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Closeted or Out?
Gay and Lesbian Educators Reveal Their Experiences about Their Sexual Identities in K-12 Schools

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Committee Chair:  J. W. Koschoreck, Ph.D.
Abstract

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender school educators are practically invisible within
the nature of heterosexist and homophobic education (Blount, 2005). “Openly gay and lesbian
teachers were once thought of as immoral, and in some states coming out is still a risk to one’s
job” (McCarthy, 2003, p. 182). One’s sexual orientation has nothing to do with the reasons
lesbians and gay men become educators (DeJean, 2004). The purpose of this study is to
determine how gay and lesbian teachers negotiate their identities and how those affect their
relationships in school, as well as what effect their sexual orientation plays on their professional
practices, roles, and responsibilities. Four gay and lesbian teachers and two gay administrators
were interviewed about their experiences in their school communities. Additionally a focus
group consisting of five gay and lesbian Catholic school educators, including a soccer coach and
a football coach from an all boy’s Catholic school was conducted.
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Chapter I

Introduction

For the first time in history during his campaign speeches, as well as in his Presidential acceptance speech, President Barak Obama mentioned that gay men and lesbians should be given equal rights to everything offered to heterosexuals. The house passed a bill providing gay victims of violence new federal protections under an expanded hate crimes bill. “Hate crimes defined by the bill are those motivated by prejudice and based on an individual’s race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability” (Bill adds protection, 2009). Currently, seventeen states and Washington, DC, ban discrimination against employees based on sexual orientation.

President Obama signed a bill that would offer same sex benefits to federal employees (Bill adds protection, 2009). On June 29, 2009, 250 gay leaders joined President Obama in the East Room of the White House to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the birth of the gay rights movement, a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York (Nagourney, 2009). During this meeting, he reaffirmed his commitment to their top priorities, he said “I will not only be your friend, I will continue to be an ally and a champion and a president who fights with you and for you” (I’ll be your friend, 2009). After more than a decade of struggling for its passage, “President Obama signed and celebrated hate crime legislation that extends protection to people based on sexual orientation” (Feller, 2009, p. A7). Federal hate crimes included in this new law now include those crimes committed against people because of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability (Feller, 2009). This is an end to a long struggle and a great
achievement for gay-rights supporters (Feller, 2009).

Discrimination against homosexuals may be the last form of bigotry that is considered acceptable. “While most folks have outgrown overt racist and sexist attacks, for many people it’s still okay to take shots at homosexuals” (Birden, Gaither, & Laird, 2000, p. 639). The number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) individuals killed in bias-motivated incidents increased by 28% in 2008, compared with the previous year, according to a national coalition of advocacy groups (Anti-LGBT killings, 2009). “Last year 29 killings was the highest recorded by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs since 1999” (Anti-LGBT killings, 2009, p. A4).

**Definition of Terms**

The following definition of terms will provide the reader with a more comprehensive understanding of the terms as they are used throughout this dissertation.

Identity is the way we choose to present ourselves to others both personally and professionally. “Identities of contestation and regulation exist within culture” (Tierney, 1997, p. 169). Tierney (1997) argues that identity formation and institutional practices are linked, and should be analyzed as such. “Sexual identity is a mixture of essentialism and constructionism that not only is reconfigured over time and context but also occurs with the multiple and often conflicting contexts in which our lives are played out” (Tierney, 1997, p. 115).

Gender, not to be confused with sex (which is determined by our genitalia), is determined by environment (our family and peers), society (school and social events), and media (television shows and commercials). Gender can be fluid between those
characteristics associated with masculinity and those associated with femininity, as associated with heteronomativity. “To perceive the relationship between genders as, in essence, unequal supposed a naturalized perception of heteronormativity” (Tin, 2008, p. 205).

Queer is the term often used for those who are attracted to the same sex, but choose not to self-identify as a gay man, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. There are those who claim we should use the term queer, in that it is more inclusive, yet does not specifically label (Tierney, 1997). “Queerness should challenge and confuse our understanding and uses of sexual and gender categories” (Tierney, 1997, p. 29).

Transgender is a term used for those who choose to cross the lines of societal gender norms. The norms are defined by the dress considered appropriate for a male or female as acceptable in society. Any individual who crosses traditional gender lines with clothing, behaviors, or any part of a societal norm role. Transgender is not to be confused with transsexual, which is gender reassignment or the reassignment of sexual genitalia.

Sexuality is a core aspect of being human throughout life and includes “sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction” (Appendix III, 2008, p. 95). Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of a variety of factors including biological, social, economic, cultural, political, ethical, legal, historical and religious or spiritual (Appendix III, 2008). “Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and relationships” (Appendix III,
It encompasses how we self identify, such as a gay man, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, queer, or heterosexual. “The journey into authenticity and acceptance is the beginning of stage three in the homosexual’s life. Stage three is the final good-bye to toxic shame and beginning of a life that is truly worth living” (Downs, 2006, p. 106). Some individuals chose not to self identify, as they do not wish to be categorized, separating them from others. Sexuality includes many dimensions however not all of them are always experienced or expressed (Appendix III, 2008).

**Homophobia in Society**

Anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) slurs have become the insult of choice whether the targeted person is in fact LGBT, perceived to be, or heterosexual. These individuals are not necessarily being ostracized for their sexual orientation. They are the target of this name-calling because they are different in some way (physically look different, have a different personal style, or are of a different race, gender, or class); those who choose not to fit the traditional heterosexist male and female society models. Much of this hatred is caused by homophobia in society. The women who play sports or choose to become mechanics, and the men who are nurses or cosmetologists are examples of how individuals resist their traditional roles.

Weinberg (1972) was the first to study an individual’s irrational fear of homosexuals, which he termed as homophobia. Sears and Williams (1997) extended the concept of homophobia in their definition, “prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence against
sexual minorities, including lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered persons. This is evidenced in a deep-seated fear or hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex” (p. 4).

The term *homophobia* is now popularly construed to mean fear and dislike of homosexuality and of those who practice it; adverse reactions to homosexuals and to homosexuality, therefore are founded upon fear and dislike of the sexual difference that homosexual individuals allegedly embody stereotypically, effeminacy in homosexual men, mannishness in homosexual women. Another source of homophobia is the fear that the social conduct of homosexuals disrupts the social, legal, political, ethical, and moral order of society, a contention supposedly supported by history and affirmed by religious doctrine (Fone, 2000, p. 5).

Agnes (2002) defines homophobia as the irrational hatred or fear of homosexuals or homosexuality. “The core of many people’s homophobia is their understanding of the position God had toward homosexuals” (Deeb-Sossa & Kane, 2007, p. 165). There are many reasons people are homophobic, but the most commonly cited is religion. Varlas (2007) found that religion can play a unique role in the acceptance of gay, lesbian, and queer (GLQ) individuals. Many conservative Christians who regard homosexuality as a sin claim that homophobia is “praised by the Lord” (Deeb-Sossa & Kane, 2007, p. 165). This use of religion makes the oppression of LGBT individuals acceptable and legitimate (Deeb-Sossa & Kane, 2007). A hostile school climate for LGBT individuals caused by religious or societal standards will increase the likelihood of harassment and bullying (Varlas, 2007). The influence of religion on the anti-homosexual stance of parents can affect both bullies and their victims (Varlas, 2007).
“Since most people view homosexuality as a violation of traditional gender roles, those who cherish conventional prescriptions tend to abhor homosexuality” (Eldridge, Mack, & Swank, 2006, p. 42). Men who choose to wear make-up, as well as women who choose to dress as a traditional man would dress, violate heteronormative gender roles. Sexuality relates to biological association at birth, and to whom you are attracted (Agnes, 2002), while gender is socially constructed beginning at birth (Archer, 1993). “The real difference between the genders is not simply biological or functional, of a nature that is natural, but is much more deeply rooted in the opposing ways in which each gender relates to its nature” (Tin, 2008, p. 205). The acts of Marlene Dietrich and Madonna have both been referred to as gender-bending and androgynous (Kennison, 2002). “Dietrich’s on-and off-screen fluidity of gender identity, as reflected in her adaptation of the ‘double drag,’ upsets the traditional dichotomy encoded more generally as that of male or female and more particularly as that of the butch or femme” (Kennison, 2002, p. 147).

Homophobia includes negative beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, and behaviors toward gay men and lesbians (Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999). Examples of the behavioral component of homophobia include teasing, threats, harassment, and assault, which gay men and lesbians frequently experience (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008). Homophobic harassment is widespread with social and political significance. The power of heterosexuals and heteronormativity has long been ignored, leading to an undermining of an intervention used to address intolerance (Sears, 2005). Stein (2005) claimed that homophobia “allows men anxious about their masculinity to affirm themselves” (p. 602). The view of masculinity was created and defined without the view of femininity (Stein, 2005). “In other words male homosexuality, which can often symbolize feminized masculinity, is a major dilemma in a heterosexist society
because it can challenge the cultural implication of hegemonic masculinity” (Eguchi, 2006, p. 349), Therefore, homosexuality is unlikely to be accepted in traditional masculine institutions (Stein, 2005). As long as masculinity is privileged with systemic and personal advantages to being a man, and the ideas of male homosexuality are perceived as a “feminized masculinity, there is little hope that libratory work will successfully change attitudes about sexual orientation” (Khayatt, 2006, p. 141).

Madureira (2007) explained homophobia as a boundary phenomenon replicated on many levels of our societal system. “Hegemonic gender ideologies as well as embodied mechanisms of social control create and maintain barriers on the movement and permeability of sexual identities” (Kim, 2007, p. 303). Queer is commonly perceived not to be part of traditional hegemonic patriarchy, and most certainly causes tension between public and private identities of gay men and lesbians (McNinch, 2007). The social discourse of masculinity supports that men are to be aggressive, while women are to be submissive to men within the social discourse of femininity (Eguchi, 2006). Homophobic harassment is common with political and social significance. In contrast to other forms of aggressive behavior, harassment is considered a relation of power of one or more individuals over another (Olweus, 1993). These attacks are frequent with an intention to harm (Olweus, 1993). Most homosexual biases are based on three assertions. The first is homosexuality/genocide, a number of people believe that accepting homosexuality “with accompanying infrequent procreation, dooms the human race to extinction” (Rowe, 1993, p. 509). Next is a biblical opposition. Words in the Bible, “no matter how divinely inspired they may be considered,” are interpreted by man, who claim that the Bible clearly states that homosexuality acts are sinful (Rowe, 1993, p. 509). The final of the three is
the allegation that homosexuals “attempt to indoctrinate and recruit youth” (Rowe, 1993, p. 509).

Wrench and McCroskey (2003) noted that people who are extremely homophobic appear to be “chastising LGBT people because these individuals are not conforming to the highly homophobic individual’s norms for gender behavior” (p. 27). Our society is perpetuated by the power structures of heterosexism and heteronormativity, where the norm is heterosexuality (Macgillivray, 2008a). LGBT individuals have to deal with restrictive norms in every environment they encounter. LGBT individuals are often forced to either accept heterosexism or confront it in each homophobic encounter. Each of these encounters confirms for LGBT individuals that they are not considered the norm (Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007).

“Straightness is imbedded with the status of being normal and natural not only through gender socialization but through construction of sexual otherness as inferior” (Sears, 2005, p. 92), and nonverbal manners of “behavior that reflect and reinforce cultural norms” (Sears, 2005, p. 129). Men fashion masculinity differently considering their race, class, or sexual orientation (along with other factors), and “such constructions position them differentially in the overall masculine hierarchy” (Morris, 2008, p. 731). From early childhood, feminine boys tend to attract concern of their parents. In the United States, especially, young men who are feminine are often referred to professionals for treatment (Archer, 1993). Borisoff and Victor (1998) claim that “women and men have been encouraged to adopt and to demonstrate styles of verbal and nonverbal modes of behavior that reflect and reinforce cultural norms” (p. 129).

The idea that heterosexuality is the only acceptable idea and the only normal pair arrangement because it “provides for the continuation of the species, even spiritual immortality through the product or progeny, is threatened to the core by open homosexuality” (Wheatley,
Conditioning to recognize heterosexuality as the only proper sexual orientation begins at birth (Rowe, 1993). “Most heterosexuals accept the conditioning without question, thus establishing a social order which simplifies an important dimension of their existence” (Rowe, 1993, p. 509). To secure social order placement, White men have constructed and maintained a form of White male solidarity (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Plummer, 2001). Stones (2006) found that authoritarianism is a key variable in explaining antigay prejudice, possibly caused by differences in cultural group values. “Authoritarianism best predicts negative attitudes toward homosexuals because a right-wing authoritarianism is strongly related to religious beliefs and political ideology, whereas social dominance orientation is not” (Stones, 2006, p. 1146). Gay men and lesbians become very aware of that fact early in life. “Individuals learn the cultural scripts of the gender role attached to their biological sex, which reinforces heterosexuality as the norms and the implications of deviating from these scripts” (Eguchi, 2006, p. 349). In forms of communication, heteronormativity causes a “fundamental belief ideology and value that discriminates against homosexuality” (Eguchi, 2006, p. 349).

Homophobia that contributes to the fear, serves as a safe guard to protect the existing gender order (Tharinger, 2008). “Homophobia works to ensure that both heterosexual and homosexual boys who do not conform to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity always have the potential to be subordinated within the social organization of masculinity” (Tharinger, 2008, p. 225). Research suggests that victimization as a result of homophobia is not necessarily limited to LGBT identified individuals, but can create a hostile climate for all students as it is a way in which masculine/feminine gender-role norms are promoted and maintained (Epstein, 2001). Mills (2001) warns that questioning traditional forms of masculinity in schools could be
challenged by those who benefit from the privilege of hegemonic masculinity. Homophobia functions as a defense of the social order and traditional values (Stein, 2005). Hegemonic patterns of masculinity are both engaged with and challenged as children mature.

Gender is formed in schools through peer groups, management of school space, dating patterns, homophobic speech, and harassment (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Thorne, 1993). “In none of these cases would we expect hegemonic masculinity to stand out as a sharply defined pattern separate from all others” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 839). Schools and classrooms within those schools represent a culture of power, reflecting “unjust social relations existing in the larger society” (Applebaum, 2003, p. 151). Historically power has functioned to silence and oppress certain social groups through the education process, but progressive educators committed to social justice strive to disrupt social relations in the classrooms and schools, “neutralizing those who attempt to reassert power is problematic” (Applebaum, 2003, p. 151). In schools and classrooms heteronormativity often functions unquestioned. “Assumptions of student and teacher identities as heterosexual examples expressed through heterosexual narrative and curricula steeped in gender normativity are characteristic of the ways in which non-normative sexualities are inadvertently excluded from curricular agendas and various social justices reforms” (Macintosh, 2007, p. 34-35).

Heterosexual environments are normalized and perpetuated, as natural, in educational institutions (McKenzie-Bassant, 2007). Homophobia can be found in school settings as well. In a study of teachers, a school board member, and parents, MacGillivray (2008a) found that nearly all who opposed the inclusion of sexual orientation in their school district’s policies felt that including sexual orientation in a school policy would begin the discourse of homosexuality in the
classrooms that would eventually result in curriculum inclusion. This group’s fear was that
discussions about homosexuality in schools would open the door to a greater acceptance of
homosexuality for their children and society (MacGillivray, 2008a). “One of their most
commonly expressed beliefs was that schools should focus on reading, writing, and arithmetic;
and leave the discussion of social issues, like differences in sexual orientation up to parents”
(MacGillivray, 2008a, p. 33). These opponents believed that schools have no responsibility to
teach values. They also felt that “policies were examples of politically correct dictates that
violate personal freedoms of belief and expression,” and claimed that such policies would
promote and legitimize homosexuality, causing confusion as they work to instill their antigay
beliefs in their children (MacGillivray, 2008a, p. 37).

MacGillivray (2008a) noted that for one teacher, it was more important to send the
message that it is not appropriate to say racist things, even if that meant taking the risk of
sending a message to the child that your parents are wrong for saying racist things. “When it
came to disciplining students making antigay remarks, however, this teacher did not want to
appear to condone homosexuality and did not want to send the message that a child’s parents are
wrong for having antigay beliefs.” (MacGillivray, 2008a, p. 34). This teacher’s argument was
not that schools should be taught without any individual values, but questioned who should
determine the values to be taught (MacGillivray, 2008a).

“Discourses around sexuality in schools have been found to be almost exclusively
framed within heterosexual models, beginning with school policies, which act as demarcations
that limit the possibilities for how students might imagine their developing future sexual
identities” (McKenzie-Bassant, 2007, p. 55). Sumara and Davis (1999) inquired into ways that
heteronormativity might be interrupted. They do not suggest that heteronormative thinking can become eliminated through scholarly dedication. Their research does note that it can become interrupted. “Not only do these interruptions to heteronormative thinking assist in the important work of eliminating homophobia and heterosexism in society, but they also create some conditions for the human capacity for knowing and learning to become expanded” (p. 205).

Harbeck (1992) believes that changes will occur through education, not through the courts or laws. “Several psychological studies have demonstrated that if a heterosexual individual personally knows a homosexual, then acceptance increases as stereotypical responses decrease” (Harbeck, 1992, p.134). The problem for many gay men and lesbians becomes one of disclosure. Those who do not disclose their sexuality are perceived as admitting that there is something wrong with being gay. If they do come out of the closet, they face the possibility of being “targets of discrimination, physical violence and cultural abuse because of their sexuality” (Connell, 1997, p. 8). “Homophobia is reinforced throughout cultural institutions such as government, media, school, religious institutions, and family every day within society, and play a major role in influencing communication” (Eguchi, 2006, p. 349). Herek (2004) argues that despite the extensive significance of the term homophobia, formed to draw attention to anti-gay feelings, the idea is both “overly narrow” because it characterizes oppression as “the product of fear” and “simultaneously too diffuse,” as it is used to “encompass phenomena ranging from the private thoughts and feelings of individuals to the policies and actions of governments, corporations, and organized religions” (p. 11).

Society has not demonstrated the ability to grasp the idea that oppression transcends ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation which manifests as homophobia and heterosexism
experiences that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals serve as origins of discord between the heteronormative culture that infuse any pool of administrators (Tooms & Alston, 2006). Many administrators consider cultural heterosexism like institutional racism and sexism, which often pervade societal norms and institutions (Tooms & Alston, 2006). Capper (1999) found that most heterosexual school administrators do not believe that their sexual orientation influences their administrative practice. Many gay and lesbian teachers, as well as students might disagree.

Kumashiro (2000) outlines a framework to fight oppression that promotes a “critique and transformation of hegemonic structures and ideologies” (p. 36). To use this approach, educators must understand and challenge what society constructs as normal gender expression. Teachers discuss with their students why some groups are “othered, and others are normalized” (p. 36). Schools are environments in which gender roles are modeled, and “teachers are generally expected to embody a traditional gender presentation” (McCarthy, 2003, p. 182). Despite the type of discrimination, which is often systemic, it is always harsh and hateful, as well as hurtful and demeaning. “While heterosexism is an omission, a pervasive yet systemic assumption that precludes any expression of sexuality that does not conform to heteronormativity, homophobia is about hatred and fear” (Khayatt, 2006, p. 136). While homophobia is institutionalized in society, it is deeply embedded into our educational settings.

**Homophobia in Schools**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender school administrators are practically invisible within the nature of heterosexist and homophobic education (Blount, 2005). “Openly gay and lesbian teachers were once thought of as immoral and inappropriate, and in some states, coming out is still a risk to one’s job” (McCarthy, 2003, p. 182). In 2002, the United States Supreme
Court declined an appeal of an openly gay former teacher who claimed he was driven from his job and into a nervous breakdown by harassment from students and parents that his school district failed to address. The teacher was Tommy R. Schroeder, who taught sixth grade in Hamilton, Wisconsin. He disclosed his homosexuality at a public meeting in the early 1990s. Beginning in the 1993-94 school year, students began to call him *faggot* and implied he had AIDS. He reported the incidents to administrators, but most of the harassment was anonymous and received no attention or support from administrators or colleagues (Walsh, 2002).

While there are no actual statistics about the number of LGBT K-12 educators in the United States, “Dan Woog (1995) found that there are gay and lesbian teachers in every school building in America, probably in numbers greater than our representation in the general population” (Jackson, 2007, p. 1). However when a man does enter the teaching profession and happens also to be gay, others are prepared to think him perverted, pedophilic, and certainly wrong-headed in his intent to teach youngsters” (King, 2004, p. 122). Much of the public continues to fear that gay and lesbian teachers will “influence or recruit their students” (King, 2004, p. 122).

Prejudiced attitudes toward GLBT teachers are well documented (Eliason, 1997; Herek, 2000). “As a community, we seem in a certain sense to have accepted the terms that the hegemonic culture, which labels (negatively) any discussion of homosexuality that is not homophobic, has set for this discussion” (Haggerty, 1995, p. 12). Educators must identify ways to talk with their students about gay men and lesbians, to let them know that it is possible to be successful in a society that does oppress and silences the LGBT individuals in any way possible (Haggerty, 1995). “If we do not promote homosexuality in the classroom, we are surely
promoting heterosexuality” (Haggerty, 1995, p. 12). Harassment and violence toward gay men and lesbians is pervasive in this country’s schools. “From elementary school through high school, gay is the epithet of choice to denote something bad, undesirable, or just different” (Sears, 2005, p. 67).

Blount (2000) claims that homophobia has played a role in the protection of strict gender roles for teachers, such as “relating to the societal taboo of the single women and the effeminate man as those exhibiting abnormal sexualities (p.201). Teaching young children is thought to be women’s work, to the exclusion of men attempting to enter the profession (King, 2004). It is socially acceptable for women to enter the elementary school profession, but when a man expresses interest in the field of elementary education, especially when he is not married, questions begin to arise. Societal anxiety and uneasiness about feminization and its potential to contaminate men’s and boys’ masculinity, as well as provoke questions about their sexuality, have increased during particular historical stages since the mid-1800s (Blount, 2005). “A common perception regarding men who teach primary grades in schools is that they are homosexual. Another common perception is that homosexual males are effeminate” (King, 2004, p. 123). The combinations of these inaccurate correlations between homosexuality, teaching, and masculine behavior have had negative effects on teachers (King, 2004).

Skelton’s (2001) research in the United Kingdom also points to the very significant ways in which male primary school teachers feel compelled to present themselves as ‘properly masculine.’ (p. 138). As primary schools are perceived to be female environments, this may involve male teachers’ “exaggerating various aspect of masculinity and thus presenting themselves as masculine through using humor and demonstrating a passion for football”
This raises significant issues about what Blount (2000) refers to as “cross-gender behaviors and characteristics” (p. 84). The consequences of this are intensified for both unmarried men and women defining socially acceptable expressions of embodied heterosexual masculinity and femininity. Martino (2008) claims that the dialogue concerning male role models in schools are likely to “invoke male elementary teachers and boys as victims of feminization, and, as a consequence, prone to emasculation” (p. 204), avoiding an examination of the “impact and effect of heteronormative systems of hegemonic masculinity and surveillance in terms of determining both the status of the profession and the legitimate or deviant identity of the teacher” (204).

Learning to negotiate identities, particularly who they will be in the classroom, is an issue for all student teachers. This is especially true for those who are also LGBT educators, desiring to work in a heteronormative school environment (Donahue, 2007). Teachers who are new to the profession, including those who are also LGBT, must learn to negotiate their identities on various levels (Donahue, 2007). “Identities exist not as static phenomena in isolation from the rest of the world but as negotiations between self in relationship to others and in relationship to historically developed social roles (e.g., teacher, student, heterosexual, homosexual)” (Donahue, 2007, p. 77). Educators can present their identities in such a way that it seems to match the norm, resisting being perceived as deviant, or they can present it in such a way that it “seems to match a deviancy, and, in the process, we resist being read as the norm” (Brueggemann & Moddelmog, 2002, p. 313).

Rofes (1985) stated that he recalled looking in the mirror before leaving for work, and hardly recognizing himself. “The man gazing back appeared mature, responsible, confident, and
straight. Who was that stranger in the mirror?” (Rofes, 1985, p. 9). Rofes (1985) states that he became an expert at evading questions about his personal life, such as marital status, noting the fear of being found out. Rofes (1985) claimed he had avoided a secretary’s well-intentioned efforts to fix him up on a blind date with one of her friends, he felt glaringly exposed. He was concerned that possibly his “cover had been blown” (p. 23). Possibly the most significant result of teaching about the “slipperiness of identity is that our students begin to see that we relate to the subject matter not simply on an intellectual but also on a personal plane; or, more accurately, they see that the lines between these areas” are not easily defined (Brueggemann & Moddelmog, 2002, p. 331). The lines between the areas of subject matter and self, intellectual and personal are not easily delineated (Brueggemann & Moddelmog, 2002). Gay and lesbian teachers constantly struggle to keep their professional and private lives separated. The blending of the two causes fear of job loss and ostracization from other members of the school community (Brueggemann & Moddelmog, 2002).

**Homophobia in Parochial Schools**

While public school educators are submerged into an institutionalized heteronormative setting, Catholic school gay and lesbian teachers experience deepened level of discrimination in addition to the homophobic school settings. In 1991, Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning, came the strongest statement which emphasizes teaching respect for gay and lesbian people, but also stresses that the Church’s condemnation of homosexual sexual acts must also be taught (Maher & Server, 2007). The Catholic church claims that there is nothing wrong with being a lesbian or a gay male, but engaging in any
homosexual activity is a sin (Maher & Server, 2007). Maher (2001) found that Catholic high schools in the United States were not addressing the topic of homosexuality in any significant way. McGinley (2003) described the difficulty of this teaching clearly:

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church’s magisterial teaching on homosexuality has been split into a moral rhetoric, condemning homosexual acts, and a pastoral rhetoric, upholding homosexual persons. This bifurcation of the Church’s rhetorical stance sends mixed messages to the Catholic faithful and has resulted in a visibly polarized atmosphere in the Church community (p. 532A).

Litton (1999) found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers chose to work at Catholic schools because of their religious beliefs, but they also saw conflicts between their religion and their lifestyles. These teachers experienced oppression and feared coming out to students, despite the belief that it might benefit their teaching. They also held the belief that they would not be supported by their administrators (Maher, 2003). Religion often affects the lives of many individuals, regardless of their ethnicity (Ford & Priest, 2004). “Unfortunately, many religions not only decry the gay lifestyle, but have specific policies and practices which condemn homosexuality. This can ultimately prove overwhelming to the individuals struggling with their sexual identities” (Ford & Priest, 2004, p. 96).

**Personal Effects of Homophobia in All Schools: Identity Struggles**

Rofes (1985) states that the principal at one of his schools said, “It simply is not acceptable for a teacher to discuss his personal life with the children,” (p. 25) after revealing to his students that he lived with three roommates. Many teachers, however, discuss their husbands or wives as it relates to an example or telling a story. Moreover, teachers throw bridal showers
and baby showers for other teachers, as long as it is heteronormative cultural rules. “Merely suggesting that homosexuality is normal often fosters accusations of recruitment. If we are sensitive to such accusations and responses in a non-defensive manner, stressing education and discovery for the youth we serve” (Rowe, 1993, p. 509).

I recall when I had my own holy union ceremony with my partner, I feared telling anyone, but when three of the teachers where I worked got married, there were parties and each was celebrated. Cox (2008) claims that if he had spoken about his gay personal life, it would have been awkward. He too lives in two worlds, keeping his home and work life separate. He would like to have the courage to be honest when asked about his personal life, “but I can imagine child gossip and homophobic comments that I regularly hear thrown around the classroom” (p. 62). Cox (2008) agrees with Rofes (1985) that if other teachers are allowed to bring their family lives into the classroom then so should the non-heterosexual, without having the fear of torment and harassment for being anything other than heterosexual. Schools reinforce and reflect mainstream normative genders and sexualities (Khayatt, 2006). “Schools teach intentionally through the curriculum, and unintentionally through values promoted by teachers, administration, boards and parents, a taken-for-granted normative sexuality and concomitant expectations of gender behavior” (Khayatt, 2006, p. 135).

As long as our personal lives are what is considered normal, and our family structure is the traditional family, there are never any questions. However, when someone falls outside of heteronormative society, their lives become inappropriate for dialogue (Rofes, 1985). Rofes (2000a) claimed that during most of his teaching career he “ juggled two identities” (p. 440). He stated that after a few months of his first teaching job, he felt schizophrenic. There was his
“teacher self” and his “gay self,” but these were always kept as two completely separate identities (Rofes, 1985, p. 60). “When I was at school or at a school function, I was a professional. When I was outside of school, on my own time evenings and weekends, I was a different person, growing into active involvement in progressive politics and the gay community (Rofes, 1985, p. 60). Even the thought of blending these two worlds threatened the guidelines and structure of his life (Rofes, 1985). My experiences as a teacher and administrator are very similar to those of Rofes. I would put on a suit and tie during the day for school, and then come home at night and put on a dress for a drag show, juggling my two identities.

The idea of disclosing a traditionally taboo identity in the classroom has had significant pedagogical consequences and calls into question conventional expectations about the kind of knowledge that can be shared with students, “thereby redrawing the lines between the intellectual and the personal, the sanctioned and the taboo, the academic and the experiential” (Brueggemann & Moddelmog, 2002, p. 312). Chris Mayo (2004) stated, that “heterosexuality is also an identity position whose potential negative effects on other sexualities needs to be examined and whose origins need to be studied” (p. 26). Mayo’s (2004) idea of “subjectivity and identity” is viewed through a critical lens while examining all stipulations of identity, along with the relationships among those who construct and occupy them.

According to Rofes, he “began to feel his two selves integrating and experienced the relief that comes with letting go of a long-held secret” (Rofes, 1985, p. 86). He failed to see how he could be a fully integrated person until he was able to blend his teacher identity with his gay identity (Rofes, 1985). For years he suspected that some of those with whom he worked in schools would have problems with his sexual identity (Rofes, 2000). Lesbian, gay and bisexual
persons are often called the *invisible minority*, because their sexual identities cannot be identified simply from their biological or physical appearance (Fassinger, 1991). “This invisibility provides a context in which LGBT individuals may deal with potential discrimination through identity management, controlling disclosure of information about their sexual orientation” (Chung, 2001, p. 4). Griffin (1992) revealed five strategies for LGBT individuals to handle their identity management: acting, passing, covering, implicitly out, and explicitly out.

All teachers teach about sex, whether they acknowledge it or not. What we say and what we don’t say, what is voiced and what silenced, create knowledge for our students which contain tremendous implications. Gay male teachers, whose bodies, desires, and practices may transgress heteronormative constructs and patriarchal paradigms, could be a source of starting new learning. We’ve gained limited entry into the classroom by denying authentic differences between many gay men’s relationships to gender roles, sexual cultures, and kinship arrangements compared with those of the heteronormative hegemony (Rofes, 2000, p. 459).

In the patriarchal system of traditional gender roles, homophobia is crucial in maintaining heterosexuality (Stein, 2005), causing authenticity among homosexuals to be an extremely difficult risk.

Authenticity is defined as being true to oneself, not as we want to present ourselves to others, including any roles we play for others, but who we truly are (Handler, 1986). The act of passing relies on an educator’s performance of gender: “for a lesbian, for instance, to pass as straight means dressing and acting straight; and for a gay man to pass as straight, he must dress and act as straight” (Khayatt, 2006, p. 135). McNinch (2007) claims that for authenticity, gay
and lesbian individuals “must dispense with masks and suits of armor” (p. 207). To escape the confinement of invisibility, gay and lesbian individuals must start by living a transparent life (Reilly, 2007). However, there are cases where teachers have been dismissed because they are homosexual, even when there was “no more reason to suspect them than their heterosexual colleagues of sexual interest in children” (Altman, 1993, p. 57). Lesbian and gay teachers must not be given the responsibility of challenging systems of education, proven to be “conventionalized by heterosexist norms and values that alienate and devalue them” (p. 61), nor should they be asked to continue to live and work with the negative consequences of revealing their identities without demonstrable support from the institutions in which they teach (McKenzie-Bassant, 2007). Brueggemann and Moddelmog (2002) propose “a pedagogy centered on the tension between the concepts of passing and coming out, a pedagogy in which identity disclosures initiate a process of consciously performing but also complicating a particular identity” (p. 313). Anti-homophobic pedagogy is heightened as an educator’s own position, often played out through personal narratives and are stated unchallenged (Macintosh, 2007).

When homosexuals determine not to admit they are gay, they give up the opportunity for authenticity (Downs, 2006). “During the crisis of identity, the drum beat of shame beats louder and louder in a lesbian or gay man’s ear. Our emotions tend to vacillate from panic to deep sadness” (Downs, 2006, p. 63). Lesbians and gay men believe that admitting their homosexuality will end life as they have known it and their worlds will completely collapse around them (Downs, 2006). Admitting one’s homosexuality raises questions about family and
friends, acceptance and approval. As many can attest life does not collapse, but “takes on a richness and added dimension of emotional depth that could not be imagined prior to taking the leap to come out” (Downs, 2006, p. 64).

One organization hoping to help gay and lesbian teachers become more authentic is the gay, lesbian, and straight education network (GLSEN). In 1995 the gay, lesbian, and straight teacher network (GLSTN) became a national organization and hired its first full-time staff person, GLSTN's founder Kevin Jennings. In 1997, GLSTN staged its first national conference in Salt Lake City, UT to respond to the legislature's move to ban all student groups in an effort to prevent the formation of GSAs in the state. It was also the year that GLSTN changed its name to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, or GLSEN, in order to attract new members to the struggle for safe schools for all teachers, staff, and students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN provides training and resources designed to develop safe and supportive schools for all gay and lesbian individuals. GLSEN strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. This organization believes that such an atmosphere engenders a positive sense of self, which is the basis of educational achievement and personal growth. Since homophobia and heterosexism undermine a healthy school climate, they work to educate teachers, students, and the public at large about the damaging effects that these forces have on youth and adults alike. They recognize that forces such as racism and sexism have similarly adverse impacts on communities and support schools in looking to address inequities. GLSEN seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes in creating a more vibrant and diverse community (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008).
In an attempt to create a safe space for gay and lesbian teachers, DeJean (2004) conducted a study of five gay male high school teachers who were working in the same district were interviewed about what it is like being a gay male teacher in a public school. “It has taken me seven years to break the fear and silence I was working in. While today there are many changes on the campus where I teach, I am still faced with the occasional parent who wants to pull his or child from my class because of who I am. I am still confronted by a hateful comment which is occasionally made and sporadically still get faggot written on my classroom door” (DeJean, 2004, p. 23). These are just some of the reasons gay and lesbian teachers working in the K-12 system chose to remain closeted, but while that closet might provide some protection, DeJean (2004) claims that there is “often a cost both personally and professionally” (p. 23).

Good teaching is not only about how well you know the subject matter and method of teaching, but how authentic a teacher is within the classroom setting (DeJean, 2004).

**Purpose**

Some studies suggest that gay men and lesbians enter the teaching profession for the same reason many heterosexuals do. They have a desire to care for children, they have creative ideas, or they are passionate about a particular subject area. “Lesbians and gay men become teachers for reasons that have nothing to do with sexual orientation. Only when they encounter the pressures of homophobia does being a teacher become a problem” (DeJean, 2004, p. 23). Being excluded from decision-making process, passed over for promotion, sexist and offensive comments are all part of what gays and lesbians have to contend with on a daily basis. It can be particularly difficult in a school setting for a teacher to deal with students and staff who openly persecute homosexuals (Niesche, 2003, p. 46). In August of 2007, A Christian group sued the
state of California on behalf of several educators and students “claiming a law prohibiting discrimination against gays in schools is unconstitutionally vague and violates student privacy by changing the definition of gender in California’s education code” (California sued, 2007, p. 4). As of 2007, Duke had found that only four research studies examining the experiences of gay and lesbian educators had been published in professional education journals.

The purpose of this study was to determine how gay and lesbian teachers negotiate their identities and how those identities affect their relationships in school, as well as what effect their sexual orientation plays on their professional practices, roles, and responsibilities. Four teachers and two administrators, who are self-identified gay and lesbian educators were interviewed about their experiences in their school communities. Additionally, a focus group consisting of five educators was conducted in a Catholic school system. This study will help heterosexual educators to see how they can help those who are gay men and lesbians feel more included as part of the school community, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

This study offers a unique perspective in that it will cross a variety of these differing contextual parameters found in the studies identified. While previous studies have analyzed each of these areas in isolation, no study was identified that addresses all three areas of identity negotiation, relationships, teaching practices with the same group of educators. These interviews were with both male and female, Caucasian and African-American, new and veteran teachers and administrators who are currently working or have worked in public and parochial K-12 schools in urban, suburban, and rural communities. This study was guided by the following questions:
1. How do gay and lesbian educators negotiate their identities in their school settings?

2. How does being an “openly” gay or lesbian educator, or “closeted” educator, affect their relationships with members of the school community, including students, colleagues, and parents?

3. How does being an “openly” gay or lesbian educator or “closeted” educator affect their teaching practices and responsibilities?

There is some research showing examining these areas in isolated settings. However, a review of the literature indicated that no study has been identified that looks at urban, suburban, and rural K-12 teachers and administrators in both public and parochial educational institutions.

**Dissertation Overview**

In chapter one I have discussed the institutionalized homophobia in both society and K-12 public and Parochial schools. Also discussed is the fear and isolation that gay and lesbian teachers experience while negotiating their identities in their lives and their professions. Chapter two will review previous research about the experiences of gay, lesbian, and transgender teachers and administrators. There is previous research with specific groups of people using specific criteria, such as high school male teachers, or elementary and high school teachers.

In chapter three the design of the study is explained. This qualitative study is designed to determine how identity issues for gay and lesbian teachers are negotiated and how those identities affect their relationships in their school communities and how their professional roles and practices are affected by their sexual orientation. Four teachers and two administrators were interviewed individually. This group of educators included both gay men and lesbians, from
rural, suburban, and urban school settings. The focus group from a Catholic school district consisted of five gay and lesbian educators. I collected two sources of evidence through semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The use of semi-structured interviews involved asking predetermined questions, but allowed the flexibility of asking for an explanation about or more specific information with a response, as well as allowing for them to tell a story about an experience they have had (Berg, 2007). Additionally, the limitations to the study will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter four discusses the findings of this research study. The comments from those discussions were compared to the individual interview responses in an attempt to identify patterns and themes among all LGBT educators. All participants were asked to tell their stories about what their relationships and experiences as either an openly gay or lesbian K-12 educator or closeted gay or lesbian educator. A narrative analysis included in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs, and creative nonfiction (Patton, 2002). The discussion about the findings of this study, as well as the conclusion and recommendations for further research will be discussed in Chapter five. Griffin (1992) believes that sexual minority people are on the cutting edge of change in a fundamental shift in how we understand power. Giving attention to sexual minority, administrators can further expose the power dynamics in schools and society. The LGBT community is slowly breaking its silent minority status. As the gay and lesbian population has become more visible, more people are aware that homosexuality is a part of their everyday lives (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008).
Conclusion

Throughout the introduction, I expounded on the homophobia in society, which filters down to the homophobia and heteronormativity that has permeated and is dominant in both public and Catholic school community cultures. Additionally, the Catholic educators have the pressure of their religious beliefs which clearly classifies homosexual acts as a sin against God’s law. “Homosexuals are arguably the most hated group of people in the United States” (Unks, 2003, p. 322). While other minorities have gained a degree of protection and acceptance, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) population remains essentially outside the safety zone (Unks, 2003).

Chapter two, the review of literature, identifies the research that has previously been conducted in the field of LGBT individuals working in the field of education. Griffin (1992) believes that sexual minority people are on the cutting edge of change in a fundamental shift in how we understand power. Giving attention to sexual minority, administrators can further expose the power dynamics in schools and society. The LGBT community is slowly breaking its silent minority status. As the gay and lesbian population has become more visible, more people are aware that homosexuality is out there (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). The results of this study can be used for LGBT school administrators and other staff members, showing the challenges to being open about their sexual orientation for gay and lesbian teachers. It will help heterosexual educators to see how they can help those who are gay men and lesbians feel more included as part of the school community, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.
Chapter 2  
Review of Literature  
Identity Negotiation

Teaching is negativity associated both with “public debates about the recognitions of LGB lifestyles with school curriculums and the perceived reactions of parents and other to their children having a lesbian, gay, or bisexual teacher” (Beyond tolerance, 2009, p. 20). In their report, the Equity and human Rights Commission found that only 51% of lesbians, 52% of gay men felt comfortable about being open about their sexual orientation, without fear of discrimination, in their educational environments (Beyond tolerance, 2009).

Kupfer (2005) found it hard to make a decision as to whether or not to use a pseudonym on her submission to the book One Teacher in 10, her story about coming out to her administrators.

My decision to use a pen name came out of the fear that without job protection language written into my teaching contract, there was a possibility that someone would want to fire a teacher who spoke out about her sexual orientation (Kupfer, 2005, p. 288).

Kupfer (2005) admitted that over the years, however her “lesbian identity had synthesized into the whole of who she was,” (p. 289) and she felt completely comfortable being herself at school and in the classroom, whether references to sexual orientation came up or not.

Kids always want to know about their teachers, even substitutes, claimed Mike Russell (2005). He often encountered questions about his personal life (Russell, 2005). Questions such as, “Did I want children?, Was I married?, What was my girlfriends name? (Russell, 2005, p.
He responded by telling the truth, changing the subject, or avoid answering (Russell, 2005). “I refused to outright lie and invent a heterosexual life” (Russell, 2005, p. 189). The students often thanked him for being honest, and would respond that they had a gay or lesbian family member (Russell, 2005). According to Russell (2005), the girls were more accepting than the boys. The boys, often uncomfortable, would “half-jokingly saying, ‘Don’t stare at my ass” (Russell, 2005, p. 189).

Russell (2005) claimed that when he was student teaching, his teacher mentor, advised him to not to come out to his students once he had found a teaching job. He had good reason to say what he did. From my observations I saw that too many of the student body had never seen their fathers. The boys often learned how to be men from the streets, where anything gay is seen as feminine and weak. And many kids had been sexually assaulted. The mention of anything gay automatically makes some kids remember the awful people who molested them. I didn’t know a way around that problem. During that semester, I took my mentor’s advice, deflecting questions his students had about his personal life (Russell, 2005, p. 191).

Staying closeted however made him feel like he was not being true to himself, and a coward (Russell, 2005). “I felt it took too great a toll on my self-respect” (Russell, 2005, p. 191). He claimed that he continued to avoid questions about his private life, but admittedly was not the “butchest guy in the world,” so some students figured it out, and would ask, “Are you gay?” (Russell, 2005, p. 191).

Vavrus (2009) found that teacher candidates experienced both indirect and direct
expectations to act according to “traditionally prescribed gender roles” (p. 386). These participants felt that breaking out of those roles would risk being harassed and being referred to as deviant (Vavrus, 2009). “All male teacher candidates (n=18) participated in and/or were subjected to sexist and homophobic discourses. Within this social dynamic, privilege was acquired by displays of masculinity” (Vavrus, 2009, p. 386). All of these teacher candidates noted that there was assumed heterosexuality as the norm, and only two of these study participants recalled experiences where one of their teachers had recognized homosexuality “as a legitimate sexual orientation or that homosexuals had made constructive contributions to U.S. culture” (Vavrus, 2009, p. 387). Most of these participants could not recall anyone identifying as a gay man, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (Vavrus, 2009). In fact, they mentioned that homosexuality was only discussed as it related to disease, especially AIDS (Vavrus, 2009). One heterosexual participant abandoned his love of theatre and music to participate in sports to avoid being labeled gay (Vavrus, 2009). One gay male participant “described his near suicidal anguish” and “his sense of isolations from his peers and any adult” (Vavrus, 2009, p. 387).

In 2002, Irwin surveyed and interviewed seventy-one gay men, lesbian and transgender teachers, academics, or educators from Australia to identify the extent and the level of workplace discrimination that these educators had experienced over their tenures. Sixty-eight percent of those educators surveyed had experienced some form of discrimination and claimed that it had a negative effect on them and their work performance (Irwin, 2002). “The most likely identified was an increase in their anxiety and stress levels (90%). Many became depressed (80%), and/or experienced a loss of confidence (63%). Twelve went on to comment that they had contemplated suicide and one had attempted suicide, as a result of the constant harassment”
Many of the participants commented on the homophobic behavior and the harassment that contributed to a negative workplace environment (Irwin, 2002). Many of the teachers who were the target of homophobic jokes or socially excluded, mentioned that while these types of homophobic behaviors may have seemed minimal, they did contribute to the school culture that was “hostile and unsafe” (Irwin, 2002, p. 75). A few qualitative studies have begun to uncover some of the factors that contribute to this discrimination and the struggles that teachers and administrators experience as they negotiate their identity in the workplace.

The study in 2003 conducted by Melillo, purposed to understand what impact heteronormativity had on lesbian teachers’ perceptions of their instructional styles, contents of their classes, and context of curriculum being taught. The majority of these educators by disclosing their sexuality enabled them to help their students (Melillo, 2003). These teachers believed that while living in fear of exposure, there was a sense of dishonesty that permeated their personal and professional existence (Melillo, 2003). “They cared for their students in the same manner as other colleagues, but some felt it necessary to remain more aloof, more removed to keep safe” (Melillo, 2003, p. 14). The women who were out at their schools, however, felt empowered to educate their students to understand how socially accept those who would appear to be different and apply that understanding to those who might feel or be different in other ways (Melillo, 2003). These lesbian educators felt that they had the subject matter knowledge to perform their jobs at an above satisfactory level, but also felt that as a result of being lesbians, “not only did they work even harder to excel and stand out among their colleagues, but they also had the extra sensitivity to reach their students personally when others were unable to really
understand what the student was experiencing” (Melillo, 2003, p. 18).

King (2004), a gay teacher, noted that he constantly monitored his behaviors around children, and that he was anxious about how other teachers, and parents would interpret his interactions and relationships with students. Teachers and prospective teachers blindly agree not to promote homosexuality. This is effective in keeping those who are lesbians or gay men in the closet (King, 2004). “By not acting gay we would not be visible as practicing homosexuals and therefore children would not imprint on our deviant sexualities” (King, 2004, p. 126). Gay teachers may serve as a role model for young children who may possibly become homosexual adults (King, 2004). “As part of the teaching practice, a gay teacher may provide narratives (and/or counter narratives) in response to the media portrayals and in response to the home-based interpretive texts spun from media texts about ‘morally dangerous’ homosexual lives” (King, 2004, p. 126).

In Gust and Warren (2008), John, one of the educators interviewed claimed that

As a bisexual married man, I have a hard time with naming my own location, claiming my body in the sight of others. I understand the complicated nature of naming, of staking a claim and feeling the careful eye of scrutiny, of evaluation of, of establishing proof, I have, at time, been wildly successful in making space for this body—I have enjoyed the luxury of being granted permission to be who/what I claim I am (p. 117).

Also in Gust and Warren (2008) was a narrative by Scott, in which he claims that “I, a gay man, balance my desire to ‘do differently’ with a measure of caution, particularly as I enjoy little to
absolutely nothing, in the way of protection under law from being harassed and victimized because of my sexuality” (p. 123).

Petr (2005) noted that despite being in a very inclusive school environment, one spring the students were preoccupied because a student teacher in the social studies department had come out to them. “It pleased me that this had impressed, rather than distressed, most of them” (Petr, 2005, p. 201). She was bothered, however, how one student described to his friends that he had gone into the social studies department looking for the student teacher, and asked one of the other teachers “where the faggot was” (Petr, 2005, p. 201).

Jackson (2006) conducted a study to identify the contextual factors that promote or prohibit the construction of identities as gay teachers. She interviewed nine K-12 gay and lesbian teachers four times each and conducted a focus group. She found that contextual factors contribute to and inhibit the amalgamation of gay and lesbian identities with teacher identities, and what she refers to as “gay teacher identity development process” (Jackson, 2006, p.27). Many factors interacted with each other to influence classroom practice. “Coming out served to bring two major aspects of participants’ identities together, being gay and being a teacher, aspects they previously viewed as irreconcilable” (Jackson, 2006, p. 31). Those participants merging their two identities, being out to the school community and created a change in their thinking about their gayness and teaching (Jackson, 2006). “As participants state, humans are infinitely complex, particularly when it come to exploring the interaction of gay and teacher identities” (Jackson, 2006, p. 33). Jackson identified five factors that determine a teacher’s process of merging the two: “personal characteristics, family status, gender conformity, professional experiences, and community atmosphere” (Jackson, 2006, p. 33). Personal
characteristics included factors such as race, age, and religion that inhibit or support gay teacher identity development. There is a distinction, in gay culture, between birth families and family of choice, those identified to be members of the family without regard to blood or legal relationships. The participants’ adherence to gender expectations determined how well they could pass as heterosexual at school. “Participants also described resembling gender expectations as making them more comfortable as openly gay teachers” (Jackson, 2006, p. 36). The participants in this study also noted that there were many issues affecting their outness at school. As their teaching comfort increased, so did their confidence in being out. Looking at the school within the larger context of the community, the participants identified local diversity, exposure to gay and lesbian issues, and local laws and/or policies as the factors shaping the community acceptance of homosexuals. “All of these factors interact to impel or impede growth as gay teachers” (Jackson, 2006, p. 40).

Divito (2005) wrote about his experience as a public school teacher in a rough section of Brooklyn, “where students bandied about the word ‘fag’ as often as they forgot their homework” (p. 35). Knowing that the attitudes about homosexuality in a inner-city neighborhood were less than ideal, Divito, under the advice of his colleagues and the school’s principal, decided not to come out to his students (Divito, 2005). He noted that he had been called ‘faggot’ by his students (Divito, 2005).

One student even asked, ‘Mister? Are you a faggot?’ Though shocked, I quickly turned on my best teacher voice and advised her that the F word was unbecoming. The student smiled, then shouted in the middle of the classroom, ‘Mr. Divito’s a faggot!’ (Divito, 2005, p. 35).
Before Divito (2005) began teaching, he questioned whether or not he would tell his students that he was a gay man. His partner insisted that it was his responsibility to teach more than sentence structure (Divito, 2005).

In 2001, Maher (2001) found that words like “denial” and “repression” were used when interviewing gay and lesbian students and staff in Catholic high schools (p. 108). Mr. Alberts, a gay male counselor in a Catholic high school, agreed with the use of words like denial and repression to describe his experience (Maher, 2001). According to Mr. Alberts, “It’s like taking a part of your being and closing it off in scar tissue and setting it aside. You can never feel whole. You feel like there’s a hole in your feelings, thoughts, and being, your spirituality is never addressed” (Maher, 2001, p. 108). Nearly all of the educators Maher (2001) interviewed agreed that homosexuality was rarely or never presented in the curricula at their schools.

“Father Coleman would demand that a teacher in a Catholic school keep secret the fact that he or she is homosexual” (Gumbleton, 2001, p. 19). These educators are encouraged to accept and love themselves for who they are, and be confident that God loves them (Gumbleton, 2001). Thus forbidding gay and lesbian educators from teaching authentically, unreservedly insinuates that there is something wrong with them (Gumbleton, 2001). “I would suggest that a homosexual teacher who has a personal need to announce his/her sexual orientation to students should for this reason not be teaching in a Catholic school” (Coleman, 2001, p. 13). Educational administrators are the gatekeepers for gender performance and sexual orientation, and “have been granted great latitude in removing suspected queers” (Lugg, 2003, p. 107).

Unless males, regardless of the heterosexuality or homosexuality status, “can pass as
masculinist leaders, the gendered expression, they may have difficulty in being hired” (Lugg, 2003, p. 118). In 2009, DeLeon and Brunner studied the experiences of LGBT school administrators. They found that “when participants had early fears of being outside the accepted norm and fear for their personal safety on a daily basis, several LGBT administrators spoke of turning to assimilation and silence” (p. 164). The two categories that emerged from their discussions with these LGBT school administrators, losses and gains (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009). Regarding the losses, many participants believed the time and energy for their careers were lessened by the time they spent in fear (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009). As one participant stated, “If I spent as much time learning to be a leader as I did masquerading, I would have become stronger and more daring earlier in my career” (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009, p. 168). As a gain, many of these administrators felt that their experiences as a LGBT individual, gave them strength and resiliency in their character that heterosexual administrators would not necessarily experience.

The strength and resiliency was gained from past experiences which where primarily based in fear (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009). One particular participant commented that “gay educators have a unique perspective to share [because they] know about name calling, harassment, being picked on…what it is like to be ridiculed, hated irrationally, not feeling the same as others” (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009, p. 168). Another gay administrator added that he thought his tolerance for people outside the norm made him a better administrator (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009). A lesbian administrator recognized that her “special perspective helps” (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009, p. 168). The past experiences of these LGBT school administrators
have formed their lives (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009).

“The overt hostility, lack of acceptance, and stigma surrounding queerness ingrained fear in most from an early age” (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009, p. 174). They learned to negotiate their identities through silence in the environment of heteronormativity and privilege (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009). “They overcompensated for what several viewed as their ‘flaws,’ and striving to validate their lives in a heteronormative society” (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009, p. 174).

Harkins (1993) found that 64% of principals thought homosexuals should not be hired to teach in Catholic elementary schools. In 1999, Litton found that teachers chose to work in Catholic schools because of their religious beliefs, but they also saw conflict between their religion and their lifestyles. They experienced oppression, feared coming out to students, and believed their administrators would not support their coming out (Litton, 1999).

Whether the pathway to teaching is effortless or troubled, the first teaching job was difficult for many participants. Whether deciding to teach was their intended career or they decided to teach as a second career, “all participants encountered problems because they saw teaching and gayness as mutually exclusive” (Jackson, 2007, p. 57). The last stage of gay teacher identity development process required coming out at school. For many participants this involved the steps of coming out to family, to parents to colleagues, and to administration. They clearly identified authenticity with students as the real mark of coming out (Jackson, 2007).

In another study, ten teacher’s stressed that while content knowledge is important, the focus of their responses stressed the importance of a teacher’s “identity and integrity” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). Some of these responses included one teacher who defined a quality teacher as one
‘who is real, honest, and caring, another saw the quality teacher as who is “able to move past fear and lower protective barriers,” while another viewed the quality teacher as “a teacher is authentic within the classroom” (DeJean, 2007, p. 69). “These ten gay and lesbian educators show how critical self-awareness and radical honesty can have a significant impact on a teacher and his/her classroom” (DeJean, 2007, p. 70). If educators do teach who they are, they will serve to show how teacher education that teaches curriculum and pedagogy must also teach critical self-awareness and self-reflection (Leistyna, Lavandez, & Nelson, 2004).

Patricia Lyons (2005), teacher of religion in a parochial school in Virginia, discussed how it pained her to have conversations with parents and students who would “spew rants against pro-gay books in the library, sex promoting gays, the homosexual agenda, and the abomination of homosexuality” (p. 71). She noted that many of her students and parents would blatantly comment that a person could not be a true Christian and a practicing homosexual. Lyons (2005) claimed that she never lied about her sexual orientation, but never mentioned it either.

One teacher told her own story as a closeted female-bodied self identified transgender educator (McCarthy, 2003). This exploratory study is one teacher’s experience with matters that are central to transgender issues in schools. Her self perception is reliant on her interactions with the external society. She simply feels like herself until confronted with restrictive gender codes that are inherent in every environment. “Her desire for a male body and the feeling that she experiences her body in ways that she perceives as male are central to her understanding of herself as transgender. Her physicality extends to her romantic relationships, in which she
experiences her body and sexuality *more like a guy*. She enjoys wearing men’s clothing and having short hair to promote her *male look*” (McCarthy, 2003, p. 179). Kelly is not out at school as transgendered, and has not transitioned physically. Her story details how
“transgender teachers have a unique perspective that strengthens their relationships with their students and liberates school community members, whether they are aware of this or not” (McCarthy, 2003, p. 182).

In an effort to identify the experiences of out gay and lesbian K-12 educators, DeJean (2007) interviewed and conducted focus groups with ten participants who identified as gay men or lesbian. These teachers worked at the elementary, middle and high school levels. All of the teachers believe that “the experiences and the challenges they faced based on their sexual identity within the K-12 environment provided a unique vantage point” (DeJean, 2007, p. 69).

One teacher educator, Dennis Sumara (2007) believes that a principal challenge of his position is to “undermine beliefs about learning that conceptualize human beings as machines, machines that are somehow detached from their contexts of experience” (p. 53). Changing beliefs about human sexuality and identities involves working with others to create a new language that will help teachers to understand humans in a more expansive way (Sumara, 2007). Participants in one study, who identified as gay or lesbian, explained that their sexual orientation is unnoticed but when it is disclosed, becomes consumed by cultural stereotypes (Sumara, 2007). “For many pre-service and practicing teachers, this usually means that they remain silent about their sexual identities” (Sumara, 2007, p. 54).

Hernandez (2009) interviewed a gay man he called Andy about his experiences as an openly gay teacher and eventually administrator. “For several years, Andy struggled to align his
professional and personal life” (Hernandez, 2009, p. 211). He claimed that he very much wanted to get his professional and personal life aligned, as he told his principal and teaching colleagues. Andy described his fear as a gay man working in a school.

I think back over the years and fear was huge. The fear of ‘Did somebody see me? Are they going to know? Am I going to lose my job?’ That was ultimate fear ‘are parents going to find out? And how are they going to react? What if students know and what will happen there? What if the kid tells other kids that was on internal struggle for me. It’s like you can’t be a whole person (Hernandez, 2009, p. 211).

Andy experienced the same fears and anxieties that many gay and lesbian educators feel. Although he was out to his colleagues, he never invited them to his house, nor did he take his partner to school and school related events and functions (Hernandez, 2009). As Andy advanced into administration, he told his staff at a staff meeting that he was gay, and developed a gay and lesbian staff member support group (Hernandez, 2009). The group lasted several years, but ended abruptly when “too many members feared for their jobs because of the conservative climate of the district and did not want to face the challenges if students of parents found out” (Hernandez, 2009, p. 213).

King’s (1998) study provides additional ways in which masculinities are intertwined with male elementary school teachers’ pedagogical practices. “King claims that male teachers who masculinities are placed under a normalizing surveillance” (p. 5) often suffer from anxieties and fear, explaining why many men chose not to enter the profession. “This practice of male teachers adopting a culturally validated hegemonic form of masculinity to assert their normalcy, is read by King as an attempt to ward of any association of deviancy surrounding the unnamed
silent accusation of pedophilia” (King, 1998, p. 6). An association of effeminacy with gay male sexuality serves as a homophobic attitude to posture all gay men as sexual deviants and emerges as an important influence in male primary school teachers’ lives. There is a denial of normalcy “embedded in the construction of knowledge” and a belief that homophobia is sheer ignorance (Macintosh, 2007, p. 36). “We subsequently assume that it is homophobia that must be understood, leaving heteronormativity as a live incendiary device, and curriculum tripwire” (Macintosh, 2007, p. 36).

DePalma (2009) claimed that although there has been a strong push for lesbian and gay teachers to come out in their classrooms, some gay and lesbian teachers in the United Kingdom, despite their legal protection from discrimination, feel that disclosing their sexual identity might jeopardize their careers. “Many others fear reprisals and shifts in staff and parent attitudes” (DePalma, 2009, p. 11). Most teachers who choose not to reveal their sexual identity to parts of their school communities do so out of fear. Nonheterosexual teachers vary in the identity disclosure to not at all, only to some colleagues, and only to colleagues and administration to students and parents of their students.

**Relationship Formation and Maintenance**

In 2008 Mayo analyzed two set of complex relationships in school. One relationship was between gay teachers and their students, while the other was the relationship between those same gay teachers and their colleagues. He found that the “gay teachers in this study addressed gay students’ needs and demonstrated support in a variety of ways, despite working in school settings that often held a hostile perception of the GLBT community” (Mayo, 2008, p. 1).

Davis (2005) a seventh and eighth grade language arts and social studies teacher in
California stated that he was prepared to respond questions to the about his sexual orientation. He had not thought about how he would respond when one of his students asked about his marriage status. He thought about what he had been told to say as a standard response: “That’s a personal question and personal questions are inappropriate” (p. 25)

The seven participants in this study were males between the ages of 26 and 54, taught in both public and private high schools, grades 6-12. Their teaching experience ranged from 1-35 years, and the subjects taught included English (special education), history, math, psychology, Spanish, and theatre. The participants all identified as gay, but only one was openly gay to colleagues and students at school. Others have chosen to come out to only some of their colleagues. “Overall, the informants perceive guarded, cordial relationships with their colleagues, where professionalism and teamwork, combined with privacy and discretion, have become the norm at school” (Mayo, 2008, p. 7).

A seventh grade English teacher in Rhode Island recalled his first year of teaching. One day before lunch he stormed into the principal’s office and told the principal that he was going to come out of the closet to his students. He had to talk to them about Matthew Shepard’s death. He had to make certain they understood the hatred and ignorance that caused this situation. He could not do that without being honest about who he was (Paull, 2005).

Another study examined eleven heterosexual adults who had an openly gay teacher two decades earlier. Rofes (2000a) found that adolescents with openly gay teacher did not experience extreme concerns about the situation. One finding suggested that an openly gay teacher is more of an issue for adults and parents, than it is for children; and that “having a gay
teacher was not a defining part their school experience” (p. 410).

Macgillivray (2008) conducted a study to show how some of his former high school students reacted to and were affected by having an openly gay teacher. His study was guided by two questions. One was to investigate whether or not his students were affected by having an openly gay teacher. If they were, he wanted to identify in what way they were affected. Secondly, he wanted to see how his results compared to those of Rofes (2000a). Eight former students: “five heterosexual, one gay male, one lesbian, and one subject who identified as bisexual” (Macgillivray, 2008, p. 76). There were three main themes for the LGB students: “being comfortable with oneself, always know they were LGB, and being pleased that other student began to change their views about gay people” (Macgillivray, 2008, p. 78). While the three main themes for the heterosexual students included initial uneasiness with having a gay teacher, one’s sexual orientation is only a small part of whom one is as a person, and certainty that they were not gay. He found that having an openly gay teacher did not cause his straight students to question their own sexual orientation. This was consistent with Rofes’ (2000a) findings.

Takatori (2007) after openly talking to his math class about his homosexuality, claimed that on graduation day one student approached him and said ‘I came out to you because I felt I could trust you. Then you responded to me. It was a wonderful feeling. You proved that we could trust other people’s good will. Thank you, I will never forget you’ (p. 104).

Nicolari (2005) a health and physical education teacher, as well as administrator for alternative education program in Connecticut, recounted one of her experiences with one student.
For 15 years as an ‘in’ teacher, I lived in fear of being ‘found out.’ I live with this silent, ‘less than’ feeling. Once afternoon I had a student after school serving a detention. Detentions as a rule turned into a ‘what’s going on in your life’ discussion. He told me he had real problems at home. When I asked if he was comfortable enough to share them with me, he responded with disgust: ‘I have a mother who is a lesbian, Ms. Nic, a lesbian!’ he was so distraught. As a lesbian trying to conceal my own identity, I could only muster up an ‘It could be worse’ response. To this day I wonder the difference it would have made in his life if I could have had the strength to say ‘Well Tommy, I too am a lesbian. I know you respect me as your teacher; let’s talk’ (Nicolari, 2005, p. 16).

She realized that her coming out to that particular student could have helped the student feel better about his home life and his mother.

While many researchers have examined several variables that influence students’ perceptions of teacher credibility. “Teacher credibility is subjective and seen through the eye of the beholder” (Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002, p. 312). Russ, Simonds, and Hunt (2002) surveyed 154 undergraduate students, with an average age of 18.5, in an introduction communication course found that a teacher’s perceived sexual orientation affects students’ perceptions of a teacher’s credibility, competence, and character. Of these students, 98.1% identified as heterosexual, 1.3% identified as gay or lesbian, and 1.3% identified as bisexual. “Specifically students perceived the gay instructor to be significantly less credible in terms of competence” (Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002, p. 316). Teacher credibility is an essential requirement for effective instruction (Russ, Simonds, & Hunt (2002). Gibson and Meem (1996) claim that homophobic students often feel psychologically distanced after their teacher discloses
that he/she is gay. Kougl (1997) explains “credibility involves belief, not fact, so accuracy or even agreement with reality is irrelevant” (p. 178). So no matter how clearly gay and lesbian teachers demonstrate their ability to teach, there is a chance that students’ anti-gay biases could dramatically alter how teacher’s are perceived and treated in the classroom (Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002).

Deleon and Brunner (2009) found in their study of LGBT school administrators that the participants deemed that their past experiences “felt a heightened sensitivity, not just for LGBG students, staff, and families, but for all members of their learning community” (p. 170). All of these LGBT school administrators agreed that the experiences from their past of being marginalized provided them with a heightened sense of sensitivity toward those who may be considered marginalized (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009). The LGBT school administrators in this study agreed that heteroprivilege is a huge issue in schools, and is felt on every level, from student, to teacher to administrator (DeLeon & Brunner, 2009).

Tooms and Alston (2006) studied two groups of graduate students in leadership preparation programs. One group consisted of 42 participants and the second group was 132 graduate students. They used the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG) developed by Herek (1984), as a survey to measure pre-service administrators’ attitudes about gay men and lesbians. The survey revealed that very few respondents were neutral on the issue. Sixty-one percent indicated a more tolerant attitude toward lesbians and gay men, while 30% had more intolerant attitudes. “However, 61% can not be an acceptable number when we consider that this population will be charged with leading our nation’s schools” (Tooms & Alston, 2006, p. 6). These authors claim that the results indicate that homophobia must be a focus of school
leadership preparation programs, as it will affect the climate of the school for LGBT students and staff (Tooms & Alston, 2006). There may be a link between those homosexuals who have leadership aspirations as being more likely to conceal their homosexuality than those without leadership desires because they are less visible and have less to lose (Brown, 1975).

This survey also asked questions concerning issues of equity as it relates to gay men and lesbians. Forty percent of those surveyed were supportive of equity for gay men and lesbians, with 25% being non-supportive, most surprising however was that 35% provided a neutral response for each item in this area. “The authors of this research wonder if neutrality of responses is a symptom of apathy in the pool of aspiring school leaders when considering issues centered on sexual minority” (Tooms & Alston, 2006, p. 7), realizing that neutrality about issues concerning equity and marginalized individuals is in conflict with the idea of leading in a democratic school community (Tooms & Alston, 2006).

**Teaching Practice/Roles and Responsibilities**

In 1996, Walling found that the most common method of teaching about gay and lesbian people is by mentioning that certain famous people were gay. The teachers in this study went even further by discussing gay-centered topics in the classroom as they related to contemporary issues in the news, such as gay marriage or hate crimes. These teachers looked for ‘teachable moments’ (Walling, 1996). One world history teacher at a suburban school discusses the homosexuality of historical figures, such as Alexander the Great and William Shakespeare. He also teaches about Hitler’s persecution of homosexuals during the Holocaust (Walling, 1996).

Conley and Colabucci (2001) described their experiences, as story tellers, and homosexual educators. “Our narratives are about surviving in educational settings, negotiating
sexual identity, and naming our struggles” (Conley & Colabucci, 2001, p. 3). Most teachers would agree that story telling is an effective method for making educational experiences more meaningful for students (Conley & Colabucci, 2001). “Homophobia is an institutionalized form of discrimination from grade school to graduated school. Schools are generally hostile place for gay and lesbian children, parents, and teachers” (Conley & Colabucci, 2001, p. 6). The lack of consideration about the lives of lesbians and gay men limits the access to the power of storytelling (Conley & Colabucci, 2001). “The lack of common discourse result in gay men and lesbians failing to embrace the power of stories and thus limits their ability to reflect critically on their experiences and beliefs related to schooling” (Conley & Colabucci, 2001, p. 12). These educators believed that storytelling helped them see how their identities as teachers are intertwined with their other identities, alliances, relationships, and perceptions (Conley & Colabucci, 2001). The dynamics involved in personal narrative forces “each participant to awaken to the otherness within” (Conley & Colabucci, 2001, p. 16). Within this model, gay men and lesbians surface as vital partners of a society “transformed by distorting the line of demarcation” (Conley & Colabucci, 2001, p. 16).

Crocco (2002) notes that if an educator’s curriculum provides no reflection on gay men and lesbians (their history, agency, creativity, struggles, and failures) then his/her teaching will contribute to the marginalization and invisibility of those individuals. In 2003, Thornton provided some examples about how social studies teachers can weave gay themes into their lesson plans when teaching about Jane Addams. Students must know, for example, that she never married and “chose to spend her adult life among a community of women and had a long time special relationship with one woman” (p. 228).
In 2004, Kumashiro reflected on his own experiences training new teachers to successfully enter the classroom. During one lesson about LGBTQ people and issues, he asked the students to write on a note card how they honestly felt about LGBTQ issues in education. To ensure their anonymity, he asked the students not to put their names on the cards. Then once he had collected all of the cards, he mixed them up and redistributed them, so no one would have their own card. Each student then read the card they had just received from their teacher. Four major themes emerged:

these issues should be addressed at home, not at school; addressing these issues can be risky in many towns and in today’s political climate; teachers should not impose their own values onto their students, especially if parents are teaching something different; and the teacher education program has not taught them anything about these issues, and they would feel very uncomfortable teaching something they don’t know (Kumashiro, 2004, p. 113).

During the discussion following identification of the themes, the students would debate their qualifications for challenging heterosexism and homophobia, and whether challenging heterosexism and homophobia involves more than stopping students from calling each other *faggot, queer,* or saying *that’s so gay* (Kumashiro, 2004). Kumashiro’s (2004) hope was that these new teachers would enter the profession more open to asking critical questions about their assumptions about what teachers should or should not do to address LGBTQ issues in their schools.

Jackson (2007) explored the experiences of gay and lesbian educators to determine how their sexual orientation enhanced their teaching, through interviews. Jackson also collected
teaching resources such as syllabi, lesson plans, and handouts. In addition, she led a focus group based on their lesson plans and conducted stimulated recall sessions where participants recounted a typical day at school. Jackson found that “participants made direct and indirect connections between their experiences related to being gay or lesbian, and their classroom practices, creating safety, establishing a rapport with students, incorporating social justice, and building on students’ understandings. How participants carried out these practices in their classrooms changed over time based on how comfortable they were expressing their sexual orientation at school” (p. 2).

A first year teacher, Krywanczyk (2007), wrote about how she assumed her first teaching assignment with the intention of queering public school pedagogy. “Queering curricula and lesson content means fighting against the frequent institutional regulation of discussions of identity to celebrations of diversity, tokenization and undiscriminating inclusiveness” (Krywanczyk, 2007, p. 28). Queering the role of teacher involves a refusal to maintain conventional ideas about the teacher as an objective and fair figure of power (Krywanczyk, 2007). This allows a teacher to reveal the biases, identities, and assumptions that everyone brings to a conversation (Krywanczyk, 2007). “Queering of normative pedagogy includes passing as an eighth grader in my appearance. This is one of the moments when lines among pedagogical content, classroom atmosphere, and personal presentation become very blurry” (Krywanczyk, 2007, p. 32). Extending beyond rote identity, queer pedagogy, extends beyond the variance of possibilities “in a progressive or revolutionary movement” (Krywanczyk, 2007, p. 32).

In 2007, seven self identified gay male teachers participated in a study. Their ages
ranged from 26-54, and their experience ranged from beginning teacher to 35 years of experience. The participants did, however, vary the degree to which they are open at work (Mayo, 2007). Mayo (2007) claimed that each participant was open about his sexual orientation socially, but only one was openly gay at school. Despite working in school environments that are often hostile toward gay-themed topics in discussions, these teachers have identified areas where gay-themed issues can openly be discussed like other mainstream issues, without having them raise suspicions or curiosity about the teacher’s sexual orientation (Mayo, 2007). “These gay teachers navigate individual classroom atmospheres and move forward without fear of losing their jobs” (Mayo, 2007, p. 257). There is agreement that students and teachers use homophobic language. The difference, however, is how gay teachers address that language (Mayo, 2007). “This study reveals some of the unique challenges faced by gay teachers who work in a politically conservative southeastern state” (Mayo, 2007, p. 461). This study also revealed that gay teachers, especially in this part of the country, are influenced by the school effect of the role they are required to play, the hegemonic or dominant male role (Mayo, 2007).

The previous studies have identified how LGBT educators perceive their relationships with their colleagues and students in their school communities. Some of the research discussed how these educators negotiate their identities and how that negotiation affects their roles and practices associated with their school roles. Next I will discuss the design of the study, how the participants were selected, and how the data were collected. Additionally, the theory and method used to analyze the data, as well as the limitations to the study are noted.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological procedures and the analytical approaches used in this study. As the focus of this research is to explore the experiences of public and Catholic school teachers and administrators who identify themselves as gay or lesbian. It provides a description of the methodology for this qualitative research using interviews and focus groups. The insights obtained from this qualitative research reveal insight and understanding about how gay and lesbian teachers and administrators negotiate their identities in their school environments, and the effects the negotiation has on their roles and responsibilities, as well as how it affects their relationships in their school communities.

In the first section of this chapter, the design of the study is detailed. It describes the method used to gather information to address the research questions listed in Chapter 1. This chapter also includes information about the participant selection process, and the participants that were interviewed and participated in the focus groups for this study. Additionally the methodology chapter describes the interview instrument that was used, a description of the procedure, and an explanation about how the data were analyzed. The final section of this chapter focuses on the limitations of this particular research study.

Design of the Study

Qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, data take the form of words rather than numbers (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992). Qualitative researchers strive to preserve and analyze the situated form, content, and experience of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). “Qualitative data are analyzed and
presented in the form of case studies, critiques, and sometimes verbal reports” (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992, p. 7). For this qualitative study, I have collected two different sources of evidence through both semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The use of semi-structured interviews involved asking predetermined questions, but allowed the flexibility of asking for an explanation about a response or more specific information regarding one of their answers, as well as allowing for the participants to express anecdotes about some of the experiences they may have had (Berg, 2007). “Questions used in a semi-structured interview can reflect an awareness that individuals understand in the world in varying ways” (Berg, 2007, 95). Researchers can achieve this by adjusting the level of language of scheduled questions or through unscheduled follow-up questions (Berg, 2007). “This approach to interviewing demonstrates a commitment to ask genuinely open-ended questions that offer the individuals who are being interviewed an opportunity to respond in their own words, expressing their own personal perspectives (Patton, 2002). Qualitative interviews offer the interviewer the flexibility to engage in a range of topics and allow the participant a chance to shape the content of the interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). “When the interviewer controls the content too rigidly, when the subject cannot tell his or her story personally in his or her own words, the interview falls out of the qualitative range” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 94).

Open-ended interview questions allow the interviewer to ask questions about a particular topic, and then probe more deeply into the areas and issues that the participant initiates (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The semi-structured, open-ended interview requires carefully and fully wording each question to ensure that each subject was asked the same questions, “the same
stimuli, in the same way and same order” (Patton, 2002, p. 344). The interviews were scheduled at a time and location convenient for the educator being interviewed. The responses to these interviews were then analyzed to determine the common themes.

These themes were then used to develop the topics and discussion prompts for the focus groups. Focus group work goes further than listening. The setting was where a participant is addressed in greater depth than usual (Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999). “Often research participants are discussing issues which are seldom mentioned in an everyday context beyond the routine exchange of jokes or platitudes” (Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999, p. 165). Often times this may be the first time that the participants have articulated specific views and experiences (Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999). The focus groups were scheduled by the educators forming the focus groups. The focus groups were formed by inviting those who have several LGBT teachers working in the same district, or preferred discussing this issue with others, rather than in a one-on-one interview. Focus groups are typically homogeneous groups (Patton, 2002). Focus groups may facilitate, rather than inhibit, discussion about sensitive topics (Farquhar, 1999). Sensitive topics include any discussion of a variety of aspects about sexuality, including sexual relationships, practice and identity (Farquhar, 1999).

Sociologists identify sexuality as an important site of dominance and conflict (Farquhar, 1999). “People can feel relatively empowered and supported in a group situation surrounded by their peers or friends” (Farquhar, 1999, p. 47). These focus group participants may also be more likely to share experiences and feelings in a setting of individuals with whom they sense to be like themselves (Farquhar, 1999). Sexual behavior, specifically sex between men which is “defined as deviant, and is subject to regulation and discipline; for example through the
privileging of heterosexuality, implementation of laws against homosexuality, and the operation of homophobia” (Farquhar, 1999, p. 51). The focus group was a discussion about their experiences in the school environment, specifically how they have negotiated their identities and how those identities have affected their relationships and their educational practices and responsibilities. The focus group consisted of five individuals discussing their experiences as out or closeted educators in a school system. “A focus group is an interview with small groups of people on a specific topic” (Patton, 2002, p. 385). Focus groups enhance self-esteem and develop solidarity (Reason, 1994).

Patton (2002) recommends that the researcher establish a rapport with the person being interviewed. That rapport, however must be established in such a way that it does not undermine neutrality (Patton, 2002). “Neutrality means that the person being interviewed can tell me anything without engendering either my favor or disfavor with regard to the content of his or her response” (Patton, 2002, p. 365). My being a gay male educator provided me with the knowledge and experience to facilitate these group discussions, as an “insider” (Baker & Hinton, 1999, p. 91). Facilitating the focus groups as a gay male educator, my understanding allowed me to establish a rapport, a feeling that I am one of them. Researchers, considered “outsiders” (p. 91) often lack the knowledge or experiences concerning relevant issues about the topic (Baker & Hinton, 1999).

“Rapport means that I respect the people being interviewed, so what they say is important because of who is saying it. It is critical to convey that their knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and feelings are important” (Patton, 2002, p. 366). Yet they must feel confident that I will not judge them for the content of whatever they might say (Patton, 2002). Having been both a gay
teacher and administrator, I could relate to much of what the participants were telling me, but knew that the interview questions were not value laden, or did they convey a negativity with regard to being a gay educator (Baker & Hinton, 1999). I was however careful not to appear shocked, angered, embarrassed, or saddened (Patton, 2002). There were therefore fewer limitations on what involvement I could achieve in terms of access to sensitive topics (Baker & Hinton, 1999). For example, sexual behaviors and the subject’s perceptions of stereotypical behavior were openly discussed.

The first stage of the research, the individual interviews, was completed over a four week period. All interviews and focus groups were scheduled off school grounds, at a time and place that was convenient for each participant. I recorded the individual interviews, as well as focus groups and transcribed the tape recordings. Each participant was then sent the transcription to review and approve prior to it being analyzed for my research. None of the participants requested that their transcript be changed, even when it included thoughts of lust and desire or condemning their administrators or colleagues.

The interview protocol was developed using items from the DeJean’s (2004) study and items from other studies examining similar issues (Appendix A). Patton (2002) suggests that interview protocol include various types of questioning. Questions about experiences and behaviors, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background/demographics should be included when developing interview questions (Patton, 2002). Six individual educators, four teachers and two administrators, were interviewed. Once those interviews were complete, and the themes and specific categories had been identified, they were used to prompt the two focus group discussions. The comments from those discussions were compared to the
individual interview responses in an attempt to identify patterns and themes among all gay and
lesbian educators. All participants were asked to tell their stories about what their relationships
and experiences as either an openly gay or lesbian K-12 educator or closeted gay or lesbian
educator. A narrative analysis included in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives,
historical memoirs, and creative nonfiction (Patton, 2002). “Narrative studies are also influenced
by phenomenology’s emphasis on understanding lived experience and perceptions of
experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 115). Berg (2007) refers to this story telling as “biography,
claiming it has always been an important aspect of social science research” (p. 278).

Having educators tell about their life’s professional experiences was biographic, and gave
them a voice. Qualitative research involves a researcher exploring individuals and their
experiences (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Griffith (1984) noted that first person accounts such
as biographies are necessary to understand the social group that has been ‘muted, excised from
history and invisible in the official records of culture’ (Long, 1987, p. 5).

**Participant Selection**

Four teachers and two administrators, who self identify as gay and lesbian educators,
with whom I am socially acquainted, informally agreed to be interviewed about their experiences
in their school communities. In addition to the six interviews, two focus groups were conducted
to gather data for this research study.

The six interviews were conducted from a list of potential candidates, both retired and
working, who had expressed a desire to participate in this potential research study, when it was
merely in the discussion stages. These discussions occurred many months prior to the time when
the interviews were actually conducted. After months of planning and preparing to collect the
data, many of those working participants claimed they no longer had the time after school started. Others agreed, and were sent the consent form and interview protocol. After several email attempts to schedule the interview, these participants stopped emailing me. All four of the teachers interviewed are currently working in a K-12 system. One of the administrators used in the study had been fired as a result of his homosexuality. The other administrator was taken out of his school and put into the district office, after a public confirmation of his homosexuality.

“Focus groups enable researchers to examine people’s different perspectives as they operate within a social network” (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999, p. 5). Focus groups are ideal for exploring how perspectives are constructed and expressed (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). Originally, two of the teachers, one in a suburban district and one in the metropolitan Catholic school system, contacted their gay and lesbian colleagues within their school systems and asked them to participate. I asked them to identify no fewer than four and no more than six individuals who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender teachers who would agree to be part of the focus group discussion. If they agreed, they were given my contact information and asked to contact me directly. The Catholic school teacher participated as we had discussed gathering four of his gay and lesbian colleagues for the focus group. The suburban school educator contacted his colleagues. My contact claimed that all of those who he contacted claimed they had no time, using a myriad of excuses not to participate. When I suggested that he approach them again, guaranteeing their anonymity, he finally commented that there was merely a lack of interest when looking beyond the excuses.

This system of participant recruitment is known as snowball sampling, getting new contacts from someone agreeing to be a research subject (Patton, 2002). “This is an approach for
locating information-rich key informants or critical cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 237). Snowball sampling is frequently the best way to study sensitive or difficult to reach populations (Lee, 1993). The participants in the focus groups agreed to participate as they had been asked by someone they knew, a trusted friend.

The confidentiality of their interview and focus group responses was ensured through both the research consent form, and my assurance at the beginning of each interview and focus groups discussion. I conducted each interview and facilitated both focus groups. Due to the sensitivity of this issue, each interview was scheduled separately, and their identities remain confidential. Each participant has been given a pseudonym, as has each member of the focus groups. The members of each focus group knew each other and agreed to be part of the group discussion. The name of each individual, as well as the school district in which they work, will remain confidential in the reporting of data, as well as in any publication of the data. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, if any educator viewed this as a cathartic experience and felt the need for support, a list of support services and resources was offered to each individual interviewed (see appendix).

As the goal of this research study was to examine self-identified gay and lesbian teachers’ and administrators’ experiences about their experiences in their schools, the gay and lesbian educators included those new to the teaching field and veteran educators, both Black and Caucasian, in public and Catholic schools, working in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Schools are often described as a microcosm of the community in which it is located. School and norms are often determined the setting in which it is located. The settings associated with each
educator refer to the social setting of the school or district. As the purpose of this study was to interview educators from rural, urban, and suburban school settings, and how one defines each may differ from person to person. For this reason, I will describe how urban, rural, and suburban communities are characterized for the purpose of this study. These descriptions about urban, rural, and suburban communities provide a description about each educator’s school setting, as it was defined for this study. This study includes participants from all three school settings and often influences their responses to various questions about their homosexuality and freedom to be out in their school communities.

**Urban**

“Changing global economies are combining with traditional urban problems of disinvestments and racial segregation to create new urban threats of excessive poverty, high unemployment, and significant population loss” (Cuomo, 1999). These urban challenges are not limited to a few large cities in sections of the northeast or midwest, but rather they confront all regions of the country in a considerable number of small and mid-sized communities (Cuomo, 1999). Urban within an educational context, however, is related to the characteristics of city life. Inner-city schools are characterized by aging buildings, inadequate supplies, and shortages of licensed teachers, along with the issues of poverty, racism, and violence (Halford, 1996).

The 1965 Moynihan Report noted how family instability, joblessness, poor health, substance abuse, poverty, welfare dependency, and crime were intertwined. More than forty years later specific neighborhoods have shifted, with poverty moving away from the inner city,
but the design of ecological concentration and racial stratification has not changed (Sampson & Morenoff, 2006). Moynihan (1965) claimed that a holistic approach turns on the knot of connections:

It is our view that the problem is so inter-related, one thing with another, that any list of program proposals would necessarily be incomplete, and would distract attention from the main point of inter-relations. We have shown a clear relation between male employment for example, and the number of welfare dependent children. Employment in turn reflects educational achievement, which depends in large part on family stability, which reflects employment. Where we should break into this cycle, and how, are the most difficult domestic questions that face the United States (p. 17).

Statistics taken from the 1990 and 2000 census were used to create a measure of concentrated disadvantage: welfare recipient, poverty, unemployment, female-headed households, racial composition (percentage black), and density of children (Sampson, 2009). Liska and Bellair (1995) found that robbery rates played a significant role in white flight from central cities thus intensifying racially segregated urban poverty.

“Perhaps the most persistent common barrier to learning in urban schools is poverty” (Ferrandino, 2001, p.80). For students living in urban poverty, coming to school prepared to learn is complicated by hunger, substandard housing, poor health, and unstable family lives. Urban leaders in schools must also address these burdens. The urban school districts serve a culturally diverse and highly transient student population, which is another characteristic of high poverty areas (Riggins-Newby, 2001). Another problem shared by urban schools is a lack of adequate resources (Ferrandino, 2001). These are the urban environmental challenges of urban
educational leadership.

**Rural**

Research on rural communities has the tendency to be small in scope and usually centers on the rural community as a social system. Purdy (1999) defines rural as area’s population density is less than 500 people per square mile and 90% of country population is in rural areas or the county has no urban area with a population of 10,000 or more. “Rural places have always had a double significance in American culture. Persistent darkness in country life is poverty, solitude, hidden violence, endless labor and nature’s arbitrary, indifferent thwarting of human ends” (Purdy, 1999, p. 36). Many of these areas, however, have a firm grasp on those who live there, and their contentment is based on community; labor and its seasonal, basic survival; and the closeness to living things (Purdy, 1999).

Rural areas are generally considered relatively sparsely populated areas. These individuals value high levels of trust, support, and strong connections among other community members. A few stores line main street and possibly a restaurant open for breakfast and lunch. Many of these communities do not have a post office, government service offices, as the offices are located in the center of the region, such as a county or territory. Consolidation and centralization of schools and shopping are also characteristics of many rural areas.

Rural culture is traditionally organized by kinship systems that link blood lineage, legal marriage and land ownership (Boswell, 1980). Culture is bolstered when there is consistency and fluidity between family, community and religious systems (Salamon, 1992). People whose identities are perceived as undermining the culture, for example GLBT people, are considered
threatening to social order and sanctions are used to promote exclusion (Boswell, 1980). Oswald and Culton (2003) found that homosexuals who live in rural settings identify living in a hostile climate and not having the same civil rights as heterosexual people, as the worst thing about living in a rural area.

The majority of studies on rural communities have found that rural residents have a tendency to adapt to most externally imposed economic and social forces with little opposition (Lobao, 2007). Other rural community research focused on communities/ resiliency with regard to networks and social infrastructures (Flora & Flora, 2003). Kazyak (2008) researched the experiences of gay and lesbian individuals in rural areas in the midwestern United States. She found that respondents do report being fearful of consequences of being open about their sexual identities. Some had even experienced those consequences. Many qualitative pieces have shown that being gay in rural America is especially difficult (McCarthy, 2000; Boulden, 2001). A few quantitative studies on this topic have found that living in rural areas contributes to higher levels of sexual prejudice towards homosexuality (Wills & Crawford, 2000; Herek, 2002). For example, a national study found that farmers were more likely to think that homosexuality was ‘immoral’ (Loftus, 2001).

**Suburban**

A suburb is defined as the district or town on the outskirts of a city (Agnes, 2002, p. 632). “Suburban places make up an extremely heterogeneous universe of cities, even when marginal types are excluded. The term suburb refers to the relatively small but formally structured community adjacent to and dependent upon a larger central city” (Martin, 1956, p. 446-447). Suburbs are described as middle-class to upper income communities. Therefore middle–class
patterns of interaction and participation can be expected (Martin, 1956).

Lynch (1987) found while studying suburban homosexuals that the middle-class suburban settings in which most respondents were raised, lived, or want to live strongly reinforced the values of successful career and home ownership. “Devotion to work, home ownership/maintenance, and continued interaction with heterosexual co-workers, relatives, and friends, left little free time for constructing a viable homosexual identity” (Lynch, 1987, p. 31).

Suburbia might seem to be the last place in which gay and lesbian people would actively choose to live. “The formation of homosexual identity is inhibited in the suburbs” (Lynch, 1987, p. 39). Typically organized around the heterosexual family home, “suburbs appear to be the straightest spaces imaginable in the Anglophone West” (Dines, 2005, p. 176). A study by Yang and Jargowsky (2006) claimed that since there is little agreement on how suburbanization should be measured, they used indicators suggested by relevant literature. “These suburbanization indicators are urban density gradient, population density, homogeneity of new growth, exclusivity of local zoning, and inaccessibility of jobs” (p. 268).

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) identify three main approaches for analyzing qualitative data: interpretative approaches, social anthropological approaches, and collaborative social research approaches. The interpretative approach allows researches to treat social action and human activity as text (Berg, 2007). The social anthropological approach provides the researcher with a unique perspective on the data collected, as well as a particular understanding of the participants and how they interpret their social worlds (Berg, 2007). The collaborative social researcher works with their participants in a given settings, allowing the data to be used to
develop a plan for social change (Berg, 2007).

Berg (2007) suggests that qualitative data be analyzed using six steps:

1. Data are collected and made into text
2. Codes are analytically developed or inductively identified in the data and affixed to the transcriptions
3. Codes are transformed into categorical labels or themes
4. Materials are sorted by these categories, identifying similar phrases, patterns, relationships, and commonalities or disparities
5. Sorted materials are examined to isolate meaningful patterns and processes
6. Identified patterns are considered in light of previous research and theories, and a small set of generalizations is established (p. 306).

The interviews and focus groups provided the data for this research study. The participants’ responses were recorded and transcribed. “Each transcription was written just as the individuals had spoken, including any slang, dialects, or pauses offered by the subject” (Berg, 2007, p. 162). Each transcription was emailed to the participant who was interviewed to ensure accuracy. Once the transcriptions had been reviewed, the responses were categorized into three categories consisting of identity negotiation, relationships, and teaching practice or responsibilities associated with the educators’ roles. While those themes were identified in the research questions, I remained open to the emergence of other themes as I coded the data. The questionnaire responses were subjected to content analysis to identify emergent patterns and themes in the responses. “Qualitative data need to be reduced and transformed in order to make
them more readily accessible, understandable, and to draw out various themes and patterns” (Berg, 2007, p. 47). Open-coding was used to identify the first group of codes (Berg, 2007). The thematic meanings were collapsed and coded into larger themes identified from the most frequent responses emerging from the initial coding (Patton, 2002). “The theme is more useful unit to count. The themes identified from the individual interviews were then used to develop the focus group discussion topics (Appendix B). Researchers might use only the primary theme in a given paragraph locations of alternatively might count every theme in a give text under analysis” (Berg, 2007, p. 312).

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) claim that the goal of any biographical study is to identify and reveal themes that demonstrate significant times or occurrences in a person’s life and truly reveal the individual.

“Grounded theory suggests that theory emerges inductively from the data, that is ‘from the ground up” (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007, p. 10). Glaser and Strauss (1967) define well constructed grounded theory meets four criteria: fit, understanding, generality, and control. First, “the theory must fit the substantive area to which it will be applied is the underlying basis or a grounded theory’s four requisite properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.238). If theory is true to the authenticity of the area being studied and induced from diverse data, then it should fit that area of study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Second, as the data represents reality, it should make sense and be understandable to those who were studied and those practicing in the field (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Next, “if the data upon which it is based are comprehensive and interpretations conceptual and broad, the theory should be abstract enough and include sufficient
variation to make it applicable to a variety of contexts related to that phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). The final criteria is control, the theory should provide control with consideration given to the action toward the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). “This is because the hypotheses proposing relationships among concepts, which later may be used to guide action, are systematically derived from actual data related to that phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). A person must be able to use the substantive theory to make it applicable to everyday situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The data were analyzed using a constructivist grounded theory approach advocated by Patton (2002). A conventional view uses the “objectivist” perspective or a “positivist” lens (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007, p. 10). A more recent perspective is called the “constructivist” view, identified as an “interpretive” lens (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007, p. 10). The objectivist or positivist approach believes that the real world and the truths it holds are waiting to be discovered (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). The constructivist/interpretative approach holds the belief that the world is made real through people’s actions and thoughts; it emerges and does not exist in some external form (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). The constructivist researcher’s interactions with participants contribute to the emerging concepts. The researcher functions as a participant as well as an observer (Chesebro & Borissoff, 2007, p. 11).

I relied on feedback and the interview responses from the participants to drive the data collection and analysis. “Grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical content” (Patton, 2002, p. 125). The objectivist researcher collects rich data that are placed in categories that are privileged over experience, while the constructivist researcher collects data that include the feelings and interpretations of what participants reveal.
both explicitly (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). “Ultimately, it is possible that the data may remain at a more intuitive and impressionistic level” (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007, p. 11). Additionally, codes were created using the themes and patterns (analytic categories) shaped by questions asked during the interview process. Specific data grounded themes were used to sort the responses to assorted interview questions (Berg, 2007).

Each participant was interviewed once or participated in a focus group. Each participant’s interview responses have also been compared to other responses, specifically looking for patterns and themes, but also noting exceptions. The constructivist’s approach assumes methods that are open to refinement that can illuminate how participants construct reality; it does not presume a generalizable truth about reality. The goal is to identify the meaning people construct as they interact (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). A rich variety of methodological combinations can be used to “illuminate research questions” (Patton, 2002, p. 248). The collection of both individual interview data, as well as focus group discussion data provided two sources of information for this research study, which will be used to address the research questions identified in Chapter 1. Many of the educator’s stories, as narrative or biographic information, have also been recorded as data. Qualitative reports have been described as ‘anecdotal,’ as they often contain quotations used to explain a specific situation or view in narrative form (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 5).

Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. The investigator did not allow anyone to read the interview transcripts or listen to audiotapes of the interviews. The only exception is my faculty advisor for the study. All interview and focus group audiotapes and transcripts have been stored in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed after the study is
completed. Consent forms have also been stored in a secure place where they will remain for three years and then be destroyed. No names, school districts, or even the city have been identified in reporting the results of this study.

In qualitative research, the researcher must be cognizant of personal biases, beliefs, and attitudes. I, as an openly gay man, continue to have vivid memories of the torment and anguish of a public school experience and as a secondary school educator. Born into a White, middle-class, male-dominant segment of our society, I never seemed to experience the comfort typically afforded to a White, middle-class male. Being a gay man, I often have wondered how my school experience would have been different had my teachers and my classmates known about my homosexuality. I have remained mindful of personal biases and attitudes while interviewing school participants and other aspects of conducting this research study.

**Limitations**

This research study will provide a view of both teachers and administrators, working in urban, suburban, and rural environments, in public and private school settings. One limitation is that all of the research participants are from a greater midwestern metropolitan area. Only one of the seven school districts represented in the study have employee anti-discrimination policies that include gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, listed under their protected groups of individuals. Another limitation was that all of the participants identified as either gay men or lesbians. No one participating in this study identified as bi-sexual or transgendered. Another limitation to this study is that it was conducted in one of the midwestern states which have adopted a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, and does not provide anti-discrimination
protection to LGBT individuals at the state level. If states provide an anti-discrimination law banning any type of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, individuals would feel less fear about disclosing their sexual identities. Only one of educators interviewed worked in a school district that provides an anti-discrimination policy in his contract that states that he cannot be fired for being a gay man. A final limitation was that of the 11 participants in this study, only one was African-American, or not White. The African-American in this study is not intended to be the voice of all African-American gay men, but is voice of one African-American gay man in a Catholic school setting.

This chapter detailed the design of this qualitative study, as well as how the data was collected and analyzed for this research study. Moreover, the grounded theory used to frame the data were examined. “In grounded theory publication, the reader should be able to make judgments about some of the components of the research process that led to the publication” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 252). Furthermore, how the participants for this study, both the individual interviews and the focus group participants, were selected is examined. The limitations to the study are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter four will discuss the findings of the data collected and the themes will be identified. Also analyzed will be how those themes from the data formed a constructivist grounded theory framework. As the gay and lesbian teachers and administrators were from suburban, urban, and rural school settings, how these settings are defined for this study is also detailed. The transcripts have been analyzed and the stories and interview responses of the gay and lesbian public and Catholic school teachers and administrators are all detailed in depth in
Chapter 4. Their stories and interview responses are clustered into the themes that were identified when analyzing the data from the individual interviews and focus groups.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis

In the first three chapters, I have provided information about how homophobia and heterosexism have permeated not only the public school communities, but also the Catholic schools as well. Various research projects have identified how LGBT educators navigate their identities in their public and Catholic school communities, in addition to how those identities affected their relationships and affected their roles and responsibilities in their schools. The third chapter discussed the methodology of the study. This chapter presents the data analysis.

Participant Interviews and Focus Group Descriptions

As mentioned in Chapter 3, individual interview participants for this study included two administrators and four teachers, and the Catholic school focus group included three teachers and two counselors. For the reporting of their stories, pseudonyms have been given to each participant, along with a few general characteristics of each subject. Pseudonyms have been also given to the educator’s partners or colleagues if they were mentioned by name during the interview or focus group discussion.

Robert is 55 years old, White, and was a rural gay public school elementary administrator until 18 months ago. He was a teacher for five years at the elementary level, and then became an elementary school principal for 23 ½ years. Susan is a 32 year old White lesbian high school math teacher in a rural school district. She has spent all 10 years of her teaching career in the same position. Richard is a 56 year old, White gay junior high and high school teacher in an area that has changed from rural to suburban during his 31 years of teaching in the same school district. Adam is White, 44 years old and was a gay elementary school principal last year and
this year works in district office as the transportation director. Adam spent 11 years teaching at
the elementary level, and eight years as an elementary school principal prior to becoming the
district’s transportation director. George who is 45 is a gay first grade teacher in an urban school
environment for a large school district. He has been teaching for nine years, and has been in the
same position all nine years of his teaching career. Teaching was a second career for George,
after spending 15 years in the printing business. Edward is a White, 27 year old gay special
education teacher in a suburban high school. He has been teaching for four years, all in his
current position. All of these educators represented six different school districts.

The Catholic high school focus group included Rose, a White, 61 year old lesbian
teacher; Dennis, a 51 year old White gay counselor and boys’ soccer coach; Scott is a 39 year
old, White gay religion teacher; David, a White, 62 year old gay teacher; and Michael is 31,
African-American, and a gay counselor and football coach. The Catholic school focus group
came from two urban school environments. Four of the participants were from the same all
boys’ Catholic school and one was from a different Catholic school. The following is provided
to more easily navigate these educator’s stories woven throughout this chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>School Setting</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Grade Level Subject area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>rural public</td>
<td>28 ½</td>
<td>elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>rural public</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>high school math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>suburban public</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>junior high/ high school social studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>urban public</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>urban public</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>suburban public</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>high school intervention specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>urban Catholic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>high school theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Counselor and soccer coach</td>
<td>urban Catholic</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>urban Catholic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>high school religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>urban Catholic</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>high school foreign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Counselor and football coach</td>
<td>urban Catholic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>high school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table provides a snapshot view of the educators participating in this study. Throughout this chapter, there will times when only their pseudonyms will be provided, and this table will provide a quick reference of the characteristics for each subject.

The three major themes that emerged from the individual interviews: identity negotiation, how open they can be and the challenges they face if they are out; relationships, who are the participants open with and whether that affects their relationship; and how does their being out or closeted affect their daily roles and practices. Those three themes were then used to guide the Catholic school focus group discussion.
Identity Negotiation

All participants in the research expressed varying levels of identity disclosure in their school environments citing fear as a major reason. Fear was mentioned 12 times during the Catholic school focus group during a three hour discussion, but only 12 times during the six individual interviews, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. The word fear was far more prevalent among the Catholic school educators, when compared to the public school educators. This may have been caused due to their working in a Catholic school setting, or as this was a focus group of Catholic educators, the word fear may have been more common as once it had been mentioned, others used the same term to describe their feelings.

Richard, a 56 year old, gay school teacher did not have the opportunity to hide his identity.

During the late ‘80s, I was very active in the gay community. I even appeared on the gay television program “Out Front.” It was during this time that some of the kids saw the program and began talking about me being on the program but were not associating it with my homosexuality. I ran a very successful theatre program and even started Boosters Program. I stopped running the theatre program in ’93. It was the same year that I attended the Gay March in Washington, D. C., and it was the same year our 8th graders took their class trip to Washington. As I was carrying the “Ohio Banner,” on the outer edge of the marching group, out 8th graders walked by on their tour of the city. That Monday when I returned to school, the principal and superintendent met me at the door, claiming I was seen at the gay rights march and a lot of parents are all upset. This was also about the time that I got into an 8 year relationship with an ex-student, 20 years
my junior, I kept a picture of myself and my partner on my desk. When the school community found out about our relationship, I was called into the Superintendent’s office, my partner came along. When the superintendent asked about the nature of our relationship, my partner told her it was none of her fucking business, and we walked out. His problem, however, was with the principal. From the beginning of the school year until the last day of school, he did everything he could to make my life miserable. For the past 10-15 years, the principal has brought every letter, email, and phone message from parents and community members complaining about my being open and authentic about who I am at school. There has been no support in the school, no support for what the kids are saying to me. I once patted a kid on the back for doing a good job or something. The principal again called me in and claimed I was molesting the boy. I was told that if I had been asked if I was gay, I had to lie about it, and that was probably one of the most frustrating things I’ve ever had to do. My administrators have never had a problem with my teaching, it’s always been the political pressure of my homosexuality that has been the issue.

Sixty-eight percent of educators have experienced some form of discriminations and claimed that it has a negative effect on their work performance, 90% have increased anxiety, 80 % have become depressed, and 63 % have experienced a loss of confidence (Irwin, 2002).

Susan, a 32 year old lesbian teacher, has been told by her administrator to hide her sexual identity as much as possible.

My colleagues know about my partner, but my students generally don’t. I believe that
those students who need to know, who need a role model, realize. But I am not able to be public about it in general. I am not able to speak about it because I have had parents call and want their children removed from my class when they found out I was a lesbian. My administration prefers my discretion. However, if it comes up (particularly since my students know about my children) I will answer honestly.

One distinction between Richard and Susan is the level of support each received from his and her administration. While Richard received no support when parents called and complained, Susan’s principal, while asking her to be discrete about her homosexuality, did support her when parents chose to make an issue about her being a lesbian and mother. Only two of the teachers interviewed for this study claimed to have support from their administrators regarding the issues related to their homosexuality. Most heterosexual school administrators do not believe that their sexual orientation influences their administrative practice (Capper, 1999), however many gay and lesbian teachers might disagree.

Adam, a 44 year old administrator, however told a much different story about the negotiation of homosexual identity.

I can say that I don’t believe anything has been a direct result of my sexual orientation. Who’s to know. I will tell you that I’ve always lived my life openly and never tried to hide anything. First of all, I’ve never dated women. So from my first day teaching until now, I’ve never claimed to have had a girlfriend or anything that would allude to such. I’m assuming people put two and two together and figured things out on their own. Certainly there will always be people who have their views, but I can say that people with
whom I’ve confided about sexual orientation have been very supportive. The only difference is they’ve tried to find me boyfriends and husbands. There’s a very large gay and lesbian population on the staff in the district, so I’ve never considered it an issue. There are a number of gay and lesbian administrators and staff members throughout the district.

McNinch (2007) agrees that homosexual educators must be authentic in their roles to be most effective. Educators are vulnerable public figures, regardless of one’s sexual orientation needing approval, conflicted by the authority imposed by their roles and fearful that they will or have become in public domain something separate from their personal selves (McNinch, 2007).

Robert, a 55 year old administrator, had a very different experience in negotiating his sexual identity. He commented that he lived in constant fear being a gay administrator.

Living in constant fear and trying to fit in. I know there were probably some homosexual students that I could have helped, but I knew I couldn’t. I knew I couldn’t be who I really was or it would be professional suicide. And not trying to be egotistical, I think I did such a good job, but I couldn’t do it because of their perception about who I was, and I wouldn’t get that opportunity. The self hatred, self loathing, and keeping my identity quiet that caused me to function in a state of constant fear.

“Signs operate in the development of individual psyche’s within a given society, as we all daily immerse ourselves in the invisible, yet functional, ocean of signs that surround us in our every worlds” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 3-4). Many of the more veteran educators expressed more difficulty while negotiating their sexual identities. They discussed how their fear of disclosure
often promoted feelings of isolation and anxiety. “Older homosexuals may experience more internalized feeling of homophobia (D’Angelli & Grossman, 2001) and greater reticence to disclose their sexual identity” (Ford & Priest, 2004, p. 99). Internalized homophobia, which many of these educators expressed, feeling, is defined as directing antigay social attitudes toward the self, often causing a depression, internal conflicts and low self-esteem (Meyer & Dean, 1998).

The Catholic school educators negotiate their identities more cautiously than the public school educators. When asked about how they cope with their homosexual identities within the conservative establishment of a Catholic school environment, Dennis, a 51 year old, counselor and boys’ soccer coach claimed:

I find that a tough question. It would depend on the situation I was in as to how I would answer it. But in the workplace it could be how I present myself with my colleagues and my students is different, whether it’s socially or professionally. I’m also a graduate of the school that I’m working in. I was not out when I was a student here, but was in the process of coming out when I was hired here. I’m pretty out to everybody that knows me fairly well. I don’t talk about it. I wasn’t as out when I was younger, but as I’ve gotten older, it’s not anything I hide. I’m out to everyone in my department. I’m out to everyone I coach with. I’m out to the administration. I’m out to probably half of the faculty and staff, but I don’t let that define me. I was talking to a co-worker yesterday, our school psychologist, and I said I do remind myself every time I walk in the building that I am gay and it does hit me. Because I know that at any time, if they wanted to, just on that issue alone, they could ask me to leave.
Rose struggles with her identity more than Dennis. She counters commenting:

I am not out, as a lesbian teacher here. I am professional in how I deal with all of my colleagues, I think. In the classroom, for instance kids will call me Mrs. (Smith), and I don’t stop them or correct them. They may think I’m married or have a sexual relationship. Mostly they don’t know, and they don’t care. They simply associate a female with being a Mrs. and when I don’t correct them that’s fine, because it doesn’t enter into our relationship, as it shouldn’t. In the classroom, I’m not out. But in the workplace that’s different.

Rose commented that she does not correct her students when they refer to her as Mrs., and that her being a lesbian does not affect her teaching. Lesbian teachers have the same responsibility as all other teachers: teaching their students (Melillo, 2003). “The lesbian educators, even if they are out, walk a fine line in an effort to maintain the perception of being fair and free from their own prejudices” (Melillo, 2003, p. 14).

Michael, an African-American Catholic school counselor and football coach, described how he felt being a gay educator.

There’s just so much more restriction. I see that it’s a bigger issue than the color issue. It affects me on a daily basis. While everyone else has a sense of freedom, I feel like I have to put up a wall that’s constantly around me and I’m filtering everything that comes out of my mouth. It’s just like I was talking to Dennis, a colleague, in the hallway yesterday and I made a comment that a student was cute. The next day another student walked in my office and commented, “So you think so and so is cute, huh?” You just have to be
very careful about everything you say and who can hear you say it, because others will use any information you give them, and they’re looking for it. And some kids will use it because they want to get closer and they need someone to talk to, so they wait to hear those subtleties and use them to help them get to know you better.

Ford and Priest (2004) found that religion often affects the lives of many individuals, regardless of their ethnicity. Michael, the African-American Catholic school football coach stated his sexuality issue is bigger than his race issue in his position. He claimed that if students attempt to learn more about his personal life, the more authority he asserts over them. Morris (2008) who found that men fashion masculinity differently considering their race, class, or sexual orientation.

Another issue in identity negotiation was to determine if these teachers and administrators’ sexual identity affected them when they decided to enter the field of education, with the public perception of homosexuality being what it is. Herek (2002a) found that there continues to be a public perception that links homosexuality to pedophilia. George, the 45 year old, first grade teacher explained:

Actually I wasn’t sure how people would respond. I was worried about “what if” I was outed, or “what if” someone made a comment about my being a child molester, just because I’m gay. You know for a while, dateline and other shows were doing programs about pedophiles, and people’s perceptions. That was the first thing I thought about; what if I was accused of being a child molester, and how would I ever overcome that. I worried about that especially when I first started because I did have K-6, and those 4th, 5th, and 6th grade boys, and I was worried about that whole thing, but like here we have to
stand at the bathroom door when the boys go in. And I was just worried about how that might be perceived, but I’ve never had a problem. But initially, all those fears play with your mind and you think about them.

The gay and lesbian teachers from Jackson’s (2007) study all expressed some fear as they began their teaching careers, claiming they spent some time in the “closeted teaching stage” (p. 44). Her participants described the beginning of their teaching careers as time when they were concerned with proving themselves as teachers, rather than focusing on their sexual identities (Jackson, 2007). These participants feared their gayness would be perceived as a flaw, their super teacher image left no room for their gay identities (Jackson, 2007).

Robert, a 56 year old, past administrator expressed many of the same fears as he explains it in this way:

Scary real scary. Scared about how to deal with colleagues, families, students and other’s questions or comments. I was scared for myself. In the early part of my career, I was still trying to hide behind a mask of heterosexuality. It was until about the last 10 years that I felt somewhat comfortable in removing the mask and being somewhat open about who I was as an authentic gay man. It was however a scary, tense road to know that I was a gay educator.

George and Robert both expressed fear about how they would perceived as educators if members of the school community were to identify them as gay men. McNinch (2007) noted that for gay and lesbian educators to be authentic and most effective in their roles, they must shed their masks.
Edward, at the age of 27, the youngest of the educators interviewed, even expressed some fear about entering the teaching arena.

I was cautious about who knew, and somewhat fearful about things that might be said or suggested, and various other stigma such as gay teachers are going to sleep with students or have inappropriate conversations with students. So I guess I was cautious, but as time went on, I’m not as worried about it. But it’s still in the back of my mind that I need to watch what I say and to whom I say it.

Unfounded hatred or fear of homosexuals is how Agnes (2002) defines homophobia. Discrimination and hostility toward gay men and lesbians is common in our country’s schools (Sears, 2005). Fear and fearful were mentioned most frequently when discussing identity negotiation, but were also used in describing the participant’s relationships.

When these participants were asked how they would describe what it has been like for them to be a gay or lesbian educator, these were their responses. They were also asked how their personal fear affected them in being open as they established and maintained relationships with others in their school communities.

Richard described it as living two different lives, elaborating about how he feels

Very schizophrenic – I’ve had to lead a split life, personal vs. professional. It affects my own sense of accomplishment. It’s so exhausting. There were times when I felt like I was being forced back into the closet again. It’s so uncomfortable on a daily basis. If straight teachers have affairs it’s no big deal, but my dating another man is catastrophic. I’m constantly filled with fear.
Rose best explained it even as she entered the teaching profession 35 years ago; she knew how her being a lesbian teacher would affect her.

When I entered the teaching profession, I had three interviews on the same day, and my last interview was with the school board president and he asked me if I was gay, and I lied. Because I figured he wasn’t asking me in a positive way, he wasn’t going to say oh good we need a gay woman on the faculty. I felt really bad about lying. I felt like I betrayed myself. I felt like I betrayed my partner. I betrayed everything that we had worked for to buy a house together, to be partners together, to be part of a social structure together. I felt really bad about it, and I still feel bad about it. When I have to write down on any form that I’m single, sometimes they have a place to write something down, like significant other, but I don’t do that here. It would be dangerous to do that here. I felt pretty much abused then and I allowed it. I allow it in my life too, outside of here.

Richard was the only educator participating in this study that expressed his oppression as a factor in his career. Adam, however, claimed that his sexual orientation does not make him feel differently in a school setting noting, “I Suppose it’s like being a straight educator. My sexual orientation doesn’t define me in a way that I feel any different than anyone else.”

George and Edward both felt that there were not an excessive number of challenges and burdens attached to being gay teachers. Edward’s challenge seemed more a frustration than a challenge, commenting,
A challenge is that I’m not able to fully connect with some of the students. There are some students that are gay, and I have to draw a line of professionalism about how to confide in them. I’m limited in what I can and cannot tell them as students versus if I saw them out or at a GLSEN event. Then I’d be more willing to give advice. Somewhat frustrating, yet more disappointing that I’m not able to give them some of the advice or knowledge that I’ve learned over the years.

Michael, a Catholic school counselor and football coach, agreed that there were minimal challenges and he did not feel like he was leading a double life.

Right now where I am in my life, I don’t think that I am leading a double life. I think people can make conclusions no matter what I do. And if there’s something I like, like the arts, I comment about it. If there’s something on Will and Grace, I feel comfortable talking about it. Even coaching football, I can be true to myself. I would never answer a kid’s personal question no matter what they ask me. Whether it’s dealing with something inappropriate or not, I’m not going to answer it so I feel like I’m being true to who I am and not leading a double life.

The responses from the majority of these educators support Cass’ (1979) claim that internalized homophobia may cause gay and lesbian individuals “to engage in avoidant coping strategies, such as restricting exposure to information regarding LGB persons and culture, inhibiting same-sex behavior, denying personal relevance of information regarding LGB persons, passing as heterosexual, and living a double life” (Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008, p. 517).
Richard had most likely experienced the most threatening challenges and burdens for being an openly gay teacher stating, “It’s been a constant struggle with the principal. I’ve had death threats, harassing phone calls, a brick thrown through the window of my home (with a note – ‘die fags’), my car tires have been deflated.”

Relating to Richard’s anxiety and isolation, Rose emphatically commented,

There is definitely anxiety and isolation as a lesbian educator. My partner and I have gone through numerous emotional days at times. She’s so tired of me saying I feel bound by not being out, because she is out at her place of work. She has made that choice in her last two jobs, by saying I am a lesbian and I have a partner. And she feels extremely fettered here because we cannot be affectionate with one another. We cannot express ourselves verbally to one another just in passing.

Rose’s frustration does not end when she leaves the school building.

In fact, because we work somewhat together here in the department, if we take that home and we’re still on that level, we clash because we’re trying to mix our professional work together with our personal home life. And when we carry that separation home with us, we bind each other up. And we don’t live in a really friendly neighborhood, although that could just be me. We’ve had a lot of discrimination in our neighborhood, and so if you feel you’re discriminated against at work, and you go home and feel more discrimination, sometimes we fight about it. And we should not be fighting about it. We should be deciding to move somewhere else, to change locations, to change jobs, to do
that but the comfort zone of teaching in a place like this school is huge; even with all the things I’m talking about that are very, very challenging.

Rose found comfort in the fact there were other gay and lesbian faculty at the school that she could talk to.

Scott, a Catholic school religion teacher, expressed extreme anxiety and fear at the idea of being an openly gay teacher.

I am in an environment where there is some very overt homophobia, in a very major way. Last year, even into this year there is a group of girls, lesbians, I think they’re on the soccer team, I’m not sure. A few of them had some type of confrontation with each other and they got into it in the hallway on a shadow day with the eighth graders and it was ugly. And it ended very inappropriately. I found out this year that our development director referred to them as a bunch of dykes. And felt free to make a comment like that with no retribution or anything along those lines. After I came out, another teacher who teaches recovery therapy, and I challenged him on that and it caused a huge episode and after three years he still claims that my questioning him defamed his character, threatening to sue me. So that’s the kind of environment I work in.

Internalized homophobia, also referred to as internalized heterosexism (Szymanski & Chung, 2003) or sexual prejudice (Herek, 2004), can be defined as directing antigay social attitudes toward the self, leading to a devaluation of the self, internal conflicts and poor self-regard (Meyer & Dean, 1998).

Scott went on to express just how much anxiety he does feel in his Catholic school setting, which is different from the other Catholic school educators in the focus group.
I teach at a different school but I would say that I’m tolerated, but in the worst sense of the word. There are one or two people, there’s an English teacher and a couple of others that have been genuinely supportive, but a principal who is a useless coward when it comes to issues like this. He’ll talk about values of tolerance and so on, but as soon as an issue comes up, or someone throws out the conservative Catholic card, he tucks his tail between his legs, just like a wimp. He has no courage. Even when he, outside of just being decent, to people who are different, he just doesn’t have what it takes to do that.

Dennis, while not in the same school, agreed noting,

As out as I am, I do feel like there are restrictions on myself and I have to be careful. It does create a lot of stress and anxiety. I don’t really feel isolated. That’s probably because I feel like I have a great support system here. But it does create anxiety, it does create some fear, it does make me think about moving on to another place of employment where I could be more open and honest, and not have to deny that part of me. I’ve thought about it at times, just being totally open and see what would happen and how the school would deal with it. But I really like this school, and I don’t think they would make me leave. But as a Catholic school they would have the right to do that, but I would fight it. I think I would get a lot of support if I fought it. I think they’re afraid of the fight, so I don’t think it’s going to happen, especially with what’s going on with the Catholic priest organization. They realize how widespread sexuality issues are within their own organization and if they put the issue on us, they’re going to have to deal with that issue in their organization. And I think that scares them to death because I think they
realize how widespread it is. Not that I would ever blackmail anybody, but I know certain things about certain people that I don’t think I would keep my mouth shut. So yes there is fear, there is anxiety, it is something I think about a lot.

“I just remember hating myself so much and tried to, I tried to run into the religion that was supposed to protect me, the religion that was teaching me about Jesus and the powerful love of God” (Kubicek, et al., 2009, p. 613). Varlas (2007) found that religion is often cited as the reason for condemning gay, lesbian, and queer (GLQ) individuals. Many conservative Christians regard homosexuality as a sin claiming that homophobia is based on religion. (Deeb-Sossa & Kane, 2007). A participant in Irwin’s (2002) study claimed, “I don’t like not being open but if they knew I was gay I’d be out of a job. It’s hard though to hide the most important part of your life and it causes fear and stress” (p. 73).

Educators working in public school settings seemed no less traumatic. Robert felt there were multiple challenges and burdens associated with being a gay administrator, as he described the anxiety and isolation he felt.

It made me somewhat depressed. I wasn’t really happy with the idea that I couldn’t be myself. When we had Christmas parties and other events, I could be who I really was, it was frustrating. But I knew that in itself would be a death sentence for me and my career. There were some who knew that tried to fix me up with dates, but I never took them up. I tried to keep my work life separate from my personal life. It became very frustrating not being able to share successes with my partner, as one could his wife. Or if I got little gifts at the office, I would have to hide where they came from. I had an asst. bus driver that might notice how happy I was, but I couldn’t be specific about how terrific
something personal had been. I couldn’t say I had a real treat from my partner.

“Heterosexuals grow up in an environment that continually endorses and validates their sexuality” (Coleman, 2001, p. 12). Homosexuals, however, are not afforded the same affirming environment at home, school, or work, causing them to tolerate numerous forms of ignorance, harassment, and discrimination from others (Coleman, 2001).

Robert went on to describing how he felt as a gay administrator.

Frustrating, like in most schools, I know I felt very frustrated. I wished I could have said that’s part of my private life and I will do my public job, and do what was best for the kids, not as a gay person or straight person, but just as the principal. Like being gay and empathetic and some having some of those qualities, I didn’t feel like my homosexuality affected my ability to do the job, to put in the hours needed, to run a successful school.

Unfortunately Robert was unable to have his homosexuality not affect his position as a principal. In December two years ago, the district determined it would run current police reports on all of the administrators. When Robert’s report was received, he was immediately dismissed from his job. Robert’s report showed that he was arrested after an undercover officer got into his van in a city park, in a neighboring metropolitan area. Robert noted that while assistant superintendents and other administrative personnel had various other incidents on their reports, they went without any reprimand or consequence, Robert was fired for the information on the report, claiming:

My career with this district ended abruptly in Dec. 2003, when the school board terminated my employment, after they became aware that I had a misdemeanor charge on my police record from 5 or 6 years prior to that time. And I have not been back into the
education field since then. I later found out that the school board had gotten some calls from parents questioning my sexual orientation and how it would affect my ability to be an elementary school principal….the small town rumor mill busy at work. I lived on egg shells after my partner died, because I knew there were questions about the nature of our relationship.

One of the teachers in Irwin’s (2002) study commented, “I’m not really out at work so I am in constant fear and anxiety of being found out and I would get the sack” (p. 72).

When the other participants were asked if he felt he could be fired for being gay, Dennis the Catholic school counselor and boy’s soccer coach, claimed he had a great amount of fear of being fired for being gay. He went on to say that everyday when he walks into the building, he thinks about it:

I have had alumni and parents ask for my job. I’ve been told to keep quiet (about my sexual orientation) by the administration, over various issues. One incident happened a number of years ago when some gay kids were speaking out and we were pretty supportive of them and what they were doing, and the kids had put a website together. My name and photo was on the website showing my support, as were some other faculty members, I received a call from the administrator during Christmas break, demanding that I remove my name and photo from the website. I refused to do that and it’s still on there. But I really did feel threatened at that time. I felt like my job was on the line, and it didn’t make for a very good Christmas vacation. But I refused to back down on that
and we took it to our faculty association and they supported us. And the administration just kind of hushed up about it.

Sixty-one year old Rose, one of Dennis’ colleagues shared her feelings about the possibility of being fired for being gay, as she described one incident when her administrator did indeed threaten her job because of her relationship with another woman.

I have sat in my principal’s office and he has said to me, “it’s been brought to my attention that you have entered into a relationship of a sexual nature with a same sex person, and I want you to know that if the Archdiocese found out then I would not be able to keep you on as a teacher and you would be let go, because this is of a sexual nature. And I didn’t say anything at that time. But essentially he was trying to protect himself by saying that he is not judging me as a person. There were a lot of people involved in getting this information to him that had their own agendas. Getting rid of me, obviously, was at the height of it. So instead of calling me in and saying anything positive, anything reinforcing, anything like “I don’t know what’s going on, but you need to be aware that there are people…” It was made into a threat rather than a support session, and I said nothing.

“When a Catholic school teacher moves into the public passage, he/she will likely meet a variety of reactions from indifference to homophobia” (Coleman, 2001, p. 13). Maher (2003) found in a study of Catholic school teachers that they held the belief that they would not be supported by their administrators. Maher (2001) found that when interviewing gay and lesbian students and staff, the words most commonly used were denial and repression.
Susan is a 32 year old rural math teacher. When she was asked if she had a picture of her family, since she and her partner have twins, on her desk, her reply was “no,” commenting, “It’s just not a battle I want to deal with right now.” When asked about whether or not she thought she could/would be fired for being lesbian, Susan added,

I know that it is legal. I also know that I go above and beyond at my job to make sure that they would have to put their ducks in a row because I’m good at what I do and the administration, staff and parents know it.

When asked about the possibility or plausibility of being fired for being an openly gay teacher, Richard unquestionably responded, “YES - I constantly feel like I’m walking on pins and needles,” adding “It’s still legal to discriminate against gays and lesbians.” There were two teachers, however, that did not feel like they could or would be fired for being openly gay teachers. George works in a school district that has a policy in their contracts that protects employees for being discriminated against for being gay men or lesbians. The other teacher, Edward commented,

I don’t think I would be fired for being gay. With my administration, I don’t believe that’s an issue. But I could see other places or another school where that could be an underlying issue and they would find some other reason to get rid of you. But I don’t think that would happen here.

Gay and lesbian teachers constantly struggle to keep their professional and private lives separated. The blending of the two causes fear of job loss and ostracization from other members of the school community (Brueggemann & Moddelmog, 2002).
The last discussion regarding identity negotiation within their school communities questioned whether the participants had experienced any psychological (personal) impacts of being a gay or lesbian educator, and how authentic these educators felt they could be in their respective school environments.

Dennis, a Catholic school educator commented,

I don’t think it’s a double life, but it’s not a totally open life. I think there were periods of my professional life, when I felt like I was leading a double life but not so much anymore. But I do not feel like I can be truly authentic to who I am as a person, with the conditions of being in a Catholic school. So double life, no, but living with hesitancy, and not total honesty, yes.

David, another Catholic educator, added,

I have never felt really restricted in the classroom by my sexuality. Maybe I’ve just managed to build in little detours around things, but even when I was married, I never shared a lot about my personal life in the classroom. It was really none of their business. Insides, yes; small things, yes, but what I did last weekend with my wife or with my lover I’ve never felt it had a place in the classroom. I never really went there. There was always a partition between the classroom and anything outside of that.

While Scott’s words were few, they were powerful. “When you say double, I don’t know if it’s a double life, but it is extremely guarded.” Robert commented that following some years of therapy, he was much happier not only as a person, but also as an educator. His comment about the result of the psychological impact was explained,
It had a positive one when I come to fully accept who I was. I think I was a much happier person, and that was reflected in my professional life. I recall some conversations I had others commenting about my seeming less intense, less stressed. About the last three years of career, I was able to enjoy this freedom from fear.

Richard agreed that it has made him a better person.

It’s made me a stronger person. I don’t let myself be intimidated as easily as I might have otherwise. It’s almost like having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after leaving the military. What I’ve been through over the past 20 or so years has led to depression and anxiety leading to psychiatrists and psychologists for therapy.

Rostosky and Riggle (2002) found that gay men and lesbians who accept themselves and are free to disclose their sexual orientation at work are likely to be healthier psychologically and more comfortable in their workplace relationships.

Edward agreed that there is minimal psychological impact on him being a gay teacher. “I really don’t know if there is any. I guess just being a teacher itself has an impact on you. But I don’t think being a gay teacher has a different impact.” Rose disagrees noting that being authentic at school would make her a stronger teacher, as she could be less fearful about what she says and does. She feels she can not be authentic, commenting

I can be authentic about my personality. I can be authentic about my sense of humor and how I teach, but I can’t be authentic about this extremely sensitive part of my identity. So it does affect me. It has a psychological impact. I would say that if we want to change things, we have to do it ourselves. In a place like this, and we really don’t feel
like fear is undermining us, then we should be able to take a step. This is what’s going
to help change kids. It’s when they see the adults in their lives, whom they respect, they
will see these adults stand up and say we can do this. We can say welcome to my class,
I’m a gay teacher, and not have any fear. Or if that is a problem, then I don’t have to say
it at all, and we can get together in our own support group because we do have the
commonality and the need for those of us who have commonalities, we do need to get in
there and welcome the new teachers who are gay, and have our own card games, and
have our own places where we’ll meet for a beer together.

Scott agreed adding,

No I don’t have the freedom to be authentic about who I am as a teacher. I enjoy
teaching, I was excited about teaching, but if I have the opportunity to get out, I’m going
to just as soon as I can. I’m clearly looking for a way to stop teaching because of the
overt discrimination and homophobia. It’s just run its course in my life.

“Like the oppositional identities from which they emerge, identity-based politics rely on and
reinforce an us-against them world view” (Keating, 2008, p. 64). Keating (2008) maintains that
all identity categories be dismissed and everyone should be “color-blind, gender-blind, and so
forth” (p. 65).

Dennis had identical feelings as the other Catholic school educators about being authentic.

Can I be authentic? I would say no. There are opportunities whether it’s a student retreat
or a faculty retreat, or like something I do with my team, where adults give talks about
themselves, you’re allowed to share as much as you would like about your personal life.
Have I ever felt like I could do that on a student or faculty retreat or with my team? No!
I find myself having to hold things back. Number 1 knows this because I’ve been on retreats with her and thank God she was there just to help me get through that time, that moment. People who I coach with, we do pretty personal sharing with our team, but I always feel like I have to hold something back, about who I am or they talk about their wife or their husband, how they fell in love, how their family is, I always felt like I can’t talk about that and because I have a tough time holding that stuff back I choose not to even talk about anything, because it’s difficult for me to get to that point, giving a talk and I feel like I’m lying to my audience and I don’t want to do that. It’s tough to take things to a point and feel like you have to pull back, because you can’t go to that next line. I guess I could do that, but it’s probably the fear of doing that. I’m jealous of people who can talk to their class about their spouse and their kids, or have a picture of their boyfriend or girlfriend on their desk, and that kind of stuff, you know I can’t do that, or I guess I choose not to do that, for fear.

At this point, Dennis said to Scott:

I would hate to see you leave education, but I understand, because I have struggled with that a lot. But I don’t know that things would be better on the other side. When you talk to people with careers outside the field of education, it’s not always that much better in other places of work. I feel really blessed with where I am. I know it could always be better, but I know it could also be worse. So I guess that’s why I choose to stay with it.

Interestingly, David the eldest of the Catholic school educators described how comfortable he felt being authentic in his school setting.

I’ve had a unique experience. Indeed, I’ve come out on retreats. I started it “when my
wife left me, I began to question my sexuality” and apparently I revealed the fact that I had a partner and it was cool. The kids were cool with it, and the rest of the retreat was cool with it. Dennis’ and my experiences about coming out are very, very different. I came out at the age of 42, when he was a teen. It was a different time when he came out than it was when I came out. And a couple of colleagues have come out to me. I guess because I’m out. So I’ve never felt very restricted, but we do have to watch what we say. I had a straight colleague that interviewed for the newspaper and made a comment about supporting gay marriage, the principal got very upset and he got called to the carpet for making that comment.

Stein (2005) claims that our current patriarchal system of institutionalized homophobia is significant in preserving heterosexuality, making authenticity an extremely difficult risk for homosexuals. While many of these educators described themselves as being limited about their openness regarding their homosexuality, all are out to an extent within their school communities. The next issue was to determine how that identity affected their relationships with others in their school communities.

**Relationship Formation and Maintenance**

All of these educators admitted being out to some of their colleagues, and even their administration within their school communities. When asked whether they were out to their students, colleagues, administration, and families, their responses varied from individual to individual, but even some varied within the same Catholic school community.

When asked about how out she was to her students/colleagues/parents of your students
and family, Rose responded,

I’m out to many of my colleagues but not all. But if any of my colleagues thought about it for a while, or it had entered their minds, they would know. I’m out to some of the parents of my students, and to some alum students, parent of alums, and parents of current students. We have had conversations and they are understanding, and are friends of mine, but I’m not out to their kids. If I’m invited to some kind of function, they’ll say bring Lily (my partner) too or don’t forget to tell Lily. So that’s part of my relationship with my colleagues. Then we have a good time and people know it. Most people don’t have a clue or are totally unconcerned. So in that respect, I don’t feel like my orientation is in question to most of the people that I know and work with.

The Catholic school educators also expressed varying levels of openness in their school communities. Mayo’s (2008) study with seven gay male teachers found that only one participant was out to his entire school community, but all of the participants were out to some of their colleagues. David feels like he’s open to everybody,

I’ve had students who will approach me and ask me where they can go to find some support or something. So apparently my persona is kind of like an accepting gay person. Whether gay or straight some of the students talk to me. But I’ve had some kids come up to me and kind of quasi-come out. For years I’ve taken boyfriends or lovers to faculty events, and currently my partner insists on going to every play and every musical. He’s always present when I attend school functions. He goes to tailgate parties and stuff like that, so for me it’s just like here I am, here he is, make of it whatever you want! For me
it’s really sort of a non-issue.

One participant in Mayo’s (2008) study claimed that he has taken a watchful eye approach, as he has noticed the need for some type of a safe zone, a gay friendly area for students struggling with their sexual identities. David did mention that many of the teachers and administrators in his Catholic school did have human rights/equal rights (=) stickers on their doors, but claimed that did not mean that students or staff members could feel safe talking about homosexuality in those rooms.

Although Rose teaches in the same school setting as David, she does not feel like she can be as open with everyone. Rose had claimed that everyone just assumed she was heterosexual.

When asked how out he was to his colleagues, administration, students, and school community families, Dennis, the counselor and boy’s soccer coach at the Catholic school, added:

I know it’s a personal decision for all of us, but I think for myself it’s been very positive. I am out to some parents of students and parents of kids I coach, and it’s always been very positive. This happened many years ago, but a group of kids at a lunch table called me over and asked if I was gay, claiming that half of the table thought I was gay and the other half didn’t. I asked them, if it mattered if I was or wasn’t, then they all agreed that I was too cool to be gay. I don’t know if it’s even anything kids think about. I don’t know if they even think of us as sexual beings to begin with. It’s like seeing a student outside of school at the grocery or buying clothes, and they seem stunned. So I’m not sure they
even think of us as being human, and specifically not as sexual human beings. There are many faculty members in our school that are gay, some are out and others are not out to anybody, but it’s cool for those who are out, in that we can talk to each other and relate to each other on a more personal level. Luckily we have an incredible support system here, of both gay and straight people. We have a lot of allies, especially the younger faculty. Straight faculty have come up and told me that they have a gay brother or sister, aunt or uncle, or that they have lost someone close to AIDS. So it’s in our community, it’s in our lives. I think a lot of people realize it’s part of who we are and I think it’s been very positive.

While there may be some negative effects of coming out to students, many of the accounts of teachers who have come out, as well as those who have had gay or lesbian teachers, indicate that the effect is positive, as it helps others come out (Jennings, 2005).

Scott, a religion teacher in a Catholic school said,

I did come out a few years ago to my faculty. I just assumed that people knew. I’m 39, and single, people should be able to connect the dots and figure it out. Kids don’t ask questions. I think it’s just assumed. If I had a partner, which I don’t, nobody would say bring your partner with you. In my context that just would never happen. It’s just a different environment.

Participants in Mayo’s (2008) study identified opportunities to form relationships with their colleagues in an attempt to combat feeling isolated.

Robert, who was eventually fired for being gay, commented:
Quasi-out with a few select faculty members. It was never really spoken about specifically, but I had a couple that I knew were supportive. In the one instance, I had a partner who died in the spring of 2003, and I had a couple of my faculty members who offered their condolences, and let me know that they were supportive.

Richard, however, is out to everyone in his school community, despite his administration’s disapproval. He stated,

I’m just out to everybody in the community. It’s no secret that I’m gay. I’m openly gay. I have a rainbow sticker on my car. I’ve had one for years. When I first put in on the car, I was told to tell kids, if they asked, that I just like rainbows.

Richard did admit, however, that many of his colleagues consider his as a resource for gay and lesbian issues that come up in his school. Openly gay educators of become the go to person for anything related to homophobic bullying or any issue pertaining to GLB issues (Jackson, 2007).

A participant from Mayo’s (2008) study claimed that after 31 years of teaching he felt accepted and respected by his colleagues, and did not have any problems with fellow staff members. Mayo (2008) claimed that this participant “didn’t worry about being gay and teaching, and he didn’t worry about whether the kids thinks he’s gay or not” (p. 8),

George, who has a contract which protects him from being fired for being a gay man, noted that he was very comfortable being “openly gay” to everyone in his school community. Even Edward is not threatened by being openly gay, commenting that he doesn’t tell everybody,
but if they asked he would have no problem being honest with them.

Robert, a rural school ex-administrator, never experienced that comfort level that Rose expressed having with her colleagues. When asked if he ever felt comfortable bringing his partners or boyfriends to school functions or social events, Robert explained,

No, I never brought my partner to any school functions. I never felt comfortable doing that, but I was invited to different events with some of my male counter parts, none of whom had any idea about my sexual orientation. But I was also invited to events in some staff member’s homes who seemed to know about me.

One participant in Mayo’s (2008) study claiming to be open to everyone in his school community, never attended school events with his partner or took his partner to social functions with his colleagues. This participant claimed, “the fact that I don’t socialize with the rest of the faculty is probably due mostly to the fact that I wouldn’t feel comfortable. I don’t trust some of them” (p. 9).

While many of these educators were out to some of their colleagues and administration, most were not out to students or school community families. Jackson (2007) found that teachers “viewed disclosing their gayness to students as the real mark of coming out at school” (p. 68). Three educators involved with this study claimed that they and their partners were invited to social events with their colleagues, and were comfortable attending school functions with their partners.

Another question about these educators’ relationships focused on how they dealt with anti-gay comments or jokes, in regard to how well their colleagues, administrators, and students respected them as homosexuals. These educators would not hear anti-gay comments or jokes if
they are valued as individuals. Relationships determine how we speak and what we talk about with others. A true friend or trusted colleague or administrator will not allow others to speak to you or about you in a pejorative way. As Richard commented, as he was teaching one day and many of the students were making harassing comments about their gay teacher, one young man stood up and demanded that the class respect their teacher and listen to what he has to say. That student, many years later, became Richard’s partner.

Robert, the ex-administrator, commented,

At first, I did like a lot of people do, I laughed and walked away. I never repeated them as jokes or stories, but I didn’t publicly comment when they were made. But then I did become defensive, claiming that I had a gay family member, and I didn’t appreciate those comments. When students made comments, I treated them as any other derogatory slur against any child with the intention of putting someone down.

Susan agreed with Robert about how to handle anti-gay comments from students noting, “The same way I deal with any inappropriate comments. They have no place in the classroom.” When asked about comments from colleagues, she merely claimed “hasn’t happened.”

Robert felt the same way about comments from his colleagues stating “I don’t really hear anything from my colleagues anymore.” Regarding student comments, he agreed with many of the other educators. “I tell students that it’s inappropriate and try to take advantage of teachable moments when I can. I don’t have a problem with letting a kid know that I find that’s so gay insulting.” Many of the educators consider anti-gay comments or jokes comparable to any other type of pejorative comments students might make to one another.
The psychological impact of George’s experience has been less traumatic.

No I really don’t think there is one. I mean the only thing that you get, but I don’t think it’s just in teaching, I think it’s in any career, when you’re around people. I was amazed at how many gay jokes or wise cracks were made, the uses of the word gay, that’s what bothers me. You’ll walk in a room and someone will be telling a gay joke, knowing that there are those in the room who are gay, or they’ll even be telling us the joke. That’s the only thing. I see how insensitive people are. It’s maybe being more sensitive to people’s feelings, like race issues, sexual orientation, and everything.

Adam also attempts to make anti-gay comments in to teachable moments.

I take anti-gay comments from kids toward one another very seriously. And when I take them very seriously, I have to be very careful about how I explain that to children. I explain it that some kids may find it hurtful and offensive to them. I explain that we are all very different, and you watch the news and you know that there are gay people. There are men who live with men and women who live with women. I’m not telling you how to believe, I’m just telling you that the differences exist. And sometimes people get their feelings hurt because you use that word to be hurtful.

George, who teaches first grade, told me he “Uses anti-gay comments or jokes to create teachable moments, whether it’s about the word gay, or a race issue, we take the time to talk about it.” Edward agreed regarding the derogatory comments from students, “I correct the student and tell them it’s inappropriate. I don’t take it personally, because it isn’t directed at me.
I would handle it just as I handle any inappropriate comment.” He did, however mention that when his colleagues make these hurtful comments or jokes, he just considers them ignorant, as they unaware of the hurtfulness of their comments.

Rose, a Catholic school teacher, commented about how she handles anti-gay comments and jokes.

I won’t allow it. I stop them. I sometimes take the moment as an educator and make it a teaching moment. I wish I would do that all the time, but you have to realize that it’s not just anti-gay jokes or comments. It’s any kind of prejudicial comment about any group, whether its female, or people of other faith, or just calling someone stupid. We are not going to allow that here. And I think, you’re hearing an awful lot about the wonderfulness about our faculty, but there are still adults who make fun of kids in their classrooms for being stupid or doing something silly. And when kids say that it’s happened to them, you must simply say lets make certain that it doesn’t happen in here, by being respectful to all groups. If you’re not respectful to your girlfriends for example, now’s the time to learn to do that.

Her colleague, Michael, the football coach, stated that he too will not tolerate harassing comments.

I guess a lot of the kids in my particular room know that I have an ally sticker on my door. I do have tons of kids come in to talk to me, and I’ve found out, over a couple of years, that after they leave they begin asking tons of questions that they wouldn’t ask when another person was in there and I always encourage them to ask when the person is in there. But if they spend time with that person over a couple of years, then they begin
to feel comfortable with that person about that question or when they do retreats and things like that they say these are some of the things I had “hang ups” about. It kind of comes out that way. But any kind of jokes or anything that comes up in my office, I tell the kids it’s okay to express yourself, but you can’t say something to specifically hurt someone else, first of all that’s a NO! If it’s an ignorant comment, then I correct them on it, and I ask them why are they saying that. But I just call them on it immediately, and I think when the whole school does it, again when it’s an administration thing, that people take a stance on, and they recognize and comment to students that it’s not going to be tolerated, we recognize that having gay students, that hurtful comments are not going to be tolerated, not allowed, or not part of our school’s philosophy. When the administration takes that stance then it gives everyone the power to call students out on these types of things.

Michael is an African American counselor and football coach and a large framed man, who often advocates for lesbian and gay issues. That certainly must have some impact on the entire athletic community in this Catholic school setting. Eguchi (2006) claims that gay and lesbian individuals must determine whether or not to disclose their sexual status at work, since disclosing their sexuality identity at work might be a cost or benefit.

These educators would not hear anti-gay comments and jokes if they received support from their school communities. When the school system stands as a united front in ending anti-gay jokes and comments, then gay and lesbian school community members will feel safe to be open about the sexuality (Goodman, 2005). The participants were then questioned about the support they receive as gay and lesbian educators, Dennis indicated that it was not just a matter
of support for gay and lesbian teachers but gay and lesbian individuals everywhere.

Part of our struggle with work is because of where we work. It’s a culture that…I guess it’s helping the gay kids that helps me stay here in this environment. It’s like one step forward, two steps back, one step forward, and two steps back. And where we are now compared to where we were five or 10 years ago, I think is huge. But it’s not just because of the school that we’re in, it’s the culture I think we’re also fighting.

David commented about the idea of his gay and lesbian colleagues meeting to support their cause and share their concerns and feelings. He said,

I think everybody kind of finds his or her own way. A lot of the gay and lesbian faculty are not out at all. I even had trouble finding people who would be part of this discussion. Even though anonymity was guaranteed, they said that it’s not something they wanted to discuss with even their colleagues.

In a similar fashion, Coleman (2001) suggests that homosexual teachers who need to be open about their sexuality in the workplace, should not be teaching in a Catholic school.

Rose agreed that it would be difficult for gay and lesbian teachers to meet for support, but did so for a very different reason.

We’re scared to get together on our campus in a room where there might be windows and our kids might see us together, or the whole faculty will see us together, or the Archdiocese will see us together, and the word gay and lesbian, and transgendered, God forbid a transgendered person ever walk in this building. We’re afraid on various levels, for a number of reasons. If you’re in a place where everyone can be open without fearing
for their safety or the loss of their job, that’s what would happen. We wouldn’t be able to do that.

DeJean (2004) notes that good teaching is not only about how comfortable educators are with their disciplines or role, but how authentic they can be in their school settings. In our current patriarchal system of traditional gender roles, homophobia is critical in preserving heterosexuality, causing authenticity to be an extremely difficult risk for homosexuals (Stein, 2005).

However clear it may seem that all of these gay and lesbian educators negotiated their identities differently, they all did so to some extent. There seemed to be a much greater variation on how those identities affected their relationships with their colleagues, administrators, students, and school community families. The next theme to be explored is how their identities affected their roles and practices within their school environments.

**Teaching Practice/ Roles and Responsibilities**

These gay and lesbian educators would not even agree that their sexual orientation had affected their practices, roles, and responsibilities in some way. Robert believed that it affected his administrative role and practice in this way.

I think indirectly, I wish I could have been more open and know that the kids I suspected in the 7th and 8th grades, that were students struggling with their orientation, but I couldn’t reach out to them without exposing my own orientation, or tipping my hand. I did my best during name calling situations to counsel students, I couldn’t be the visible role model that I wanted to be. That I couldn’t say, yeah it’s going to be tough, but you can make it. But I couldn’t do that. I could not really be true to myself in my role as a
principal, to all of the students. All teachers can relate to the heterosexuals, because we were born into this world have lived our lives with that expectation, but because of the myths, the homophobia, and fears, questioning or homosexual students have no role models.

He continued adding,

I knew that there was community discussion about me when I was having parent round tables once per month, and one religious parent questioned what would be taught in the Family and Consumer Science class curricula. She wanted to know if we were going to teach about birth control, condoms, or anything about homosexuality, and when she said it she looked directly at me. And I told her no that’s the parent’s responsibility to teach about those things. We’re going to teach the curriculum, abstinence first, and then about protection, which is the curriculum of the district and the state.

Even Susan wasn’t sure whether it was her sexual orientation or other experiences that affected her teaching.

I think I am more aware of the student who may be struggling with sexuality questions or mental health issues than many of my colleagues. But whether that is because of my orientation directly or other experiences could be debated.

Goodman (2005) believes that in a model school, sexual orientation issues are fused into the curriculum. “Gay and lesbian community members feel safe to be open about the sexuality.
There are positive images of homosexuals in the school’s curriculum and program” (Goodman, 2005, p. 116),

Richard, however, knew that his sexual orientation has had an affect on his teaching over his 31 year-old career. It has even affected the curriculum he teaches.

It makes me very, very conscious of and much more sensitive to those who are marginalized. I try to expand equality so that it applies to all those I teach. I mention gay and lesbian individual’s contributions to society as part of my social studies curriculum.

The teachers in Jackson’s (2007) study had various stories about coming out to their students, but all came out within the context of the curriculum.

Adam felt that his being a gay administrator had much less of an impact than Richard, claiming, “Just that I’m more conscious of stereotypes, particularly about pedophilia. I’m very guarded about how I conduct my business. It’s not as difficult now. When I deal with a student, I leave the door open.” Adam’s concern is not unfounded as Simon (1998) and Stevenson (2000) both noted that one stereotype about gay men generally is that they are over sexed, predatory child molesters who are drawn to boys in particular.

George and Edward agreed that their sexual orientation has not affected their teaching practices. David, the eldest of the Catholic school teachers believed as George and Edward, that his homosexuality does not affect his teaching practice.

My sexual orientation does not affect my teaching practice because what does the teaching of foreign languages have to do with your sexuality anyway. I keep a definite wall between my personal life and my professional life. I don’t discuss my private life in
the classroom. Sometimes I’ll tell anecdotes about places I’ve been or things I’ve done.

But I don’t feel the need to discuss my personal life in the classroom. The fact that I have children and a grandson, and maybe that gives me a certain amount of freedom.

Edward was emphatic that his homosexuality did not define him as a teacher.

I don’t let my sexuality define me as a teacher. It’s a part of who I am, but it’s not who I am. I enjoy teaching and I don’t think my sexuality should have a bearing on whether I’m a good or bad teacher.

Michael, the Catholic school counselor and football coach, disagrees and feels very confident that his sexual orientation affects his role in school.

I was fortunate to be able to come back to teach at the place where I was a student, so I kind of knew about my surroundings, I knew some teachers who I could talk to. I played all sports, and really didn’t get into the arts, which I really love, until my senior year. I left here and played college football where I learned to keep things even more private. I was fortunate that I went to Boston, where I could lead a double life, and that’s what I did. There was me as a football player, and there was me who went out on the weekend away from the other football players. That side of me was very private. It wasn’t until the last couple of years that maybe I left something around that made them think. But they never made a big deal about it. But it made me feel like I had to be even more masculine, to be intimidating to them, so that they wouldn’t see any signs of a stereotypical gay. After college I knew I wanted to go into counseling. The first thing you learn is ethics and boundaries, and about setting those boundaries. But I bonded so well as a
student here, and I knew that’s what I wanted to do was help students struggling with their sexual orientation. With being a counselor and a football coach, I had super walls put up. For instance, if a kid wants to be too chummy, I push them away. Maybe yell at them more do something to make see that they aren’t your friend. It affects my decisions on a daily basis as to what I do around here. Like if I get a call on the phone when a kid is in my office, they’ll be like was that your wife. Others will say some kids think you might be gay and others don’t, but it’s like “I’m not going to tell you.” Every year it’s just a new cycle of kids that want to get to know you. If anything, it really pushed me away from this kid, because I put up a wall.

Dennis defiantly feels that his sexual orientation affects his daily practices. This became apparent when he claimed,

Every year, even after 28 years, I still have to remind myself of that; being a gay person in the world of education, and the fears that go with that, personal or professional, so it is a struggle and it goes back to the anxiety issue. So did it affect me getting into the field of education, yes I had a lot of self-doubt. And hopefully the next generation of kids coming up won’t have to deal with that. I was watching the movie Milk, a story about the life of Harvey Milk, the other night on cable, the big issue with teachers in California and Anita Bryant and it reminds me of what was going on back at that time. It’s still an issue for people working in education or people working with kids. It shouldn’t be an issue but it is. Hopefully we’ll get to that point.

Tooms and Alston (2006) claim that society, in general, has not recognized the ability to comprehend the idea that oppression goes beyond ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation which
manifests as homophobia and heterosexism experiences that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals function as origins of dissention between the heteronormative culture that infuse any pool of educators, specifically administrators.

Throughout this chapter, the extent to which the educators have negotiated their identities is detailed, but also included was how it affected their relationships in their school communities and how it affected their respective roles and responsibilities in their daily activities. The next chapter will summarize these findings, but will also detail the implications for further research, as well as the implications for the practicing teacher and administrator.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

The four previous chapters have discussed how homophobia and heteronormativity have been institutionalized in our society and schools. Also discussed was the previous research of GLBT experiences in schools, specifically how these educators negotiate their identities, how it affected their relationships, and how it affected their teaching practices. Chapter three detailed how this research study was formed, how the participants were selected, and how the data would be analyzed. Chapter four provided a comprehensive analysis of this research study participant’s experiences in their schools.

Chapter five will summarize the findings of this study, but will also provide implications for future research about this topic, and suggestions for those educators practicing in the K-12 field of education. This will also be helpful for those who are training the individuals to work in a K-12 setting.

As noted in Chapter one, there were three major questions driving this study.

1. How do gay and lesbian educators negotiate their identities in their school settings?
2. How does being an “openly” gay or lesbian educator, or closeted” educator, affect their relationships with members of the school community, including students, colleagues, and parents?
3. How does being an “openly” gay lesbian educator or “closeted” educator affect their teaching practices and responsibilities?
A summary of the participants’ responses are detailed later in this chapter.

Despite the advances for equal opportunity in the workplace for gay men and lesbians, there continues to be a need for much more progress in the heteronormative and homophobic institutions of K-12 school systems. Given that gay and lesbian educators are more susceptible to workplace discrimination, the way they negotiate their identities is often a survival tactic.

Regardless of our sexual orientation, educators are vulnerable public figures, needing approval, prepared for derision, conflicted by the authority imposed by their roles and fearful that they will or have become in public domain something separate, thus somehow invalid or inauthentic or distances, from the personal self (McNinch, 2007, p. 206).

**Summary of Identity Negotiation**

Palmer (1998) cites the need for the inner and outer lives of teachers to be congruent to maintain integrity. Gay and lesbian individuals who disclose their sexual orientation at work, if their workplace practices a nondiscrimination policy, are likely to be healthier psychologically and more comfortable in their social interactions (Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Only one of the participants in this study works for a school district that has a non-discrimination against gay and lesbian educators in their employment contracts.

Each of these educators has negotiated his/her sexual identity within their school communities differently. Interestingly enough the eldest of the participants, and the most veteran teacher, David, not only teaches at a Catholic school, but is one of the two most open when it comes to his sexual identity as a gay man in the school. This has been his own choice through his school retreats with students, their parents, and his colleagues, he has revealed details about his coming out experience and what affect that has had on his life. David’s colleagues,
administrators, students, and many school community members know that he is gay man. This is
evident as he takes his partner to school events, such as the theatre, and football games and
tailgate parties. “My partner and I get invitations to various dinner parties, with colleagues.
They’ll say ‘bring your buddy along’ as if to say ‘yes we know, but we’re just not ready to say
the word partner or husband’ or whatever.”

Richard, like David, was the only other teacher expressing to be completely out to his
colleagues, students, administrators, and other school community members. While this was not
completely by his own choosing, he has done nothing to hide his homosexuality.

There wasn’t anything specific at the school that led me to be more open. It happened
because of my gay activism and my theatre productions. Some of the productions I put
on caused a lot of controversy. I used to play music while kids were taking a test. One
day I was playing some Irish folk music and the kids asked what it was. I told them, but
added that they weren’t singing in Irish, by Gaelic. The next day the principal called me
in and told me that he gotten a phone call from a parent claiming I was playing gay Irish
music in the classroom. This just tells you how overly sensitive the school administration
is over gay issues.

Despite significant progress in the human rights arena for homosexuals over the past decade, the
role of gay and lesbian educators continues to be conflicted (McNinch, 2007).

The other educators, both public and Catholic, expressed being out on different levels.
All of these participants are out to a few colleagues and their administrators, but few expressed
being open to their students or the families of their students. Not that a few of their students
were not aware, but in general, most students do not know or it is not considered an issue for
those students who do know, as Dennis explained. Many of these educators expressed fear about disclosing their sexual identities, and some were discouraged from disclosure by their administrators fearing that it would cause harm more than it would help.

Gay and lesbian individuals with high levels of internalized homophobia tend to find it more difficult to disclose their sexuality at work, even if their workplace practices a nondiscrimination policy, because of their fear of receiving negative responses from others. Furthermore, gay and lesbian individuals have to make a decision whether or not to disclose their sexual status at work, because disclosing their sexuality at work may cost and/or benefit them (Eguchi, 2006, p. 354).

The majority of these educators, or their administrators, feared that disclosing their sexual identity would put them at a disadvantage, while many of the educators felt that being more open would be an advantage, in that it would allow them to be more authentic and less guarded in how they could express themselves. The two educators who felt the freedom to be most authentic, David and Richard were two of the most veteran educators participating in this study. Downs (2006) explains authenticity as the beginning of the final stage of denial and is the last phase of self-acceptance in a homosexual’s life. It is a time when they become comfortable, in all settings, in their own skin (Downs, 2006). LGBT individuals with high levels of internalized homophobia tend to find it more difficult to disclose their sexuality at work, even if their workplace practices a nondiscrimination policy, because of their fear of receiving negative responses from others. Furthermore, LGBT individuals have to make a decision whether or not to disclose their sexual status at work, because disclosing their sexuality at work may cost and/or
benefit them (Eguchi, 2006, p. 354). Stein (2005) claims that in our current patriarchal system of traditional gender roles, homophobia is critical in preserving heterosexuality, causing authenticity to be an extremely difficult risk for homosexuals.

Summary of Relationships Formation and Maintenance

Both the public and Catholic school educators expressed a level of comfort about telling some colleagues and their administrators about their homosexuality. Only the two teachers previously mentioned, David and Richard, are out to everyone in their school communities. Most of the educators, however, were comfortable about taking their partner to school functions or events, as well as social functions with colleagues. There were a couple of exceptions, but the greater part of both public and a parochial school educators, more teachers than administrators, expressed a level of comfort of being authentic with colleagues and the school community in general, as long as it was a function or event, either school sponsored or social time with their colleagues.

A few of the educators, especially those at the elementary level, expressed concern about how their relationships with young boys might be perceived if these educators were open to all members of their school communities. A gay teacher himself, King (2004) stated that he constantly scrutinized his behaviors around children, as he expressed concern about how others might interpret his interactions and relationships with students. This proved to be especially true about teachers entering the field of education, those stereotypical perceptions of others clouded their thoughts. Some of the negativity, however, came from their administrators. Richard, who had battled with his principal and some of his colleagues for the past 10 years or so claimed,

As I’ve had discussions with colleagues, they ask why I’m so overt. I ask them ‘Aren’t
you overt with your sexuality?” You talk about your children, your spouse, your life.

You have a photograph of your family on your desk. When Jeff and I were together, I got in trouble for having a picture of us on my desk. The principal told me that I must take it down. I told him that if I have to take my down, then every body in this building has to take their family photos down too.

He added that “many parents and administrators don’t like it when you’re direct and open about who you are as a person, if you’re gay or lesbian. You begin thinking about everything you do as self-preservation.” Richard did however admit that he has put a face of normalcy on homosexuality for some of his colleagues and students. He claimed, “Many of them didn’t think they knew anybody who was gay. I helped get rid of a lot of the normalized homophobia.”

Smith, Axelton, and Saucier (2009) found that across 41 studies there was a significant negative relationship between contact and sexual prejudice. This suggests that having contact with lesbians and gay men is associated with reduced sexual prejudice towards homosexuals by heterosexuals. Richard and David, the only two teachers who admitted that they are out to all members of their school communities, certainly serve as role models to those who are struggling with sexual identity. But the two Catholic school counselors, Dennis and Michael also serve as role models, not necessarily in being out, but in being strong advocates for those who experience anxiety and fear about their sexual identities.

Another teacher, Susan, who has a great amount of support from her principal, expressed discomfort about being authentic with her students. “Safety does play a role in my silence with my students. I have had at least one parent who went to the administration when she found out I
was pregnant and complained, but the administration handled it phenomenally.”

Russo (2006) points out that “at the fundamental level, schools will not be safe places for gay and lesbian individuals--and by association, for others in school--until being gay or lesbian is destigmatized” (p. 115). There are no immediate repairs or “Band-Aid solutions” that will effectively speak to the issues of marginalization and homophobia that sexual and gender minority in our schools must endure (Macintosh, 2007, p. 41).

My findings with these educators were consistent with those used in Mayo’s (2008) study, which found that most gay and lesbian teachers have chosen to come out to only some of their colleagues. He found with his participants, as well as I did with mine, they enjoy guarded relationships with their colleagues, “where professionalism and teamwork, combined with privacy and discretion, have become the norm at school” (Mayo, 2008, p. 7).

**Summary of Teaching Practice/Roles and Responsibilities**

Further research may be needed to clarify whether sexuality, and indeed homosexuality and bisexuality, is seen mainly as a biological topic rather than also a social-emotional topic. There are important implications for the emotionally literate ethos of a school in supporting curriculum content and discussions of sexuality and relationships (Adams, Cox, & Dunstan, 2004, p. 266).

While the two counselors and the administrators felt that their sexuality affected their professional roles, only one teacher, Richard, claimed to incorporate gay and lesbian individuals in his social studies curriculum, noting the contributions they have made, just as all teachers do with African-Americans, Jewish individuals, and Native Americans. The administrators and
counselors felt that their being gay men made them more sensitive and empathetic to anyone who is marginalized by the norms of the school. More of these educators, including the first grade teacher, use gay jokes or derogatory comments into teachable moments, informing students how much hurt those comments can cause. Good teaching may also be defined as ethical teaching which celebrates differences by exploring them. This discussion might contribue to our understanding of the tensions inherent in “being queer in the classroom and queering the classroom” as Thompson (2004, p. 273) so aptly calls it. Sexuality is usually addressed in with the sex education curriculum and in anti-bullying lessons as one part of bullying behavior (Adams, Cox, & Dunstan, 2004). Fear of discourse about any sexuality, not just homosexuality, define any school setting (McNinch, 2004). “There are, however, opportunities for educators to break the pedagogical silence and engage in new curricular directives that begin not at solving the problem of homophobia but at acknowledging the larger issue of heteronormativity” (Macintosh, 2007, p. 41).

DeJean (2004) believes that good teaching is not only about how well educators know their subject matter or role, but how authentic they can be within their school communities. As all of the participants in this study expressed an interest in being more authentic, most felt that it was not in their best interest to do so. This is certainly consistent with Kupfer’s (2005) fear about the possibility of being fired, as there was no job protection language written into her teaching contract. Identity-based politics’ exclusionary categories control one’s capacity to bond useful partnerships.

King (2004) suggests a gay teacher provide narratives or counter narratives in response to
media portrayals and the student’s perceptions of a homosexual. The majority of participants in this study, however, felt that their sexual orientation did not affect their teaching practice or role, and were not sure it would be applied. Most, however, did feel that their homosexuality made them more empathetic and caring, especially for those who are marginalized in the school communities.

**Concluding Comments**

Direct discrimination is defined by verbal or physical aggression, or marginalized as the other to the norm of being heterosexual. Indirect discrimination is more subtly focused, often by individuals who consider themselves open minded. This would include views of LGBT teachers as victims within the system, or as potential representatives of their sexuality (Nixon & Givens, 2007).

Wheatley (2000) claims that gays and lesbians bring beauty to humanity. “We bring men and women together from across their great divide, and show human animals the face of God. We are the mediators, the teachers, the artists, and the storytellers” (p. 39). Homosexuality is part of almost every community in the United States. “Gays and lesbians constitute our children, parents, siblings, teachers, political leaders, doctors, counselors, and friends” (Ford & Priest, 2004, p. 95). As gay men and lesbians become more accepted as much as many other minorities have done, there should be much less discrimination against them. “The United States Defense Department reported that last year it dismissed the fewest number of service member for violating its ‘don’t ask, don’t tell policy’ than it had in more than a decade” (Fewer troops fired, 2010, p. A3). In fact the number of service members dismissed dropped from 619 in 2008 to 428 in 2009 for being openly gay men or lesbians (Fewer troops fired, 2010).
With gay and lesbian military service personnel serving openly, there have also previously been some gay and lesbian individuals elected to public office and appointed to high posts in the federal government. “The California Assembly has picked its first openly gay speaker” (Calif. Picks gay, 2009, p. A6). On Thursday, December 10, 2009, California Assembly Democrats unanimously approved John Perez to be its next Assembly speaker (Calif. Picks gay, 2009). As gay men and lesbians earn more freedom to be open about their sexual identity, one would hope they will then be given the same respect that many heterosexuals have been granted at birth. With this progress will there be a shift in homophobic climate of schools, or will it be one of the last professions to abolish the institutions of heterosexism? When speaking about the death of the gay Miami University senior hockey manager, Brenden Burke, he said,

> Having Brendan as part of our program has been a blessing. We are much more aware of what you say and how you say it. We need to be reminded that respect is not a label, but something you can earn by the way you live your life (Kranz, 2010, p. B2).

Brenden had just weeks before his death come out to the coach and his hockey teammates for which he served as manager. The coach claimed that he felt the need to be authentic, and was respected for his strength and honesty in doing so (Kranz, 2010). Not until every gay man and lesbian is offered the same opportunity enjoyed by Brenden Burke in his short life, will social justice for all citizens be achieved.

**Implications for Future Research**

The recommendations for future research are largely shaped by the limitations of this
study. First, a similar study using a larger geographical area is suggested, as my participants were limited participants from a greater midwestern metropolitan area. The second consideration might be to conduct a similar study involving more participants of color or ethnicity.

Another recommendation would be to identify gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender school employees, as all participants for this study self-identified as either a gay man or lesbian. A fourth consideration for further research may be to broaden the study of Catholic school teachers from various schools within an Archdiocese, as many of these educators struggle with being open in their schools, as it conflicts with the religious teachings. This study only included Catholic teachers from two different schools, and their experiences within their settings were extremely different.

As both of the administrators interviewed for this study are no longer working in schools, another research consideration would be to examine the perceptions of openly gay and lesbian administrators who have been unsuccessful in attempts to be promoted. A final consideration would be to further define what would required to disrupt the heteronormativity and homophobia that is obviously present in schools. This would be helpful to those working as administrators and those training to become administrators, as to how they can create a safe environment for all members of their school communities.

**Implications for the Practitioner**

This study reveals why school districts must consider their policies and practices in regard to gay and lesbian employees in their districts. If school systems are indeed concerned about student achievement, dependent on a safe and supportive school environment, then they
must accept the fact their teachers or administrators might be gay or lesbian. School systems must develop and enforce policies that will provide an environment where gay and lesbian individuals will feel safe and supported. Gay and lesbian educators deserve to work in an atmosphere free of the fear that their sexual identity will be revealed and used to destroy their careers.

The two administrators lost their jobs when it was revealed that they were gay men. One of the Catholic school teachers is actively looking for a way to get out of teaching due to his lack of support and homophobic environment. Another teacher explained his experiences working with an unsupportive administrator as working in hell. He explains it by telling me how much more effective he could have been with a supportive administrator. The other Catholic school employees fear that they could be fired for being gay men or lesbians. “Because social injustice is ever present in our society and exacerbated in our schools, educational leaders must not only identify and understand the unjust practices happening in schools, but also feel an urgency to take action” (Allen, Harper, & Koschoreck, 2009, p. 77). In an online study of educators in principal training programs, 24% of the respondents elected to omit responding to the section about issues of sexuality. Of those that did respond, common responses referred to fear of a negative feedback from parents, and other school community members. Other concerns included a lack of knowledge, and religious or faith related beliefs (Allen, Harper, & Koschoreck, 2009).

Of the eleven educators participating in this group, only three claimed to have a good relationship with their direct supervisor, be it principal or superintendent. These experiences of these educators will be helpful for those working as administrators and those training to become administrators. These teacher’s experiences address the struggles and stress that can be caused
when a supervisors refuse or choose not to support their employees. This is consistent with the findings of Mayo (2008) who found a participant in his study who noted that each time I mention the need for safe zones or support programs to school administrators, the idea was shut down. One primary responsibility of a school administrator is to create a safe and supportive school environment for every in the building. If teachers fear being called names or being harassed, they are not in a safe environment.

As urban educational leaders, we need to push toward deconstructing the isolation produced by our dichotomous social constructions. If we are forced to question the queer the constructions of our own identity in a crucially reflective way, searching for ways that we may unconsciously perpetuate social injustices through binary thinking, we may realize a possibility for more equitable existences inside and outside the urban classroom (Sharp, 2007, p. 105).

If gay and lesbian educators would be free to tackle issues of difference in a safe environment, then students would be safe to question the status quo by seeing through the eyes of others. Queer pedagogy allows students to confront their own unexamined identities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). As many gay and lesbian teachers have negotiated their own identities, they are prepared to help students struggling with their own identities (Jackson, 2007).

**Implications for the Curriculum**

Only one of the teachers, Richard, interviewed for this study spoke of how his sexuality affected his teaching practice by incorporating the contributions gay men and lesbians have made to society. While no other teachers involve gay men and lesbians in their teaching practice, they do admit that their sexuality affects their teaching. Acknowledging and respecting diversity is a
character issue that is a part of all course content as part of any curricula (Melillo, 2003).

Jackson (2007) suggests that the curriculum be changed to integrate the contribution to cultural progress that gay men and lesbians have made. “Doing this by using inclusive language, and describing all types of families, and including how gayness has impacted literary and historical figures are all ways in which teacher can move gayness from the margins of the curriculum to the center” (Jackson, 2007, p. 181). She also recommends that language arts teachers develop worksheets asking students to correct a sentence using same-sex examples, such as *Tom and Rob adopted an child* (Jackson, 2007). Math curriculum could be changed to include word problems that include gay and lesbian issues.

Margaret came out to her parents as a lesbian in 1978. Her parents made her visit a psychiatrist for 40 weeks at $65 a visit. How many Melissa Ethridge albums at $13.99 each might Margaret have bought with the money they could have saved by not sending her to the psychiatrist (Jackson, 2007, p. 181).

The influence of gay and lesbian teachers’ experience on their instruction provides insight into teaching practices that provide greater understanding of identities and various forms of constructing meaning that will help students prepare to live in a plurality (Jackson, 2007).

**Conclusion**

Each of the six educators interviewed and each of the five participants in the focus group negotiated his/her identity differently. There were some differences in the identity negotiation of the rural, suburban, and Catholic school environment educators, as the urban educators seemed
more at ease with being out at school. There was, however, no connection between years of experience as an educator and ease of being out at school.

It was however apparent that how the educators’ negotiated their sexual identity did affect their relationships. The teachers who felt more guarded about their sexual identity were less likely to be open to other members of the school community, being open with only a few trusted colleagues. For these educators,’ being closeted or open, also did affect their roles and practices in their schools. Those who were out felt more at ease sharing stories about themselves as they deal with students or curriculum issues.

One of the participants, George, expressed the need to be out in school as it allows others to see that “we are not the stereotypes that they have perceived, seen on TV, or heard about. That we are good teachers, and can lead normal lives; they can see reality, that we are not different because we are homosexual.” Edward expressed that he’s aware that there are those who think he “shouldn’t teach because he’s gay,” but he just attributes that to a lack of knowledge about homosexuality.

In his closing comments, Adam expressed, “Hopefully things are better for a young educator just coming out of college than they were for me when I started. Maybe this research will show that they are not, but hopefully they are.” This research did not show that young educators are more open to being out in their school environments than veteran teachers.

To be sure, there are LGBT teachers, counselors, and administrators working in the K-12 school systems. This research provides data for those lesbian and gay educators who are currently working in the schools, as it may speak to some of your concerns and allow you to
relate to some of these educators’ experiences. This research additionally provides data illuminating how important a safe and supportive school environment for all staff members is in providing a productive school atmosphere, as teachers who live in constant fear of being outed as a gay man or lesbian distracts from an educator’s responsibilities. Just as DeLeon and Brunner (2009) found that as a form of coping with the fears of being out or beingouted, educators choose to assimilate and remain silent, because as Brueggemann and Moddelmog (2002) found the fear of being openly gay or lesbian educators produces fear of job loss and exclusion. As Goodman (2005) stated gay and lesbian school community members will not feel safe to be out about their sexuality until the school system takes as a united front against anti-gay jokes and comments. The educators in this study agreed, but most also agreed that many of their colleagues and administrators will not agree to such a unified effort. While these educators in this study, as well as other educators not in the study, but with whom I have spoken to, agree that being out in their school communities is absurd. The fear that these teachers spoke about when negotiating their identities, is common among gay men and lesbians working in K-12 school systems. Until school districts are safe for all gay and lesbian students and employees, and there are policies in place to protect against harassment and being fired, fear will continue to keep many of the gay and lesbian educators closeted.
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Interview Protocol

1. Do you self-identify as a gay male or lesbian?

2. You work in/did work in what type of school environment? Urban Rural Suburban

3. What is your age?

4. How long have you been teaching?

5. What subject do you teach?

6. What grade level do you primarily work with?

7. Can you please talk about your career history?

8. How many years have you taught in the school where you now teach?

9. What was school like for you?

10. Why did you become a teacher?

11. How do/did you present yourself in the workplace (eg. How does your sexuality define you as a professional?)

12. Are you out to your students/colleagues/parents/family?
13. What made you feel safe/unsafe to come out to those with whom you are out?

14. Do your colleagues include you in social events outside of the workplace?

15. What appreciation and support can be found in your school environment?

16. What are the challenges and burdens you experience being a gay/lesbian educator?

17. How do you deal with anxiety and isolation as a gay/lesbian educator?

18. Were there events that led you to be more open in your school community? If so what were they?

19. How would you describe what it is like being a gay or lesbian teacher?

20. How does your sexual orientation affect your teaching practice/administrative role?

21. As a gay/lesbian teacher/administrator, what words would you use to describe what it felt like when you entered the teaching profession?

22. How do you deal with anti-gay comments or jokes?

23. Have you ever experienced any perceived discrimination (overt or otherwise) as a result of your sexual orientation?

24. What is the psychological (personal) impact of being a gay or lesbian teacher?
25. Do you think you could/would be fired for being gay/lesbian or an issue related to your sexual orientation?

26. What are your plans for the future?

27. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences being an *out* or *closeted* gay/lesbian educator?
FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH TOPIC AREAS
AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Participant # ____________________

Survey of Personal Information:

1. Do you self-identify as a gay male, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender? ____________
2. What is your race or ethnicity? White (nonHispanic) African-American Asian Hispanic
   Other (specify) ____________________________
3. What is your age?
4. How long have you been teaching?
5. What subject do you teach or role do you play?
6. What grade level do you primarily work with?
7. How many years have you taught in the school where you now teach?

These themes and prompts have been identified through the personal interviews conducted for this research study.

Identity Negotiation:

1. How do/did you present yourself in the workplace (eg. How does your sexuality define you as a professional?)
2. Are you out to your students/colleagues/parents of your students/family?
3. How would you describe what it is like being a gay or lesbian teacher?
4. Do you think you could/would be fired for being gay/lesbian or an issue related to your sexual orientation?
5. How would you describe what it is like being a gay or lesbian teacher?
6. How do you deal with anti-gay comments or jokes?
Relationships:

1. Do your colleagues include you in social events outside of the workplace?
2. What are the challenges and burdens you experience being a gay/lesbian educator?
3. How do you deal with anxiety and isolation as a gay/lesbian educator?
4. Have you ever experienced any perceived discrimination (overt or otherwise) as a result of your sexual orientation?
5. What appreciation and support can be found in your school environment?

Practices, Roles, and Responsibilities:

1. As a gay/lesbian teacher/administrator, what words would you use to describe what it felt like when you entered the teaching profession?
2. How does your sexual orientation affect your teaching practice/administrative role?
3. What is the psychological (personal) impact of being a gay or lesbian teacher?
Support Services and Resources
for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues

GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network)
(859) 628-2732

Gay and Lesbian Community Center
4119 Hamilton Avenue (Northside)
(513) 591-0200

PFLAG (Parents, family & friends for lesbians and gays)
(513) 721-7900

Mental Health Association of the Cincinnati Area
(513) 721-2910

Norcen Behavioral Health Systems, Inc.
7162 Reading Road, Suite 500
(513) 761-6222

St. John’s Unitarian Church
320 Resor Avenue
(513) 961-1938

New Spirit Metropolitan Community Church
4033 Hamilton Avenue
(513) 661-6464

Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church
103 William Howard Taft Road
(513) 281-5945

Jewish Family Service
(513) 469-1188

HRC (Human Rights Campaign) Greater Cincinnati Community Committee
(859) 466-3089
Adult Consent Form for Research for Individual Interviews  
University of Cincinnati  
Department: College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services  
Principal Investigator: Steven D. Hooker  
[513-221-9895, hookersd@email.uc.edu]  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. James Koschoreck  
[513-556-6622, james.koschoreck@uc.edu]

Title of Study: Sexual Orientation: Should it be the Determining Factor on Whether or Not Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender Individuals Work in K-12 Schools?

Introduction: You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study? The person in charge of this research study is Steven D. Hooker of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to determine how gay and lesbian teachers negotiate their identities and how that identity affects their relationships in school, as well as what affect their sexual orientation plays on their professional practices, roles, and responsibilities.

Who will be in this research study? About 16 people will take part in this study. You may be in this study if you are a self-identified gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered educator.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take? You will be individually interviewed, and asked to answer questions about your experiences in school as a self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered educator. It will take approximately 90 minutes. The research will be scheduled in a public facility that is convenient for you.

Are there any risks to being in this research? There is some possible risk that you may feel uncomfortable by some of the questioning and subject matter, but you may stop participating or not answer any question at any time during the interview. You do, at any point, have the right to decide whether or not to remain in the study. You may discuss discomfort and risks with the investigator Steven Hooker (513) 221-9895, the investigator’s advisor Dr. James Koschoreck (513) 655-6622, or you may call the University of Cincinnati’s Institutional Review Board for Social and Behavioral Sciences at (513) 558-5784.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study? There is no direct benefit for you. Findings may be used to develop recommendations new gay and lesbian teachers and administrators entering the field of education or moving into a new school district.

Will you have to pay anything to be in this research study? You will not have to pay anything to take part in this study.

What you will get because of being in this research study? You will not be paid (or given anything) to take part in this study. While there are no direct benefits, you will be given the...
opportunity to tell your story, have your voice heard, and share your experiences with new
teachers and other lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender teachers and administrators.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study? Nothing in this consent form
waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator,
the institution, or its agents for liability for negligence.

How will your research information be kept confidential? Information about you will be kept
private by using pseudo names if you are being interviewed individually or by your identification
number, if you are in a focus group. After that it will be stored in a locked cabinet and stored in
a secure place for three years after the end of the study and then will be destroyed.

What if you have questions about this research study? If you have any questions or
concerns about this research study, you should contact Steven Hooker at (513) 221-9895.

The UC Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences (IRB-S) reviews all non-
medical research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of
participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the
Chairperson of the UC IRB-S at (513) 558-5784. Or, you may call the UC Research
Compliance Hotline at
(800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB-S, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive,
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

Do you HAVE to take part in this study? No one has to be in this research study. Refusing
to take part will not cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You
may start then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should
tell Steven Hooker (513) 221-9895.

Agreement: I HAVE READ AND RECEIVED ANSWERS TO ANY QUESTIONS I ASKED. I
GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. I WILL RECEIVE A
COPY OF THIS SIGNED AND DATED CONSENT FORM.

Participant Name (Please Print)_______________________________________________
Participant Signature_________________________________________Date______________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _________________________ Date _____________

IRB # 09-08-12-03 v. 9-9-09  2
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Agreement: I HAVE READ AND RECEIVED ANSWERS TO ANY QUESTIONS I ASKED. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS SIGNED AND DATED CONSENT FORM.

Participant Name (Please Print)___________________________________________________

Participant Signature _______________________________________ Date   ______________

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _________________________ Date ______________