized individuals of the gay and lesbian community due to the historical lack of support by professional organizations of those contesting social norms, the expectation of teachers to serve as examples for students, the fear that homosexual teachers recruit students to become homosexuals, and the low status assigned to a profession historically dominated by women. Despite the scrutiny of the profession and the high expectations of teacher performance, teaching has historically paid less than other professions. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), this is still the case, with mean teacher salaries ranking below those of legal, architectural/engineering, computer science, business/financial, management, art/design/entertainment, and health professions. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also reports mean teacher salaries for Deep South states and demographically similar areas as, in fact, lower than the national average.

Graves (2006) reported that, throughout the aforementioned Johns Committee investigations, many gay and lesbian teachers were subjected to what were often surprise interrogations and generally had no legal counsel present to protect them. Although these teachers were not necessarily physically tortured, they were mentally and emotionally tortured through denigration and graphic questions about their personal relationships. Such private interrogations harkened to the earlier forms of private interrogation described by Foucault (1995) and served to gain “confession[s] so strong a proof that there was scarcely any need to add others,” thereby guaranteeing that “the truth might exert all its power” (pp. 37-38). The absence of counsel was due to their inability to afford it, the inability to find someone who would risk their own legal reputation to represent them, and/or the prevention of counsel presence by the committee. In either case, they essentially lacked both the social and economic capital to access adequate legal representation.

Many Western societies have made tremendous progress in broadening their acceptance of gays and lesbians (Plummer, 2008; Weeks, 2007). McDermott (2011) argues that, even though significant work has been done to challenge societal misunderstandings about diverse sexualities and to fight for equal rights, there is still much work to be done to guarantee equitable opportunities for all. McDermott claims that one area that has been neglected, in particular, occurs at the intersection of sexuality and social class, noting that social class can still limit how some gays and lesbians function within society. For Madelyn of the current study, who claimed that she could never come out at school unless she was “financially secure” (able to retire and/or not be dependent on her full teacher salary to survive), the issue of class intersects with sexuality materially. Madelyn, like many other teachers, already struggled to make ends meet on a meager teacher salary which is lower than that of many other professions. Although an expensive lawsuit

could have potentially devastating negative financial effects on anyone, many teachers like Madelyn may not be able to afford expensive legal representation if confronted with the possibility of losing their jobs due to an issue related to their sexuality. Thus, as McDermott (2011) argues, “class resources and advantages are likely to be crucial to negotiating and claiming...equal lives” (p. 64) by teachers like Madelyn.

McDermott (2011) suggests that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is useful in understanding how social class and sexuality intersect to influence choices made by gays and lesbians in society. Bourdieu (1990) defined habitus as “systems of durable transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, principles which generate and organize practices and representations” (p. 53). More simply stated, habitus is “dispositions that internalize our social location and which orient our actions” (Noble & Watkins, 2003, p. 522). This definition of habitus also allows us to continue working through the previously discussed binary of social structure and human agency by examining the interdependence, rather than the opposition, of the two. If we further examine the human agent in terms of how social, economic, and cultural capital become embodied in such a way as to determine how someone looks and acts, we can begin to understand why agents make the choices they do. Bourdieu (1990) likens the reasoning behind agential practices to those agents’ “practical sense” or “feel for the game” (p. 67). Madelyn, like some of the participants in McDermott’s (2011) study, understood the rules of the game as heterosexual. As such, “the interconnection between the positionings of class and sexuality complicate[d]...the contesting of the heterosexual habitus” (McDermott, 2011, p. 74) that Madelyn had internalized. Madelyn’s choice not to come out was what Bourdieu (1984) would define as “the choice of the necessary” (p. 379). Her job was her livelihood, her means of survival. Thus, she had to do what she felt was

necessary to keep it. She could not afford to be in a position whereby her sexuality may have caused her to lose her job. Thus, the intersection of class and sexuality can have material effects on teachers like Madelyn, thereby preventing them from exercising their agency in making the choice to come out at work.

Personal privacy

Teaching has historically been a blend of private and public spheres. For example, teachers, particularly female teachers, have historically been expected to serve *in loco parentis*. When we think of such “parental” roles, we often equate them with actions such as hugs, talking about families, and sharing personal experiences. Yet, for gay and lesbian teachers, there is often a huge demarcation between public and private spheres. In a field that has been traditionally dominated by women (women that were expected to be chaste), teachers have largely been perceived in somewhat of an asexual nature (Blount, 2005). Likewise, as he questions his own “status quo or status queer” as a teacher, Rofes (2005) remarks, “Teachers are clearly sexual beings, but teacher culture has evolved in a desexed way” (p. 14). He goes on to question whether or not it is possible for “teachers to present themselves as full human beings, including sexual beings” (p. 14) without being seen as some form of threat to students. One of the main problems found with coming out as gay or lesbian is that such a declaration commonly and specifically implicates the act of sex (King, 2004; Khayatt, 1997). Along with this implication comes a host of negative societal views, including the belief that gay and lesbian teachers may promote homosexuality, actively “recruit” children as homosexuals, and/or even worse, orchestrate pedophilic relationships with children (Bishop et al., 2010; Graydon, 2011; King, 2004). Thus, many gay and lesbian teachers find it necessary to hide their sexuality at work.

For several of the participants of the current study, choosing not to come out at work was more about a right of privacy rather than necessarily trying to hide their sexuality. For Julian, it did not seem to bother him that he was not explicitly out at work. He believed in keeping personal business separate from work. Julian was actually describing how he based his decision not to disclose his sexuality more on a “right of privacy” discourse (Ferfolja, 2007) than a necessity to hide his sexuality. Much like Ferfolja’s teachers, Julian maintained that since his roles as teacher and colleague at work took precedence over making friends with colleagues, there was no reason to share personal information. Similarly, Mayo’s (2008) entire teacher participant group, although either implicitly or explicitly out, saw no reason to develop anything other than cordial, professional relationships with other colleagues.

Regarding the issue of privacy, Désert (1997) explained that it is not the same for both heterosexuals and sexual minorities. In fact, he claimed that it is more an issue (or actually a requirement) of secrecy for sexual minorities. Outward signs of implicit admissions to sexual acts as well as explicit public displays of affection by heterosexuals are tolerated. Such behavior and information is generally expected to be kept private by sexual minorities. While some teachers feel that their right to privacy is a civil right (Ferfolja, 2007), others feel that it is also their “right to teach children regardless of [their] sexual orientation” (Rofes, 2005, p. 23). The participants of the current study noted that there was a definite difference between colleagues suspecting and knowing about their sexuality, and felt that some of their colleagues really did not want to know. As such, they were quick to add that they were careful about what and how much information they shared about their personal lives.

Foucault might agree that the teachers were right to exercise caution regarding how much information they shared, as he appears to view our sense of personal identity and individual

agency as binding us up further in power relations with others. Individuality, according to Foucault (1995), is “one of the effects of the new tactics of power” (p. 23) that can actually cause an imbalance in power relations. For it is through identification that individuals become subjected to examination and subsequent “normalizing judgment” (Foucault, 1995, p. 177), by which they are compared to the larger normalized group and are ultimately classified as abnormal when they do not fit that norm. The “constant pressure to conform to the same model” (Foucault, 1995, p. 182) becomes internalized, making individuals fearful of being different, or in Ahmed’s (2006) queer phenomenological terms, constantly wondering if they are lining up with the norm. In other words, the more information there is about an individual available to others, the more power can be exercised over that individual.

Thus, what does it mean for these gay and lesbian teachers to try to retain personal privacy when they had to go to great strides to re-orientate themselves toward a heteronormative space? Ahmed (2006) writes that, “The normalization of heterosexuality as an orientation toward ‘the other sex’ can be redescribed in terms of the requirement to follow a straight line, whereby straightness gets attached to other values including decent, conventional, direct, and honest” (p. 70). Thus, this means that the risk of there being information that could have been used against them in any way by those who did not agree with their sexuality was a risk that most of the participants in the current study were not willing to take. Some of Ferfolja’s (2007) teachers reached a similar conclusion, maintaining that they were more “powerful subject[s]” (p. 576) as long as they maintained strictly professional relationships at work and kept the disclosure of personal information (e.g., sexual orientation) to a minimum.

School and district cultures

As established in Chapter 2, schools are already oriented toward the heteronormative and thus, function as gendered spaces that teach and affirm heteronormative ideals through a hidden social curriculum via activities like the prom (Best, 2004) and gendered practices such as advising student course selection based on gender expectations (Cousins, 2007; Smyth & Darmody, 2009), separation of sports by gender (Adams et al., 2005; McDowell, 1999), and the reinforcement of heteronormative views of masculinity and femininity (Pascoe, 2007). Butler's description of the heterosexual matrix could be ascribed to schools as spaces in which "acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (1990, p. 136). That is because schools have been shown to generally produce spaces in which heterosexuality is both expected (Roberts-Morris, 2004) and assumed (Charles, 2010) to be the orientation of all constituents. Ahmed (2006) claims that, "Spaces become straight as an effect of repetition...which allows straight bodies to extend into them" (p. 92). As such, individuals who do not identify with the heterosexual norm "get stuck in certain alignments as an effect of this work" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 92) and are forced to try and constitute their masculinity or femininity within the existing heteronormative discourses.

Schools can and often do serve as social institutions in which dominant power structures are conserved and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 1980). Thus, I argue that the structure and culture of heteronormative space in schools can effectively close down agency for gays and lesbians thereby causing the notion of choice in such spaces to look very different for them. The culture of the schools/districts in which the teachers of the current study worked was an important part of the structure that they used to guide their decisions regarding disclosure

about their sexuality. Factors that participants identified as affecting school culture included school/community diversity and socio-political climate; the academic performance level of the school; the presence/absence of local policies to protect against discrimination based on sexuality; and administrative/collegial support.

School/community diversity and socio-political climate both determined how comfortable some participants felt about being out at school. Those who taught in more socio-politically conservative areas tended to be more guarded about their personal lives at work. Recall that even though there was protective policy language in place in Sara's district, much like Jackson's (2007) teacher participants, Sara was still cautious and had visions of members from the primarily white, conservative community "showing up on the school's doorstep with pitchforks" upon learning of a lesbian teacher at the high school. Likewise, Drew remained uncertain about the overall acceptance of gays and lesbians at his school due to the conservative nature of his majority white, affluent, socially conservative community. Drew also based his reluctance to come out on the community's apparent racial reaction to issues specific to his school. The contrast of the non-diverse schools of Sara and Drew with those in which Madelyn and Megan taught may appear to imply that schools in more diverse communities tend to be more socio-politically liberal and less homophobic. Both Madelyn and Megan described their schools as more diverse in terms of student socioeconomic status, racial composition, and open viewpoints of administration and colleagues. These descriptions, combined with their comments about the lack of regard for one's sexual orientation at their schools, certainly support such an implication. On the other hand, even though Liz described her school's community as being more diverse, she indicated that it was still very socially conservative. She claimed to have a lot of "problems with rednecks...black/white issues...also gay/straight issues," and added, "...you

don't really discuss it [being gay], because there are still people who are not open to it." Thus, there were conflicting reports among the participants regarding correlations between diverse populations and attitudes toward gays and lesbians.

While the inconsistencies between the participants' schools in the current study may seem surprising, other research has also reported conflicting correlations between diverse populations (particularly based on comparisons of race/ethnicity) and attitudes toward homosexuality (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1994). When observing participant teachers' classes, Connell (2015) overheard students in a predominantly white school making assumptions about a greater level of homophobia in neighboring schools having more students of color and lower socioeconomic status. She stated that the students could not believe that the "ghetto" schools also had gay-straight alliances. Likewise, many of Connell's teachers made the same assumptions about people of color being more prone to homophobia than people of other races/ethnicities. The problem, Connell (2015) states, is that such:

Racialized discourses of homophobia contribute to the continued invisibility of queers of color and perpetuate the discursive linking of gayness and whiteness, which in turn supports the continued enforcement of homonormativity (p. 157).

Although Connell makes a valid point, recent research has confirmed lower levels of tolerance for gays and lesbians among African Americans and multiracial individuals (Holland, Matthews, & Schott, 2013). This lower level of intolerance is deeply rooted in African American history, particularly as it pertains to African American males. Ross (1994) claims that the black community has traditionally tried to keep those things hidden that would reflect poorly on the community. However, he also points to those aspects as historically being the very weapons used to pathologize the black community for its perceived deviation from dominant cultural practices. McBride (2005) agrees and claims that the conservative black community, through its own

complicity with the “politics of respectability,” has cut out parts of its own history. Because blackness is seen to be authenticated by the heterosexual black male (Johnson, 2003), blackness is viewed to be further diminished by being gay (Riggs, 1995). Recall that Ricky in the current study worried about the same issue of fitting into the black community as a gay male. Marlon Riggs (as cited in Carbado, 2005) further described being a black gay male as a “triple negation.” In other words blackness is negated by whiteness; black maleness is negated by white maleness and the historical feminization of the black male by a matriarchal family structure; and maleness in general is negated by queerness. Thus, even though there is good reason to regard as true the perceived correlation of a lower tolerance for gays and lesbians within a more racially diverse community, we must recognize that there are many other factors in play within a school’s culture that can cause those perceptions to materialize (or not) within that particular school.

In addition to school/community diversity and socio-political climate, Julian’s story implied that teaching in a low-performing school also may have afforded him an added protection against being fired for being gay. When explaining that sexual orientation did not seem to be a concern at his school, Julian attributed it to the fact that the school just needed good teachers due to its current state takeover status. At one point, Julian even remarked, “You could have the most flamboyant teacher, and if the kids are making strides and learning, then who gives a damn? That’s how it is at my school.” Whereas there does not appear to be specific research to support Julian’s implication as it relates directly to sexuality, there is research which stresses the need for teachers in high needs schools. Research has shown that more than one-third of teachers leave the classroom within the first five years of teaching, with that rate being even higher for teachers in lower performing schools (Guarino, Santibáñez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001). Thus, attraction and retention of teachers for such schools, particularly good teachers,

often proves difficult due to heavier teaching schedules, less collaboration and professional development time, having to teach outside of specific certification areas, and overall poor working conditions (Center on Education Policy, 2007; Jerald, 2002; Morton, 1993). Although Julian's situation was a special one due to the nature of his school's low academic performance level, he made the point that, as long as he was getting the job done, he felt that he was safe. Thus, he was working really hard to be the good teacher, not only because it was in his heart to do so but also because he did not want to give the administration any reason to let him go.

The existence of policies (or the lack thereof) to protect gay and lesbian teachers was another part of the structure that affected the agency of participants. Since the 1970's, some states have passed legislation that prevents discrimination and firing of teachers based on sexual orientation, and there has been no litigation within the past decade regarding the firing of teachers from public schools based on sexual orientation (Eckes, 2017). Some school districts have even established local policies that include sexual orientation as part of their non-discrimination policies. However, the majority of the policy protections related to sexual discrimination are largely in place for students. Such policies are many times part of general anti-bullying plans that do not specifically address sexual orientation. Again, only two participants in the current study, Sara and Ricky, reported knowing of any such policy in their district or school. As we saw, Ricky's school was a special case due to its affiliation with a medical facility that was charged with teaching children from all backgrounds and conditions while they remained in the facility. Protective policies were well in place when Ricky started teaching there and allowed him to be completely comfortable at work from the start. However, Sara learned very quickly when she first started teaching, that there was nothing to protect her from being fired if she was outed. Sara's story about her chance discovery of a policy change years later to include sexual

orientation in her district's non-discrimination policy is a powerful one. That her school system changed their policy was great and important news in itself. However, what Sara said about the lack of understanding of those like her administrator (who also happened to be a well-intentioned ally) regarding how the absence of specific policies and protections effect marginalized groups is also important. Even more important was the realization that her administrator had once Sara shared her past fears with her. Sara's administrator could not understand why Sara had been so fearful for so many years. After all, the administrator considered herself to be (and had proven to be) a well-intentioned ally. Sara stated it best herself when she claimed, "Even the people who consider themselves our allies have no idea what we go through." Sara's statement conveys how oblivious even the best of allies can be to the effects of the lack of such policies on good gay and lesbian teachers. This also speaks to the insular views of society in general, and how most of us tend to only be aware of, or concerned about, what affects us directly as individuals.

For participants who were out to any degree at school, the support shown to them by administrators and colleagues was paramount to their comfort level, happiness, and sense of protection at work. Megan's administration and colleagues were supportive to the extent of throwing a wedding shower for her and her same-sex spouse. Additionally, other staff members were also explicitly out at Megan's school. Thus, she felt perfectly safe being completely out with all of her colleagues. Although Madelyn was uncomfortable with being out at work, and did not believe that being out at work was necessary to her ability to perform her job well and to be happy at work, she was confident that her administration and colleagues would not have taken issue with her sexuality. Similarly to Jackson's (2007) study, the participants of the current study also reported that supportive administrators were the most important form of support for gay and lesbian teachers.

Role Models, Advocates, and Sex/Sexuality in Schools

Ahmed (2006) wrote that, “Sex, gender, and sexual orientation...are kept in line...such that any nonalignment produces a queer effect” (p. 83). In the case of this study, “queer” as a sexual term can be seen as being spatial, because it refers to a sexuality that does not line up with the heteronormative and therefore prevents queer bodies from extending into heteronormative spaces (Ahmed, 2006). Thus, whether suspected or confirmed as gay or lesbian, such teachers potentially queer the space of schools simply by being there. Whether one’s outing is of one’s own volition or not, once it has happened, there is then the problem of what consequences may follow. As such, the participants of the current study remained aware of the negative perceptions of gay and lesbian persons held by much of society, in general, and the potential consequences for themselves as gay and lesbian teachers, specifically. They also recognized the particular significance that their sexual orientation and actions may have held in the eyes of students, colleagues, and parents. For some, that meant working twice as hard to develop a reputation as a super teacher and the hope/belief that their reputation would in some way protect them against potential discrimination and/or persecution, should their sexuality ever become an issue in question. For others, that meant continuing to struggle with how to address issues of sexuality at school while continuing to be role models and advocates for students, particularly those who may have been struggling with their own sexuality.

Schools have always been sexually charged spaces for all students, gay and straight. Whether or not teachers and/or parents choose to acknowledge it, discussions about sex and sexuality are happening, if not the act of sex itself in some cases. Students, gay and straight, are also becoming more sexually aware and active at earlier ages. Recall the middle school boy who told Julian about being gay and having sex with men and Liz’s students’ questions about the

young transsexual girl running on the boys track team. Julian did the best that he could do to support the student and informed the counselor, while Liz simply told the students to leave the situation alone. While some may feel that Julian and Liz could have or should have done/said more, others may say that further conversations with the students would have been inappropriate, particularly at the middle school level. Had there been a plan in place, or had there already been an honest and open discussion surrounding issues of sex and sexuality at their schools, Liz and Julian may have been more comfortable with handling the situations differently and using them as teachable moments. Even though Janet's own daughter had lived the life of a child of same-sex parents, her librarian deemed a book that the child was reading as inappropriate due to its having a gay character. Janet, being out with her colleagues, chose to fight the issue and ultimately got the book in the school's library. Finally, there was the issue of Megan's principal attempting to be supportive of a male student, who was being bullied for being gay during P.E., by allowing him to serve as an office worker rather than attending P.E. class. However, there were two problems with that solution. One, simply removing the student from the P.E. class was not addressing the underlying problem of bullying related to sexuality. The second problem, as a few participants mentioned, is that the culture of a school can definitely change with changes in faculty and administration.

Issues of sex and sexuality are still considered taboo for many, particularly where children are concerned and thus, may or may not even be addressed at some schools. Yet, research has already shown us the ways in which schools are already constructed as gendered and predominantly heteronormative spaces (Adams et al., 2005; Best, 2004; Bettis & Adams, 2006; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004; Fine, 1988; Fordham, 1993; Henry, 1998; Roberts-Morris, 2004). Such spaces send mixed messages to students as they socialize them in the ways

(heterosexual) boys and girls should act, while at the same time discouraging them from acknowledging or dealing with issues of sex and sexuality. The recent politically charged movements and events such as #MeToo and the hearings for the nomination of alleged sexual abuser, Brett Kavanaugh, to the U.S. Supreme Court, in which issues and definitions of consent have been debated, point to the importance of having meaningful and honest discussions about sex and sexuality in schools. In a follow-up article to Fine's 1988 article entitled *Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire*, Fine and McClellan (2006) point out that not much has changed in nearly 20 years regarding the lack of an effective and open dialogue concerning sex, sexuality, and desire in schools. In fact, many a current curriculum "fails to challenge the heteronormative culture of schools...[and]...not only denies LGBTQ youth [to which I would add teachers] legitimacy, but it also asks them to hold aside (and silence) significant pieces of their identity" to fit into such "moral communities" (Fine & McClelland, 2006, pp. 310-311), something that often proves to be difficult and awkward for some gay and lesbian teachers.

Thus, when attempting to provide safe and inclusive environments for all students, dealing with issues specifically related to sexuality often placed participants of the current study in awkward positions. At this juncture, they were faced with having to address the issue at hand while risking suspicions or accusations regarding their own sexuality. Recall that Sara reprimanded a student in front of her class for calling another student a fag and stood up for a lesbian student who did not wish to wear a dress to the prom. Gina, who was already suspected as a lesbian by a homophobic administrator, was scolded when she questioned the administrator for calling a student gay. Both participants advocated for gay and lesbian students at considerable risk to themselves. Teachers like Sara and Gina, who may already be suspected of

being gay or lesbian, risk having those suspicions confirmed or at least investigated further, a risk that heteronormative discourse places only on select elements of the population. In a similar vein, certain contexts such as physical education and contact sports may have involved physical contact between participants and students. Although physical contact with students is a risky area for all teachers, it presents a unique dilemma for those who are gay or lesbian due to existing societal misconceptions regarding gays and lesbians as pedophiles (Bishop et al., 2010; Graydon, 2011; King, 2004).

Still, many of the participants indicated that by viewing their students through a lens colored by their personal experiences, they were able to be more empathetic to the needs and struggles of their students, particularly those who were different. Similar studies in the literature support such participant data (DeJean, 2004; DeJean, 2007). The process of being an empathetic, caring, and compassionate teacher also often entailed forming close personal relationships with students in which participants saw themselves as potential role models and/or advocates. However, some of society still does not look favorably upon gays and lesbians as role models for children (Blount, 2005; Graves, 2009; Harbeck, 1997) or upon the advocacy for gay and lesbian rights for that matter. Additionally, serving as role models and advocates for students may take on a particular importance for gay and lesbian teachers if those students are also gay or lesbian. As several of the participants of the current study reported, even though they were not out to students, students who publicly identified as gay or lesbian (or appeared to be struggling with their own sexuality) often sought them out as confidants and safe havens. Due to the developing sexual awareness and activity of their students, they often found themselves having to address issues of sex and sexuality that arose among students, even though there was no formal

curriculum or policy to support them in their endeavor. Again, navigating such situations proved difficult and risky for the participants, as none of them were out to students.

Although some participants felt that they did not have to be explicitly out to effectively address issues of sexuality among the students, others like Janet and Megan who desired to be seen as successful and positive role models in the eyes of the students, felt that such hopes may be a bit fraught if those students could not truly see them as a successful person who was also gay or lesbian. Therein lies part of the dilemma. Can we be seen as good role models who are also gay or lesbian if we are *not* out to our students? Is being out to our students even appropriate? In examining this dilemma, a return to the previous discussion of agency proves helpful. On the one hand, we have already seen how some teachers choose not to come out based on beliefs about personal privacy, the belief that their sexuality has nothing to do with how they do their job, or fear of negative repercussions.

Some, however, might view a gay or lesbian teacher's choice not to come out as complicity in and reproduction of the existing heteronormative social structure. Such power relations and social structures also help to sustain an overall judgment about who should come out and why. So why does there appear to be such judgment around coming out? Ironically, as I was writing the last few sections of this dissertation, *National Coming Out Day* came and passed. As usual, popular gay and lesbian advocacy newsletters that I regularly read, as well as the flood of posts around this time by advocacy groups on social media sites, stress not only the importance of the fight for equality but also the power behind more of us coming out. Some gay and lesbian advocates feel that it is imperative to come out for the collective benefit of us all and tend to judge those of us negatively who cannot seem to quite make it out of the closet. Some research has reported that gay and lesbian teachers found it psychologically liberating to come

out and reported a reduction in stress (DeJean, 2007). On the other hand, Connell (2015) discusses at length how others become torn between “pride and professionalism” (p. 1). Although some of Connell’s (2015) participants who considered themselves activists outside the classroom and viewed visibility as “the right choice” (p. 73) regardless of professional expectations, some admitted feeling guilty about not coming out to students. Likewise, many of the elementary and secondary teachers studied by Woods and Harbeck (1992) felt that by avoiding assumed lesbian and gay students, they were betraying them and failing them as positive role models who could provide support and accurate information about issues of sexuality. Similarly, within the current study, teachers like Gina and Janet felt as if they were not being as good of a role model as they could be by not being out to students. Gina, in particular, recalled wishing many times that she could have said, “Me, too” when she had students tell her that they were gay or lesbian.

Hays (1994) explains that by focusing solely this concept of “reproductive” agency (p. 63), or how social structures are produced and reproduced via practices that occur between people, we can lose sight of “transformational” (p. 64) agency, or the agent’s ability to affect changes within social structures. Research studies have shown that many gay and lesbian teachers, regardless of their level of disclosure about their sexuality, indicated that having to be more critically aware of their sexuality influenced their teaching philosophies and practices in ways that led to positive interactions with and effects on their students (DeJean, 2004; DeJean, 2007; Endo et al., 2010; King, 2004; Mayo, 2008). Many found that they were able to promote social justice and serve as positive role models for all students (Endo et al., 2010) and combat issues of homophobia (Gust, 2007) without necessarily having to be out at work. Participants of the current study also categorized simply listening to students and providing a safe space for

them before, during, and after classes as being positive role models, claiming that it was not necessary to be out to the students to do so. Still, other researchers reported that by being out with students, gay and lesbian teachers were better able to combat negative stereotypes and offer hope to young gays and lesbians for the possibility of happy and successful lives (Griffin, 1992), something that Janet of the current study deeply longed to be able to do some day.

Although previous studies have consistently pointed to the importance of having positive gay and lesbian role models for students, and participants of the current study provided the same insights, most still agree that coming out to students is fraught with multiple potential problems at both the professional and personal levels. This may especially be the case for gay and lesbian teachers who are still struggling with their own sexuality and/or coming out just in their personal lives. Such internalized dilemmas can often lead to feelings of what, in a queer phenomenological sense, might be described as dis-orientation as one has to try and be something or someone they are *not* at work.

Identity, Performativity, and (Dis)orientation

Giving a nod toward Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Ahmed (2006) wrote:

Disorientation can be a bodily feeling of losing one's place, and an effect of the loss of place: it can be a violent feeling, and a feeling that is affected by violence, or shaped by violence directed toward the body. Disorientation involves failed orientation: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach. (p. 160)

In other words, Ahmed (2006) explains, bodies that are not oriented along normative lines/directions can actually be "... 'stopped' in their tracks...accumulate stress...[and] take the shape of such stress..." (p. 160). She adds, "The social pressure to follow a certain course, to live a certain kind of life...can feel like a physical 'press' on the surface of the body" (p. 17). All of the stories in the current study point to the fact that, as gay and lesbian teachers, the participants

were not necessarily able to be what they considered their true selves at work. In other words, the “I” that they were at work was, in fact, constituted by normative teacher identity discourses that excluded sexual identity, particularly that of gay or lesbian. The daily routine of having to act a certain way, lie, or otherwise try to deflect questions about their personal lives added stress to the already demanding job of being a teacher. The findings suggest that a contradiction in expression of identity exists for some gay and lesbian teachers who have chosen not to publicly disclose their sexuality at work. As some participants stated, their sexuality is just one part of their identity, as is being a teacher; however, it is an important part that merges with all of the others to make up their whole identity. Even though I write of these intersecting components as if they can be separated into distinct identities, I realize that to speak of them as such risks rendering the whole identity unintelligible. However, that is what, in fact, happens with many of these teachers.

In studying how pre-service teachers developed professional/teacher identities, Alsup (2006) found that teachers generally try to establish their professional identities based on what they are taught in teacher education programs, noting that such professional identities often conflict with what teachers know to be their true selves. This process of becoming a teacher involves what Britzman (1991) described as an identity transformation, one in which teachers are asked to set aside personal identity aspects, remain objective and fair with all students, and fit into a normative teacher model. Alsup (2006) defined this model as “middle class, white, female, and *heterosexual* [my emphasis]” (p. 7) and claimed that, “the problem arises when a culture’s definition of normality is inconsistent with the personal belief and values of the individual seeking to become a teacher” (p. 64). This is because, as Britzman (1991) also points out, personal identities cannot simply be put away, and attempting to do so can create stress. In

reality, the contradiction for many gay and lesbian teachers is that that these identity components *are* expected to remain separate at school. Thus, some gay and lesbian teachers may feel forced to distance or alienate themselves from part of their identity to be produced as the subject of teacher and to avoid persecution and/or discrimination.

As explained by Jackson and Mazzei (2012), the term *identity* is problematic itself in that it signifies an “essential nature that stabilizes meaning about people who belong to a particular identity category” (p. 69). However, they recommend Butler’s theory of performativity as a way to counter such humanistic views of identity. Butler (1993) defined performativity as “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names” (p. 2). Regarding gender and the notion of feminine/masculine, she does not recognize such categories as inherent but as determined through reiterative performances of cultural discourses of what it means to be feminine or masculine. In the same vein, she claims that “identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler, 1990, p. 34). Writing of sexual identity specifically, Alsup (2006) explains that, if we include embodiment in the definition of discourse, then the formation of sexual identity is also discursive. She adds, “...therefore, like other various subjectivities and identity positions, sexual orientation is a part of a whole human being and, therefore, must be compatible with one’s professional identity and the discourse that creates and reflects this identity” (Alsup, 2006, p. 99). Again, the problem for some gay and lesbian teachers is that sexual and professional identities are not, in fact, compatible.

In the case of gay and lesbian identities, identification often involves more of a dis-identification with heterosexual norms. Because such signs of identification may or may not be intelligible (and therefore not accepted) by normative society, gay and lesbians often dis-identify

again to fit into heteronormative spaces. Thus, these individuals repeatedly take on different forms of identity which, as Butler (1990) explains, can become internalized. Acting straight or, at the very least, attempting to fit into the normative teacher subjectivity is what Butler (1996) terms a citational practice that produces gay and lesbian teachers as an effect of that performance. However, such performatives do not completely constitute them because there is always their subjectivity of gay or lesbian that they return to in their personal lives. According to Butler's (1996) theory, this both "constitutes and contests the coherence of the 'I'" (p. 376) that these teachers use when referring to their whole selves.

Butler (1996) further describes identity categories as "sites of necessary trouble" (p. 372), because any one category can exclude parts of another. For example, in the current study, when Ricky's performativity during his early years of teaching excluded his sexuality, which he saw as an important part of his whole identity, those expressions of his subjectivity remained unseen or unknown. According to Butler (1996), Ricky's performativity was compelled as "provisional" (p. 372), or to use Ricky's words, "being fake." The reason identity categories are troubling, Butler (1993) explains, is that they are normative and compel subjects to conform in order to be intelligible by society. Other examples of performativity in the current study were those of Sam and Madelyn. Sam seemed confident in his own performativity by indicating that he felt confident that his portrayal of the "grouchy old bachelor" worked to allow him to avoid normative questions/speculations about an older unmarried man. Similarly, Madelyn appeared to fit into the heteronormative matrix by being perceived as what she described as "just an old divorced woman" with children and grandchildren, which she herself reinforced by simply not denying the role. This making and unmaking of subjectivities, as described by Jackson and Mazzei (2012) was part of the process that produced these teachers as "unfinished product[s]" (p.

73) of specific discourses (e.g., that of what a teacher is or should be) and power relations (e.g., with colleagues, administration, and students). Wood (2005), a lesbian college instructor, wrote that her silence troubled her nearly as much as her fear of homophobia, admitting that being complicit with her assumed heterosexuality and not performing her true sexual identity had caused a “disconnection between my critical theory and my pedagogic practice” (p. 430) and rendered her own identity “incoherent” (p. 431) for herself. Again, the performative acts that allowed all of these teachers to conform to normative expectations and become intelligible to society often translated into part of their identity being excluded, thereby making their reference to “I” unintelligible to themselves.

Alsop (2006) claims that teacher identity formation is performative in much the same way as Butler describes gender and sexual identity performativities due to the material and corporeal effects that the performances can have on the teacher. For gay and lesbian teachers specifically, each time their subjectivities are constituted and reconstituted, those teachers are essentially giving up something of themselves to be successful as a teacher in a heteronormative space. In other words, they are dis-orienting themselves away from the gay or lesbian part of their identity and re-aligning themselves with the expectations of a heteronormative space. Such a “straightening” or re-orientation, if you will, is a task that can prove scary and exhausting.

Recall that Sara explained how she found it difficult to interact with co-workers who she felt really did not know who she was. Relatedly, Gina, Ricky, and Sam expressed feelings of guilt and dishonesty for not being forthcoming with colleagues. Ricky’s feelings even developed into harbored resentments and prejudices toward others for having to “put on an act” and “be fake” with them. That Liz had to worry about a family picture on her desk being in question, and that she and other female participants commented numerous times about having to evade

personal questions about marriage and children, illustrated just some of the fearful and potentially damaging situations about which gay and lesbian teachers, unlike their straight colleagues, must worry. Ahmed (2015) made a similar point by blogging that, when mentioning a same-sex partner (just as heterosexuals mention their partners), one may be seen as “drawing attention to yourself,” thereby risking potential harassment. Similarly, when some participants of the current study overheard homophobic comments or conversations by colleagues and/or students, they were afraid to stand up against them for fear of arousing suspicions about their own sexuality or having those suspicions confirmed. Such situations may, in turn, stifle teacher identities, thereby preventing teachers from effectively reaching students (DeJean, 2004) or cause psychological stress and/or depression (Rudoe, 2010). However, inactions by teachers can also send messages of complicity to students who may be looking to them for some type of validation, support, or protection.

As Ahmed (2006) describes, the normative or straight body is one that appears “in line” with others, one that has been shaped by the repetition of bodily and social actions over time. It is the body that is allowed to extend into phenomenological space, that space in this instance being a heteronormative one. If it does not “line up” with other bodies, it is viewed as queer and becomes unable to extend into that space. It is at that point when the extension fails, that disorientation can occur. The fact that Sam policed his use of gender-neutral pronouns when speaking of a significant other and practiced the way he stood, walked, and talked were all evidences of a literal “straightening” effect that took place with his body as he attempted to line up with the heteronormative expectation of his gender. Similarly, when Sara, Janet, and Liz felt obligated to dress more femininely for certain work functions than how they regularly dressed, they felt very uncomfortable. Hence, Sara’s comment about feeling as though she was “teaching

in drag” when dressed more femininely sums up how some of the teachers felt about “straightening” up their act to more easily extend into a heteronormative space. Although “lining up” with the heteronormative space may have allowed some of these teachers to more easily extend into that space, such actions may have also caused part of their identities to become “out of reach” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 101) to them.

Likewise, some physical spaces also seemed to be “out of reach” to the participants. The fear that Madelyn and Liz had about being in the girls locker room for extended periods caused them to try and remain outside of that space, a space that was part of their job to supervise. Sara’s concern about her assigned restroom duty not only prevented her from inhabiting that space but also put her in the uncomfortable situation of having to explain to her administrator why she did not feel comfortable completing her assigned job duty in that space. Even though the bathroom duty was problematically flawed from inception and supplicant for a lawsuit, *and* Sara was already out to that particular administrator, the incident could have proven more dangerous for Sara with a less supportive administrator. Finally, Janet’s feeling of being “stuck” in her particular district for fear of losing tenure if she decided to transfer to a district closer to home spoke to the limitations placed on gay and lesbian teachers as to where some feel that they can safely work. Situating these teachers’ experience within a framework of queer phenomenology, Ahmed (2015) captured adequately the effect of such experiences when she blogged, “When we work and study in spaces that are organized around those who [we] are ‘not’ it is wearing” and “encourage[s] you to take up less space.” Without the guarantee of tenure, protective policies, and supportive administration, navigating a new space into which one cannot fully extend can prove complicated, frightening, and risky for gay and lesbian teachers.

Even though Sam had what he described as a supportive administrator (i.e. knew he was gay and was “ok with it”), that administrator put Sam in a very awkward position by leveraging Sam’s sexuality to avoid his own responsibility. By telling Sam to “take care of it” when parents started complaining about a gay male couple of parents who wanted to chaperone a band trip with their son, the administrator forced Sam to be complicit in the discrimination against the couple. Nixon (2006) actually describes what Sam experienced as indirect discrimination and minoritizing. He explains that placing such responsibility on LGBT staff members can “force individual teachers to come out” and “allows the likely majority of staff to pass off issues of prejudice as not their responsibility” (p. 278). Sam’s administrator took the easy way out for himself and placed the responsibility of discrimination on Sam. Additionally, this was a disorientating experience for Sam, as it went against every gay grain in his body and made him feel like a hypocritical “jerk.”

The gay and lesbian teachers in this project communicated how their whole identities were at times already unintelligible to both themselves and some colleagues. Whereas remaining in the closet about their sexual identity may have provided the participants some degree of safety, it also stifled their teacher identities at times, thereby preventing them from effectively interacting with their colleagues and connecting with their students on a more personal and meaningful level. For some teachers, these experiences caused fear, stress, and feelings of disorientation away from what they believed to be their true selves. Thus, in the following chapter, I will provide some salient implications of this study as well as recommendations for educational practice and future research.

CHAPTER VI: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The current study highlights the importance of providing gay and lesbian teachers the opportunity to share their experiences of working in the predominantly heteronormative space of K-12 schools. It allows for investigating how experiences related to heteronormative misconceptions about gays and lesbians as well as homophobic acts and discrimination against them can negatively affect both their personal and professional lives. Although other similar studies have been performed, those focusing on gay and lesbian teachers in more socio-politically conservative areas such as that of the current study are few. Additionally, even though we have seen positive changes in social views with regard to sexuality in recent years, there is still much work to be done. While the majority of the participants in the study did not report terrible working conditions, all of them described having been witness to or direct recipients of homophobic acts and/or discrimination related to their sexuality. All addressed various negative stereotypes of gays and lesbians and how dealing with such misconceptions as teachers contributed to varying levels of stress and fear in their professional lives at one time or another.

Implications and Recommendations - Legislation

None of the participants lived or worked in areas where any anti-discrimination legislation existed to specifically protect individuals on the basis of sexuality. Only two participants reported working within schools/districts that actually included the words “sexual orientation” in their non-discrimination policies. As such, to ensure the ultimate protection for gay and lesbian teachers, the best case scenario would be for federal anti-discrimination laws to

first be extended to *all* persons and then enforced by mandate at the state and local levels of government. Although we can remain hopeful that such legislation will some day pass, that day appears long to come. Of course, legislation is not a complete solution. An important implication for this study is the fact that social and cultural views continue to lag behind related legal determinations. This is particularly the case in more socio-politically conservative areas such as that of the current study, where such views are strongly influenced by personal moral convictions and deeply rooted religious beliefs. For example, even though same-sex marriage was legalized by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015, some married participants still worried about engaging in conversation with colleagues, students, or parents when asked about their marital status. In 2018, Miss America Deidre Downs Gunn married her same-sex partner in Alabama and was even congratulated by the Miss America Organization. So if same-sex marriage is legal nationwide, then why should gay and lesbian teachers have to worry about answering in the affirmative when asked if they are married? Why should it not be safe for them to also say that it is to someone of the same sex when further engaged in conversation? The primary reason lies in the fact that it has never been the majority vote in many conservative states to recognize same-sex marriages. Also, social views have not necessarily shifted despite the U.S. Supreme Court's 2015 ruling. Unfortunately, socialization in schools still often reflects the social views of the larger society. As such, rather than challenging dominant ideologies and keeping up with certain social progressions, schools generally continue to reinforce the dominant heteronormative views, thereby continuing to relegate gay and lesbian teachers and students to the margins. Graves (2009) posits that, based on analysis of historical information, teachers are excellent indicators for understanding "how political-economic changes influence sexual identity" (p. xiii). Moreover, she maintains:

...schools are critical institutions for maintaining or challenging dominant ideology, and teachers occupy the most critical positions in schools. To control teachers is to control the dominant ideology...to free teachers from antigay discrimination is a crucial step in dismantling homophobia in our society. (Graves, 2009, p. xvii)

Thus, while we wait for legislation that may or may not come, there are still actions that can be taken by local entities such as colleges of education, school districts, and individual schools.

Implications and Recommendations – Local Policy and Practice

Gay and lesbian teachers and administrators should be made aware of local legislation and district/school policies that are in place which might protect them. They should connect with local advocacy organizations that can help raise awareness and offer legal counsel that is experienced in issues related to discrimination based on sexuality in the workplace. Like Connell's (2015) teachers, some participants in the current study struggled with being out and proud versus remaining professional, closeted, and safe. I agree with Sedgwick (1993) in that no one should try and guilt anyone into coming out of the closet if they do not feel safe and comfortable in doing so. However, I recommend that those of us who *are* out and can serve as a voice for those who are not, or can otherwise serve as a liaison between them and the entities who may be able to offer help, make an effort to do so.

Some participants who were out to any degree at work spoke about the endless process of coming out at work. Even if gay and lesbian teachers come out at work at any given point in time, many feel that they have to risk coming out over and over as new students, colleagues, and administrators arrive. That is why it is important to have written policies in place that offer protection. One can never be guaranteed of working with students and/or colleagues whose views on sexuality agree with those of one's own. As all of the participants in the current study stressed, without formal policies and protocols in place in local schools/districts (at the very

minimum) to address issues surrounding diversity and equity, the atmosphere could go from one of nurturing to one of discriminatory with a simple change in administration.

School districts must begin creating curriculum which is centered on equity and social justice and which includes comprehensive sex education. Fine and McClelland (2006) reported that sexualities of individuals who do not conform to the predominantly heteronormative ideals are either not discussed in most sex education courses or are demonized when they are discussed. Thus, we need comprehensive sex education courses which teach facts about not only sex but also sexuality; which explain safe sex practices rather than simply teaching abstinence; and which focus on same-sex relationships as well as heterosexual ones. Such courses should also include other sensitive and often missing topics of desire (Fine, 1988), abuse, birth control, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. This is the only way we can expect schools to effectively approach questions of sex and sexuality that are sure to arise between students and teachers, particularly queer students who have nowhere else to turn. Moreover, it would allow us to have open and honest conversations about sensitive issues while moving away from the mindset that sex and sexuality should necessarily remain a taboo or private matter. It may be a huge leap, but once sex and sexuality can be discussed openly and honestly, we may then also be able to move beyond the thought of children having no sexual agency/desire. In another perhaps even larger leap, we could move closer to deconstructing the notion that children should be protected from discussions of sex/sexuality in general and gay and lesbian teachers specifically. Without courses, policies, and protocols in place, teachers and administrators will not be equipped to help students navigate the difficult terrain of romance, love, and sex. In effect, educational leaders and policy makers are doing an injustice to students, teachers, and society as a whole by avoiding such responsibilities.

All of the aforementioned efforts will be in vain without the establishment of school cultures of inclusivity. This involves not only adjustments to policy but also the creation of a culturally responsive curriculum. That may range from the diversity of books and lessons used with students to an actual sex education curriculum that addresses sex and sexual orientation openly and honestly. Inclusion of diverse issues (specifically issues of sexuality) throughout the curriculum should be mandatory. However, rather than simply adding in gay and lesbian examples and scenarios, we need curriculum that is constructed around diversity, equity, and social justice for all. As Janet discussed from the viewpoint of a parent of a school-aged child with same-sex parents, it should also be responsive not only toward all students and teachers but also toward diverse families. What Janet was specifically referring to was a school culture in which diversity is valued and welcomed, one in which its members not only have discussions about how to act on those values but also how to instill those values into the students. By doing so, we can avoid the risk of further separation of issues such as those that affect gays and lesbians from issues that affect all “others” in society. Such efforts may aid in countering negative stereotypes held about gays and lesbians by including them in the mainstream discussion rather than continuing to relegate them to the margins. This will also allow others to better understand how the discrimination/exclusion of gays and lesbians amounts to the same type of demonization that occurs via racism, sexism, ableism, and ageism. Additionally, engaging in age appropriate discussions in the classroom gives all students and teachers the opportunity to examine/challenge their own biases, understand/consider the positions of others, recognize the various forms of social injustice, and discuss ways to rectify those injustices in a safe environment. I would recommend that responsible school leaders look to schools like Ricky’s for guidance. Although Ricky’s school was not a traditional public school, there is no

reason that it could not and should not serve as an example and a resource for traditional schools in learning to create cultures of inclusivity through routine and relative training.

Changes in school culture can best occur under the guidance of a supportive administration at both the district and school levels. It is not enough to simply have policies that purport protection against harassment and/or discrimination based on sexuality. Rather, there must be strong administrators at both the school and district levels who are willing to stand up for and protect all teachers who are doing their jobs. When non-discrimination policies *are* in place, administrators must explicitly address the policies and guarantee everyone that they will be enforced. Otherwise, such policies risk going unknown and unenforced. Case in point, neither Sara nor her administrator were aware of the inclusive sexual orientation language that was added to their district's non-discrimination policy until Sara accidentally ran across it when searching for an unrelated policy. Participants of the current study named strong and supportive school-level administrators as the single most important players in establishing a safe and inclusive school culture. Effective administrators will be those who seek out and provide proper training, resources, and support for teachers to have both the confidence in their ability to do the right thing by themselves and their students and the job security to do so.

As such, colleges of education should be more intentional in preparing teachers and administrators to work with diverse faculties and student bodies. They should require courses that stress the importance of equity and social justice for all educators and students. Ongoing professional learning should be required which instructs educators how to examine their own biases and prejudices. Programs such as *Project Implicit* out of Harvard University offer implicit bias tests for such purposes. They should be asked to reflect on and honestly discuss how their biases influence their pedagogies as well as their interactions with colleagues and students who

are different from them. Programs like *Teaching Tolerance*, offered by the Southern Poverty Law Center, support educators in teaching students to be active participants in a diverse society. I also recommend that school leaders perform equity audits as described by Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009), followed by action plans to address inadequacies identified by the audits. Finally, studies such as the current project and similar past research can also serve to enlighten all teachers and administrators on the needs of their gay and lesbian colleagues and students. It is important for pre-service teachers and prospective administrators to be exposed to diverse topics through literature that is presented in education courses. Requirements of such readings and ensuing discussions hold the possibility of broadening their understandings and viewpoints, as well as making them more sympathetic to the issues affecting their gay and lesbian colleagues and students.

Exposure to relevant research and others who are different may also help deter some of the heteronormative assumptions and misconceptions about gay and lesbian persons in general and gay and lesbian teachers specifically. No one can ever truly understand the struggles of the “other” unless they have had the exact same experience. However, one can certainly come closer to empathizing with them if they get to know them and hear their stories. Likewise, increased tolerance and acceptance, as well as the dispelling of negative stereotypes, has much to do with exposure. Thus, teachers and administrators should be exposed to diverse populations as well as research that presents and analyzes the experiences of those populations. Part of that exposure can be achieved by working alongside of gay and lesbian colleagues. Nixon (2006) claims that the presence of LGBT teachers in schools:

...forces schools and other educational institutions to face reality in terms of continuing discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexuality, both within and without, and to begin the long hard-fought process of setting up new models for thinking and behavior. (p. 280)

The participants of the current study also testified to the advocacy and empathy that their experiences afforded them toward all of their students. Thus, rather than having a meaningless diversity statement on the policy books, I recommend that school leaders commit to hiring diverse faculties, not just those of diverse races/ethnicities but of different sexual orientations and abilities. Rather than continuing to marginalize gay and lesbian teachers, I would recommend that schools and districts begin actively seeking out gay and lesbian teachers and administrators who are willing to disrupt these heteronormative spaces and help create the necessary culture of inclusivity.

Implications and Recommendations – Future Research

Rather than studying how gay and lesbian teachers construct their personal and professional identities, future research might be better served following the framework set forth by Jackson (2007) to examine the actual formation of gay/lesbian teacher identities. Jackson claims that by analyzing how teachers merge gay/lesbian and teacher identity components, one can better account for the processes that lead to authentic teaching. In addition to past research, the current study has shown how the attempt to keep the two components separate serve only to add stress to the lives of gay and lesbian teachers. The scope of this current study did have limitations, in that it did not include bisexual and transgender teachers. Thus, future researchers might consider actively recruiting such participants, if/when possible, to add more depth to the identity formation discussion.

There is still a need for additional research regarding the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers in the more socio-politically conservative areas of the country. Allowing more historically silenced voices to be heard will allow for an increased understanding of the experiences of those who continue to be marginalized by society. The contribution of such

stories to literature potentially read by influential stakeholders also serves to challenge negative stereotypes of gay and lesbian teachers (e.g., that of pedophile or recruiter of children into the gay community), thereby advocating for their support and protection against harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation. As the old adage goes, “There is no time like the present” to trouble the normative sociopolitical waters. Historically, gays and lesbians have lagged behind in efforts to band together as a community and mobilize efforts. Divisiveness along the lines of race, class, age, gender, and sexual identity continue to exist within the queer community. As more and more marginalized persons are standing up for equal rights and are being heard, it is time for us to once and for all stand in solidarity to do the same.

The final story shared by Sara, in which she described the astonishment that her administrator expressed after hearing of Sara’s past fears, illustrates why it is so important for stories like hers, as well as those of any other gay or lesbian educator who has had similar experiences, to be heard. Even though the administrator herself was an ally, she had no idea of the material effect Sara’s fear of being outed had on her for many years prior to learning of a non-discrimination policy that was inclusive of sexual orientation. Thus, the only way changes can start to occur is through the sharing of these experiences far and wide, in hopes that those in a position to influence policy development will listen, understand the need for change, and take up the work.

Implications and Recommendations – LGBTQ Teachers

“...inhabiting the queer slant may be a matter of everyday negotiation...the everyday work of dealing the perceptions of others, with the ‘straightening devices’ and the violence that might follow when such conceptions congeal into social forms. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 107)

As teachers, we all assumedly enter the profession because we have a love for learning and for children. We understand the importance of providing quality instruction to all students

and helping them to become productive citizens, who are capable of taking care of themselves and others. So, as LGBTQ teachers, what does all of this mean to us? As Ahmed writes above, it means that many of us understand that we must constantly negotiate our sexual orientations in the workplace due to existing social norms. We must constantly remain orientated toward the goals of our profession while continuing to adjust our own orientation toward the ever-shifting terrain of schools. Ahmed further states that these “queer moments...must be overcome...because they block bodily action” (p. 66). Thus, for some of us, this may mean developing strategies to accomplish the re-orientation rather than giving up and leaving the profession that we love.

If we decide to come out at work, we may find that we must constantly do so. Coming out at work is just like coming out in our personal lives. Each time that there is a new faculty member or administrator, we may find ourselves weighing our desire to be out against the possibility that new acquaintances and colleagues may not accept or support us. We may find ourselves using some of the same strategies to re-orient ourselves toward the heteronormative space of school that were used by participants in this and previous studies.

We must, however, remember that choices to use such strategies and/or to come out at work are *our* choices to make. Like the participants of the current study, we are agentic. We can make the choices that best works for us, realizing that the choices that we make may create more pressure on us than that of our straight colleagues. We may find ourselves trying extra hard to be that “super teacher” who is admired and respected by both students and colleagues. However, that is fine, because we must do what is best for us, what we can afford to do, and what we can ultimately live with in the end.

Those of us who have a political bent and feel comfortable doing so should navigate those lines as well. Ahmed (2006) offers a powerful message about the hope offered by queer politics when she writes:

...the lines that accumulate through the reproduction of gestures, the lines that gather on the skin, already take surprising forms. We have hope because what is behind us is also what allows other ways of gathering in time and space, of making lines that do not reproduce what we follow by instead create wrinkles in the earth. (pp. 178-179)

As Ahmed claims, we can have hope based on the groundwork laid by those who have come before us. However, we need not feel obligated to reproduce and continue to follow the same social and institutional norms. We can re-orient ourselves along new lines of reform, equity, and social justice to ensure that queer persons continue to acquire the rights and recognition they deserve.

Conclusion

The issues of sex and sexuality are still considered taboo for many, particularly where children are concerned, and thus may not even be addressed at some schools. Even if sexual education is part of the curriculum, Fine and McClelland (2006) reported that sexualities of individuals who do not conform to the predominantly heteronormative ideals are either not discussed or are demonized when they are discussed. Through this study, I have attempted to explain how heterosexuality becomes normalized and how this, coupled with negative societal assumptions/misconceptions about gay and lesbian persons, translates into discrimination, fear, and dis-orientation, particularly for gay and lesbian teachers.

The issue of gay rights and protections remains one of civil rights. Overall, there were several problems with the beginning of gay rights movements. Many had to do with peoples' fears of getting involved and ruining their lives. Another problem stemmed from the conservative attitudes of many gay people and their desire to remain complacent and, many

times, complicit with heterosexual societal norms. The organization of any kind of national force was late coming because of these issues. It was nearly a decade after much of the civil rights movement that any kind of national organization of forces for gay rights really started to take place (Sears, 1997). Society's attitudes toward homosexuality have changed considerably since the 1940s. However, because of the issues of morality still surrounding homosexuality today and the stereotypes attached to being homosexual, especially in conservative areas like the Deep South, the struggle remains difficult.

Being gay or lesbian may have at least become more tolerated by some members of society, if not actually accepted and even embraced by others. However, that is until one begins talking about entrusting the care of children to gay and lesbian teachers. Unfortunately, in many areas, there are no laws or local policies in place to protect gay and lesbian teachers, thereby leaving them to live and work in fear of homophobic acts perpetrated toward them, direct discrimination, and even termination due to their sexual orientation. The current project served to tell the stories of gay and lesbian teachers that relate their experiences (both positive and negative) while working in the predominantly heteronormative space of K-12 schools. By doing so, it aimed to contribute to the existing literature while addressing the geographic representation gap that exists for more socio-politically conservative areas such as the Deep South, thereby enlightening stakeholders on the need for changes in programs and policies that can better support and protect all teachers and students.

In her Feminist Killjoys blog post entitled *Queer Use*, Ahmed (2018) speaks of diversity work as being hard and how "diversity often takes on institution form" (i.e. a lot of planning and talking with no action). She claims that one person, by acting as a "leaky pipe" and sharing her/his stories, can lead others to do the same. She further urges, "Just loosen the screw a little

bit, a tiny bit, and you might have an explosion. We need more explosions.” Law/policy makers, school administrators, school district leaders, teachers, and teacher education programs need to step up and make the familiar strange by disorientating themselves away from societal normatives that tend to performatively exclude “others.” They *must* re-orient themselves along lines of diversity that include those “others.” I challenge all constituents to become the “killjoy” that Ahmed describes as having a “willingness” to stand up for what is right, equitable, and just for all teachers and students.

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APPENDIX 1:
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Email Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

“Breaking the Silence: Learning from the Experiences of Queer Secondary Educators in the Predominantly Heteronormative Space of Schools”

Hello.

Do you ever feel isolated in your workplace or afraid to let others know the real you? Have you ever been the victim of harassment or discrimination as a result of your sexual orientation? Or perhaps you have had similar experiences due to assumptions made by students and/or colleagues regarding your sexual orientation and/or perceived gender non-conformance? You are not alone.

My name is Dwight Jinright. I am a graduate student of Social and Cultural Studies in the Department of Educational Leadership, Policy and Technology Studies at the University of Alabama. I am conducting a study on the experiences of queer teachers in secondary schools in Alabama. If you are a teacher of grades K-12 in a public or private school in Alabama, are at least 19 years of age, and would be willing to speak with me about your experiences, I would like to invite you to participate in my research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and, if you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study, or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

As a participant of this study, you will be asked to participate in an initial 45-60 minute interview with me. We would actually schedule a two-hour block for the initial interview to allow for a review of the informed consent form and for you to have ample time to ask and answer questions. If you agree, I could also contact you for a follow-up interview to allow you to review the transcript of the first interview and clarify any necessary information with me. The follow-up interview should take no longer than one hour. Both interviews will take place at a location of your choice and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

It is impossible to do this kind of research without participation from teachers like you. If you would like to participate in this study or would like to know more information about this study, please contact me at djinright@crimson.ua.edu.

Please share this email with other queer secondary school teachers who you know in the State of Alabama. In so doing, please help to protect individual privacies by sharing only with personal acquaintances at their personal email addresses. Also, please do not share any personally identifying information with me regarding the persons with whom you plan to share the email. It should be entirely their decision to contact me, should they wish to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Dwight Jinright
Doctoral Student, Social and Cultural Studies
The University of Alabama

(This research has been reviewed according to the University of Alabama IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. If you have any questions, please contact me at djinright@crimson.ua.edu or my advisor, Dr. Natalie Adams, at nadams@ua.edu.

APPENDIX 2:
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Research Study

Participants: Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

You are being asked to participate in a research study.

Title of Study: Breaking the Silence: Learning from the Experiences of Queer Secondary Educators in the Predominantly Heteronormative Space of Schools

Primary Investigator

Dwight Jinright
College of Education
Department of Educational Leadership,
Policy, and Technology Studies

Phone:
Email: djinright@crimson.ua.edu

Secondary Investigator

Dr. Natalie Adams
College of Education
Department of Educational Leadership,
Policy, and Technology Studies
The University of Alabama

Box 870229
201-B Lloyd Hall
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
Phone: 205-348-4600
Email: nadams@ua.edu

Please read this document and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by a doctoral candidate in social and cultural studies at The University of Alabama. It is the study for his dissertation and will be overseen by the secondary investigator, a professor of educational studies.

Background Information:

This study is designed to describe and increase the understanding of the experiences of gay and lesbian secondary educators. An interview format is proposed for this study in order to obtain narrative accounts of experiences of study participants.

Procedure:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in an audio-recorded interview in which you will be asked questions about your experiences as a gay/lesbian teacher. Each interview should take between 45-60 minutes. Your audio-recorded interview will be transcribed in full. During the course of the study, all audio-recorded interviews will be in a locked cabinet at the residence of the primary researcher.

What is this study about?

For those teachers who are gay or lesbian, the decision to come out at work is a complex one that is guided by both personal fears and principles. Fears of homophobia, isolation, and the larger societal issue involving negative perceptions and beliefs about gay and lesbian persons all affect the decisions of teachers to share information regarding their sexuality. Even though legislation and local policies exists in some areas to prevent harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation, some teachers are still wary of coming out due to a lack of administrative support

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EXPIRATION DATE: 1-8-19

and/or a pervasive notion that homosexuality is wrong. Still, others have chosen to come out in one way or another. The primary investigator is interested in understanding how these decisions affect teachers both personally and professionally.

Why is this study important?

This study is important because it provides a way to explore an under-researched topic and contribute to existing research on the effects of experiences of gay and lesbian teachers on their personal and professional well-being. The study will allow for the comparison of stories from various participants in an effort to identify commonalities/differences and form a better understanding of how gay and lesbian teachers deal with issues surrounding their sexuality at school. The study will also help to highlight how, despite laws being in place that could possibly protect gay and lesbian teachers, harassment and discrimination still occur at local levels.

Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You responded to an email that was sent to you by the primary investigator or by another person who shared the email from the primary investigator with you. You indicated that you are or were a teacher in a secondary public or private institution and are at least 18 years of age. You provided the primary investigator with your contact information.

How many other people will be in this study?

The investigator hopes to interview a maximum of ten teachers within the State of Alabama within the next year.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

As a participant of this study, you will be asked to participate in an initial 45-60 minute interview with me. The actual process may take up to two hours to allow for a review of the informed consent form and for you to have ample response time to questions. If you agree, I could also contact you for follow-up interviews to allow you to clarify any necessary information with me. The follow-up interviews should take no longer than one hour.

If you agree to be in this study, I will interview you at a place of your own choosing about your experiences as a secondary teacher who identifies as gay or lesbian. The interview will consist of in-depth, open-ended questions that are conversational in nature. In addition, interview questions will focus on your experiences as a gay/lesbian teacher in a predominantly heteronormative educational institution. The interviewer would like to audio-record the interview to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be recorded, simply tell the interviewer, who will then take handwritten notes.

How much time will I spend being in this study?

The initial interview should last about 45-60 minutes. However, two hours have been allotted to allow for a review of the informed consent form and for you to have ample time to ask and answer questions. If you agree, I could also contact you for follow-up interviews to clarify any necessary information with me. The follow-up interviews should take no longer than one hour.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you for being in this study is your time.

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Will I be compensated for being in this study?

No.

How will my privacy be protected?

You are free to decide where we will visit, so that no one else will overhear the conversation. The primary investigator will visit you in the privacy of your home or in another place that is convenient for you. During the interview, you may refuse to answer a particular question or not share information you find sad or stressful.

What are the alternatives to being in this study?

The only alternative is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant?

Being in this study is totally voluntary. It is your free choice. You may choose not to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationship with the University of Alabama or the primary researcher.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

What are the risks to being in the study?

The study may have the following risk: If you had a difficult experience that you share during the interview, you may experience heightened anxiety, stress, or sadness when sharing that experience with the interviewer. If this occurs, you will be given time to collect yourself before continuing, if you desire to do so. You can also control this possibility by not being in the study, by refusing to answer a particular question, or by not telling the investigator things you find to be sad or stressful.

What are the benefits to being in the study?

The study may have the following benefit: While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, you may find it rewarding to know that you have an opportunity to help increase the understanding of the experiences of gay/lesbian teachers in secondary institutions. Your participation in this study also provides you with the opportunity to share your experiences in a way that can lead to a sense of solidarity among other gay/lesbian teachers and possibly affect policy changes that aid in the protection of those teachers from harassment and discrimination.

Will you keep my information confidential?

The following participant demographic data will be collected, for the sole purpose of comparing/contrasting experiences within/between the various categories: age, race, gender, grades/subjects taught, number of years taught, disclosure ("out") status at work, self identification (L, G, B, T, or Q). Neither your name nor your work institution will be recorded

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CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 1-9-18
EXPIRATION DATE: 1-8-19

or used in the study. You will be assigned a pseudonym of your choice, which will be used to label all study data related to you. Personally identifiable information that may be expressed during your interview will be removed and your transcripts will be assigned a number as a way to separate them from other transcripts. Additional measures of confidentiality will include reasonable steps to ensure that the only persons with access to research records are the primary and secondary researchers, Institutional Review Board (IRB) professionals, and other persons or agencies required by law. All research material will also be maintained in a locked cabinet at the residence of the primary researcher.

All audio files, field notes, and consent forms will be stored on an external hard drive at the private residence of the primary researcher in a locked cabinet. Audio files will be destroyed by the primary investigator immediately following transcription. Transcripts, field notes, and consent forms will be retained for twelve months, at which time they will be destroyed by the primary researcher. The external hard drive is password protected. Additionally, files on the external hard drive will only be accessed by the investigator using a computer that is also password protected.

The findings from the study may be published, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential. No one will be able to recognize you as a study participant.

The primary investigator is required to report any indications of abuse or self-harm to the appropriate entities.

Who can I contact if I have questions?

The researchers conducting this study are: Dwight Jinright, a doctoral student in social and cultural studies at The University of Alabama and Dr. Natalie Adams, an associate professor of social and cultural studies at The University of Alabama.

You may ask any questions you have now by contacting the researchers.

If you have questions about this study, you may contact Dwight Jinright at _____ or by email at djinright@crims.ua.edu. You may also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Natalie Adams, at 205-348-5675, or by email at nadams@ua.edu.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer at the University of Alabama, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/itc/PRCO_Welcome.html. After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Dwight Jinright for a copy of it. You may also e-mail the IRB Outreach Office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

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CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 1-8-19
EXPIRATION DATE: 1-8-19

Statement of Consent:

Please check the statements below to indicate your consent to participate in this study:

- I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
- I understand that I must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.
- I have received a copy of this document to save for my records.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Primary Researcher

.....
Audio/Video Taping Consent

As mentioned above, the individual qualitative interview will be audio recorded for research purposes to describe the experiences teachers of K-12 institutions who identify as LGBTQ. These audio files will be stored in a locked file cabinet and only available to Dwight Jinright (the primary investigator). He will only keep these until they are transcribed, at which time he will destroy them.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audio recorded and I give my permission to the research team to record the interview.

- Yes, my participation in this interview can be audio recorded.
- No, I do not want my participation in this interview to be audio recorded.

.....
Permission to Re-Contact Study Participants

Once study participants complete their interviews, the primary researcher will transcribe all interviews into text. Should the researcher need clarification on statements made by study participants, it may be necessary for the researcher to re-contact you for clarification purposes. Your permission is necessary before the primary researcher can contact you. Please indicate below whether or not you give the researcher permission to re-contact you.

- Yes, I give permission to the researcher to contact me should she needs me to clarify any statements made during my interview.
- No, I do not give permission to the researcher to contact me again after I have completed my interview.

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CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 1-9-18
EXPIRATION DATE: 1-8-19

APPENDIX 3:
INTERVIEW METHOD AND PROTOCOL

Breaking the Silence: Learning from the Experiences of Queer Secondary Educators in the Predominantly Heteronormative Space of Schools

Interview Method

- There will be three interviews, each scheduled for 90 minutes (Seidman, 2013) at a location of the participant's choosing. The location chosen by the participant will be a private room that is conducive for a confidential one-on-one interview with the primary investigator.
- The first interview will begin with an introduction of the interviewer, an introduction to the study, and a review of the informed consent form. Time will be allowed for participants to ask questions. Participants will be asked if recording the interview is acceptable before beginning the interview. Participants will be reminded to try and refrain from including any identifying information in their responses. However, they will be assured that, should they include such information, it will be removed during transcription.
- Interview questions will be divided among the three interviews dependent upon their relevance to life history, experiences, and reflection on meanings of experiences (Seidman, 2013).
- Probing questions may be used to clarify participant responses (e.g., Would you give me an example? In what ways? What do you mean by that? Would you explain that further?)
- Upon completion of the interview, participants will be thanked for their participation, asked if they have any questions, and reassured again of their confidentiality.

Interview Questions

Interview 1: Focused Life History

1. Demographic Data: age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality (LGBTQIA+)
2. Tell me about your life before becoming a teacher.
3. Reconstruct your experience of growing up gay/lesbian and what it was like for you.
4. Describe one of your most significant experiences as it relates to growing up gay/lesbian.
5. Did you have teachers whom you believed to be gay/lesbian? Describe your understanding of them at that time and your relationship with them.
6. How did you come to be a teacher?
7. How long have you been teaching?
8. What grade level(s)/subject(s) have you taught?
9. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?
10. Do you have any additional comments or questions?

Interview 2: Details of Experience

1. What is it like to be a teacher who is gay/lesbian?
2. When do you most often think about your sexual orientation? (or What causes you to think about your sexual orientation at work?)
3. Describe any discourses around sex/sexuality at your school?

4. Are there certain spaces at school that you find to be more “safe” and/or exclusive? Provide examples.
5. Are you out at school? (to what degree/with whom) How did you come to your decision to disclose or not to disclose?
6. Do you ever feel “dis-oriented” at school?
7. What do you do, specifically, (or not do) to orient yourself to a predominantly heteronormative environment? In other words, what do you do to “line up” with the “straightness” at school? How do you know how to act when at school?
8. Is there any compartmentalization of your roles and/or different parts of your identity (public/private)?
9. Describe your relationships with your co-workers. How have these relationships shaped your experience as a teacher who is gay/lesbian? (e.g., social relationships, assumptions/expectations, homophobia, feelings of being unsafe)
10. Describe your relationships with your students (maybe parents as well). How have these relationships shaped your experience as a teacher who is gay/lesbian?
11. What do your colleagues/students say to you or about you? What do they NOT say?
12. How do you think being gay/lesbian influences your teaching practices and/or quality?
13. Describe your views on being out at school, exposing students to gay/lesbian issues, dealing with homophobic behaviors, and/or advocating for students who might be gay/lesbian.
14. Do you have any documentation/communication from the school/district/community that might speak to the relation of individual issues to larger societal structures that govern sexuality and gender in schools? (news articles, moral clauses, laws or local policies that protect/discriminate...may bring such documents to next interview)
15. Do you have any additional comments or questions?

Interview 3: Reflection on the Meaning of Experiences

1. Given what you have said about your life before becoming a teacher and what you have said about your experiences as a teacher who is gay/lesbian, what would you say being a teacher who is gay/lesbian means to you now? What sense can you make of it?
(implications, awareness, significance)
2. *Optional Question (if identifying as a racial/ethnic minority):* What does it mean to be both a teacher who identifies as a racial/ethnic minority who is also gay/lesbian?
3. What do your actions, or the ways in which you act (or do not act) at work mean to you?
4. How do you see these meanings playing out in your future?
5. In an earlier interview, I asked you how you decided to come out or not at work. Thinking back on your answer to that question, do you feel that coming out at work is a choice? Do you feel as if you have a choice? In other words, is choice about options or agency?
Agency – the capacity, condition, or state of acting or exerting power
6. What does the term *queer* mean to you? How do you feel about it?
7. Do you have any additional comments or questions?

APPENDIX 4:
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Participant Pseudonym _____

No. of Years Taught	
Grade Level(s) / Subject(s) Taught	
Age	
Race	
Gender	
Identify as L, G, B, T, Q +	
“Out” or Not “Out” at Work	

* The sole purpose for the collection of this data is to compare and contrast the experiences of participants within and between the various demographic categories.

APPENDIX 5:
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTERS

November 6, 2018

Dwight Jinright
Department of ELPTS
College of Education
The University of Alabama
Box 870229

Re: IRB # 16-OR-206-R3 “Learning from the Experiences of Queer Secondary Educators in the Predominantly Heteronormative Space of Schools”

Dear Mr. Jinright:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application. Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on November 5, 2019. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance

January 9, 2018

Dwight Jinright
Department of ELPTS
College of Education
The University of Alabama
Box 870229

Re: IRB # 16-OR-206-R2 "Learning from the Experiences of Queer Secondary Educators in the Predominantly Heteronormative Space of Schools"

Dear Mr. Jinright:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application. Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on January 8, 2019. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Stuart Usdan, Ph.D.
Chair, Non-Medical Institutional Review Board
The University of Alabama

March 28, 2017

Dwight Jinright
Department of ELPTS
College of Education
The University of Alabama
Box 870229

Re: IRB # 16-OR-206-R1 "Learning from the Experiences of Queer Secondary Educators in the Predominantly Heteronormative Space of Schools"

Dear Mr. Jinright:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application. Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on March 27, 2018. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance

June 1, 2016

Dwight Jinright
ELPTS
College of Education
Box 870229

Re: IRB # 16-OR-206, "Breaking the Silence: Learning from the Experiences of Queer Secondary Educators in the Predominately Heteronormative Space of Schools"

Dear Mr. Jinright:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on May 30, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpanato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance