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Poetry from the Glass Closet: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Pk-12 Educators as They Manage Their Sexual Orientation Identity Within a Teaching Role

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POETRY FROM THE GLASS CLOSET: THE EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN, GAY,

AND BISEXUAL PK-12 EDUCATORS AS THEY MANAGE THEIR SEXUAL

ORIENTATION IDENTITY WITHIN A TEACHING ROLE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to portray the experiences of lesbian, gay, and

bisexual educators in PK-12 schools in the State of Colorado. This aim emerged from my

own personal experiences, previous research, and the current status of state and federal

laws. This research focused on the experiences of 15 lesbian, gay, bisexual and allied

identified teachers, including myself.

This study focused on a primary research question: What are the experiences of

lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 educators as they manage their sexual orientation

identities within a teaching role?

Heuristics was the qualitative methodology best suited to address this question.

Heuristics is a process, which combines personal passions and inquiry to illuminate larger

universal significance. For this study, I used a three interview protocol, extensive

journaling and member checking. There are six distinct phases of heuristics in order to

maintain methodological integrity. The final phase was creative synthesis where I used

poetic transcription to capture the experiences of my participants.

In addition to making critical decisions around the heuristics methodology, my

theoretical framework of Queer Theory, challenged me to explore varying dimensions of

the research study, my personal journey, and those of the participants. Queer Theory is

about de-centering, fluidity, and a wider view into identities, both marginalized and mainstream. This framework was central to grappling with the data and information that did not mirror my own experience or political stance regarding being "out" in the classroom.

This study is a step in beginning to uncover the components of many lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators, as each poem further adds to the shallow body of existing literature. During the research process seven themes emerged: experience, personality, philosophy, isolation vs. support, non-negotiables, sense of self, and navigations. Using the seven themes as a guide, the reader can begin to appreciate the complexities and nuances of how one manages sexual orientation in a teaching role. This guide will be useful to various stakeholders, including state and federal policymakers, administrators, and teachers as they try to better inform their practices and create inclusive environments in schools.

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To the casual observer, a doctoral dissertation may appear to be solitary work. However, to complete a project of this magnitude requires a network of support, and I am grateful to many people.

First of all, I offer my sincere appreciation to the committee that supported me and guided me throughout the dissertation process. A special thank you to my advisor, Dr. Nick Cutforth, who believed in the importance of this topic from the beginning. You consistently challenged me to produce a stronger dissertation and continually fostered my research and academic growth. Many thanks to Dr. Annemarie Vaccaro; you guided and inspired me to continue this work when it stalled and helped shaped my identity as a queer theorist. Your role modeling and critical lens was exactly what I needed to visualize this completed product. To Dr. Paul Michalec, thank you for all of your patience and guidance in moving me through the, sometimes, painfully exhausting process of heuristics. Your ability to ask the right questions helped me find clarity in the moments I was most unsure of myself.

A deep thanks to my participants, for without your voices this dissertation would still be "missing". Every interview was a gift and I cherish how each of you illuminated unique and powerful viewpoints of how identity shapes our experiences. Thank you for selflessly sharing with me and others, the knowledge and perseverance you have shown in and out of the classroom. You are an inspiration to me, your students, colleagues and the reader of this dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A Personal Story of Conflicting Identities

There are many aspects to one's identity. Race, class, gender, occupation and

sexual orientation are only a few of the myriad of identities with which one may struggle

with throughout a lifetime. It is the last two identities, occupation and sexual orientation,

that have posed moments of conflict and resistance for me, because much of my vision of

personal identity is wrapped up in the fact that I am a teacher and a lesbian.

I have always known that I wanted to be a teacher, an educator. Starting in high

school I worked in a preschool, taught Sunday school, and was a camp counselor during

my summer break. As with different aspects of personal identity, I went through a

process of reflection and integration as I learned to see myself in the role of educator. I

questioned the meaning of the identity: what does it mean to be a teacher? I tried on

aspects of the identity: what does it look like to be a teacher? I even wrote a paper which

explored whether I wanted to be a high school science teacher or an elementary school

teacher. In the end the conclusion was consistently the same: I am a teacher. It is part of

my identity and an aspect I have used to define myself from high school forward.

This process of defining self as teacher was more pleasant than painful. However,

the same cannot be said about the process of determining my sexual orientation that

included deep personal reflection, moments of resistance, and shame. Moreover, there

seemed to be an ever-present conflict between my identity as a teacher and my emerging identity as a lesbian.

Unlike the process I went through in high school, the process of recognizing my sexual orientation took place when I was in college. It was the summer of 1995, an eventual landmark in my personal history. My position as a camp counselor for the youngest campers was thrilling and exhausting. I relished the experiences and viewed them as one way in which I was practicing or trying on the role of teacher. I was goofy. I told stories of an imaginary character, fixed bruised knees, and sang songs over thunderstorms to make the night less terrifying. It was satisfying, but draining work. Even through this fatigue I could not sleep. Morning after morning, I found myself staring out my tent flap to watch the sun rise and sparkle on the clear lake water. I was running myself ragged during the day, but my thoughts woke me as soon as the sun was up and I could not manage to get a solid eight hours of sleep.

I have always dealt with personal matters in my head. Processing occurs internally and is sorted out long before any words are ever uttered. When I stopped sleeping, I started to ponder the possible roots of the atypical insomnia. It took me weeks to recognize I was not sleeping because I was gay. The internal struggle of admitting one's sexual orientation can often take an unusual toll on the body, mind, and soul.

For me the trigger to the inner turmoil was a girl. She came into my life that summer and would start a chain of events that would bring me to the place where I am today. At first I viewed Abby merely as a close friend. However, one sleepless morning, I

realized that I wanted more than a friendship from her. I was attracted to her in a way that was different from the other relationships I had experienced in my twenty years. This attraction terrified me and thrilled me all at the same time. It took me two weeks, though no amount of thinking could prepare me for the first time I said to another that I was gay. This process of revealing one's sexual orientation is liberating and paralyzing all in the same moment. Telling Abby that I was: a) experiencing new emotions for her, b) pondering my sexual orientation, and c) attracted to her felt incredibly freeing once the words were able to leave my lips. The pressure that had prevented me from sleeping was gone, but unfortunately it was replaced with a new burden: being gay.

What does it mean to be gay? How do you explain to others the deeply personal and emotional challenges that occur once you begin to accept that part of self? That summer was made up with a lot of firsts. The first time I voiced that I might be "different." The first time I spoke the phrase, "I am a lesbian," to another person. It was also the first time I started to sense a conflict of identity: could I really be gay and also a PK-12 classroom teacher?

When the summer was over, I returned to Indiana to begin my junior year of college. Charged by the feelings of empowerment one can feel as identities are revealed, I jumped into my course work at Saint Mary's College with eagerness. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm was short lived. I began my education courses, but they were not what I hoped for. I disagreed with some of the teaching methods and theories, and I quickly became an outsider.

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Rejection from fellow classmates and professors was devastating. I had always felt born for the classroom and all of a sudden others were telling me this was not where they saw me. They never could have known the additional internal identity struggle that was making being back on a conservative Catholic campus so hard. All I could hear was that my teacher identity was being rejected. I soon transferred this rejection to my sexual orientation. If they could not see and accept me as a teacher, they could not see or accept me as gay. The oppression and fear that surrounded me at Saint Mary's sent me into a profound depression and "into the closet." I kept my orientation a secret and tried to change myself in the college classroom. I no longer posed questions, but kept my head low, and suffered through. An uncomfortable conversation took place that spring as student teaching placements were being arranged. I made promises to stay focused and cooperative and they placed me in a fourth grade classroom. The messages sent to me that year were about assimilation and conformity; I lost my voice and feared the secret of my sexual identity would be discovered.

Saint Mary's represented oppression to me while my summers at Camp Menotomy meant moments of freedom. When I returned to New Hampshire that summer, my friends could see that my spirit was somehow different, broken. I had left camp comfortable in my own skin and returned wounded. Friends and campers helped rejuvenate my spirit; I charged my internal battery with all of the sunlight and love that camp could provide. Before I left, my mentor, the camp director, helped me prepare an action plan for how I was going to survive my final year at Saint Mary's. It was her

support that I heard in my head as I stepped into the fourth grade classroom on the first day of student teaching.

Student teaching is the opportunity to try on the teacher role and see how it feels, and I found the fit perfect. The time with the students was full of positive energy and I found two wonderful mentors, a contrast to my experience on campus at Saint Mary's. Chris Curtis, my cooperating teacher, had been a fourth grade teacher for many years. She was skilled at showing me the many dimensions of being a classroom teacher. For Chris, her role as teacher was a central aspect to her identity.

However, without my second mentor, Dr. Gretchen Brunner, I may never have survived student teaching. Dr. Brunner was my classroom supervisor and the first gay adult I had met at Saint Mary's. She represented many of the things I wanted to be: a confident female who had found a way to be both a gay woman and a teacher. Although we never talked about it during student teaching, her observant and empathetic eyes knew what I was grappling with. Dr. Brunner may not have helped me reconcile the inner turmoil of my identity, but she kept me from stagnating. I am forever grateful for the momentum she helped me find at a time when it was hard for me to be in my own skin.

Her support and guidance made it possible for me to flourish even in the oppressive environment at Saint Mary's. Dr. Brunner helped me to transform my frustration with the Saint Mary's teacher preparation experience into my passion to address problems in teacher education. To achieve this dream, I made a plan to obtain a master's degree, teach for 5-7 years, and obtain a PhD.

As I moved into the big yellow Victorian, which served as graduate housing at Smith College, I felt myself breathe for the first time in years. There was (and still is) an energy that emanated from the buildings, faculty, and students who I found myself surrounded by at my master's degree program orientation. This energy seemed to soothe my internal conflict and allowed me the space to marinate and be with myself. Smith is the place where I regained my confidence as a teacher and as a lesbian.

If you ask any classroom teacher they can tell you about a "perfect" teaching moment – a time when students, curriculum, and teacher are in perfect synchronicity and there is an ease and joy that is almost beyond description. Although rare and elusive, these "perfect" moments propel teachers forward during moments of struggle. My sixth grade teaching position, in the nearby town of Southampton, offered me many "perfect" teaching moments. Some nights I would sit in my classroom and ponder these moments. More often than not, however, these moments would then be followed with moments of panic: What if they found out my secret? What if they knew I was a lesbian? Would all of the hard work I put in each day make a difference? Would all of my talent in the classroom be enough if the community ever found out about my "secret identity?"

Finally, I decided to "come out" to my closest colleagues and an administrator. Yet, my fears persisted. Would they continue to support me if my gay identity was revealed to the larger school community? Even though I had tenure, this internal struggle affected me emotionally. A sixth grade colleague, David, regularly expressed his frustration that my sexual orientation had to be a secret. I have never told him, but those

conversations were a lifeline for me. David was the first to show me the power of the ally. These conversations reassured me that others were aware of what I was thinking and feeling, and regardless of their orientation, they could still understand and support me.

Years later, I prepared myself to leave the public school classroom and return to academia for the PhD. Part of me sensed a great loss when I closed my classroom door for the last time; yet another part of me recognized that this new adventure would help me resolve many tensions related to my conflicting identities. Clearly Dr. Brunner knew this when she helped me craft my professional plan. She knew the academy was a more open and accepting place: a place where I could be gay and a professor.

My time at the University of Denver has been filled with ah-ha and eureka moments. A particularly important moment happened during the fall of 2005. I was co-teaching with a fellow doctoral student and we were observing a student-led lesson on the workings of the inner ear. My focus on the feedback I would provide the student was quickly lost, however, when my own inner ear started to ring. I found myself focusing on a side conversation students were having with one another. They were expressing frustration that their diversity class was not discussing the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) youth in schools. All of a sudden more than my ear was ringing. I felt an electric energy flow through me and wondered how I was going to handle this situation. This day was unlike those in sixth grade when I would dread when I would have to educate students on why "gay" was not an appropriate insult to use. Instead, I was

energized. Something shifted that morning that still eludes me, but I knew I wanted to address this situation.

After class reconvened I looked around for Sarah. She was the student leading the conversation and I wanted to talk with her. You can imagine my deep regret when I realized she had already left class and I had missed my opportunity. Thankfully Sarah came back into the classroom to pick up a notebook left behind. I told her that I had overheard her earlier conversation and that I thought she should talk with the diversity instructor because he would likely be open to student feedback. She explained that for a class assignment she was doing a shadow study of a 15-year old identified lesbian and I was floored. I thought it was amazing that this pre-service teacher wanted to explore this girl's life for a day. But even more amazing to me, was the girl. At 15 I was nowhere near accepting or acknowledging the turmoil that I felt inside; it would take me until I was 20 and in college to gain such an understanding. I offered myself to Sarah as a resource if she needed it, but in doing so felt my insides ripping apart. I explained that as a gay woman I might be able to offer perspectives and experiences if she was having trouble sorting through her data. I don't believe I breathed for the next minute. I had done the unthinkable: I had "outed" myself to a student. Her response was amazing. She thanked me, gave me a hug, and went on to class.

That one Saturday morning marked the beginning of my quest to resolve my conflicting identities of being gay and an educator. From that moment on, it was not

enough to be a gay professor. I wanted to be a gay educator and embrace all parts of me, whether in sixth grade or a college classroom.

These events and numerous others led me to ponder whether my experiences matched those of other gay educators. Were they afraid of being known as gay educators? What were their stories? What led them to "come out" of the closet or to stay hidden behind the coats? Did they regret their choices? What benefits might there be?

I have thought a great deal about these questions during the past 18 months. I have journaled, dreamt, and lived this inquiry. I have also consulted the literature to find out whether my feelings and experiences have been described by researchers of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers. I found much in common with my experiences, but as I delved deeper I began to notice gaps in the literature. These gaps, my own personal reflection, and the information contained in the literature have led me to the primary research question and larger purpose of my study.

Purpose of the Study and the Emerging Literature

The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the many factors that hinder and support lesbian, gay, and bisexual preschool (PK)-12 educators in schools and their larger communities. This study aims to connect the areas of literature on identity development and identity management with the personal narratives of PK-12 educators in Colorado.

Researchers are in the early stages of exploring what it means to be a gay, lesbian, or bisexual teacher. One strand of research involves narratives that explore the

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experiences of these teachers. Very few quantitative articles exist in this subject area due to the difficulty in locating a significantly large number of subjects willing to participate (Griffin, 1991; Khayatt, 1992; Juul, 1994; Rasmussen; 2004). Therefore, qualitative methodologies have been primarily used to study this population. The literature delineates between two primary groups of educators: those in higher education and those in PK-12 education. The majority of studies have focused on those in higher education, due to factors of job security, a more liberal academia, and maturity/experience of the educators (Khayatt, 1992; Juul, 1994; Knopp, 1999; Jackson, 2001). Thus, in many respects, this study breaks new ground because of the paucity of PK-12 literature on lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers.

A second strand in the literature focuses on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development and identity management inside and outside of school settings (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Minton & McDonald, 1984; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Lipkin, 1999). This strand of literature possesses both limitations and potential for new research. One of the limitations is that, although there is current research available that addresses the experiences and needs of gay/lesbian/bisexual identity development, this work has not led to the development of a new model or framework. Most of the research relies on Cass's (1979) model of identity development that relied on the experiences of gay males.

Pat Griffin's (1992) article in *Coming out of the Classroom Closet-Gay and Lesbian Students, Teachers, and Curriculum* (Harbeck, 1992) is a seminal article that describes lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers' strategies to exist in heterosexual schools.

She illustrates four common identity management strategies that lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers use: passing, covering, being implicitly out, and being explicitly out. Passing is the most closeted strategy and involves performing or talking about actions and events that would portray lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers as heterosexual. Thus, lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers who are passing fabricate stories about spending time with a person of the opposite sex even if, in actuality, the other person were of the same sex. Lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers who use covering do not lie about their activities; instead they omit information that would lead others to believe they are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Teachers who are being implicitly out do not directly label their orientation as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. They share personal life experiences and activities without lying or covering details, thus allowing those around them to interpret the information. Teachers who are being explicitly out are open about their sexual orientation to selected groups of people, who could range from a few selected colleagues to the entire school community.

Although the literature is more extensive on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development, it does not address the intersection of the identity development and identity management literature. Identity development literature currently bases identity synthesis or identity acceptance on an individual's level of "outness." When looking at the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers, this distinction is arbitrary and requires that the main source of the person's identity be their sexual orientation. As I have begun to explore, identity and integrity do not have to be based solely on one of the many facets of identity. This study seeks to explore the intersections of identities and the role of management

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strategies, as well as the many ways educators find wholeness as lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators in the classroom.

Given the current status of conservative Colorado state law, why would a teacher take the risk to be "out" in the classroom? According to Griffin's (1992) work on identity management strategies employed by lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators, teachers not only have to choose to be "out," but also whether they could even work in an environment that offers no explicit legal protections. Federal law does not currently provide protection to lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators either. However, it is important to acknowledge that on November 7, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives successfully passed the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). The vote, 235 to 184, marks the first time ever that either chamber of Congress has passed employment protections based on sexual orientation. Yet in 31 states, it is currently legal to fire someone based on their sexual orientation.

This study is not about setting the notion of being "out" as better, but rather about helping teachers find wholeness and synthesis within their identities. Defining what constitutes a good teacher means looking beyond the teaching methodologies employed and the curricular theory enacted. It requires looking at the person who is in the classroom. Teachers and administrators need to understand the varied intersections of identity and integrity when seeking to support teachers, which in turn supports students. This study investigates one specific aspect of identity, but the ideas of wholeness, identity, and integrity have implications for all teachers.

This research is based on sexual orientation identity development in PK-12 classroom teachers. This population is underrepresented in the literature and merits examination. To best represent this population, my participant sample contains considerable diversity, and includes gender, racial/ethnic background, and sexual orientation identification (i.e., lesbian, gay, or bisexual).

Research Questions

After a careful examination of the literature and personal reflection on my process of identity development, one primary question, and two sub-questions emerged to guide this investigation.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 educators as they manage their sexual orientation identity within a teaching role?

Sub-Question 1: How do identity development theories and identity management strategies match the experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 educators?

Sub-Question 2: How does the synthesis of various identities support teachers in finding wholeness and satisfaction in PK-12 classrooms?

To best explore these questions, I utilize the qualitative methodology of heuristics. Heuristics is a "process of internal searching through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). The researcher is present throughout

the process, and the research questions and ensuing methodology are structured around an "internal search to discover, with an encompassing puzzlement, a passionate desire to know, a devotion and commitment to pursue a question that is strongly connected to one's own identity and selfhood" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 40). Throughout my PhD coursework, on both an academic and personal level, I explored the intersecting identities which I bring to the classroom when working with PK-12 students and pre-service teachers. It is the blending of both components that makes heuristics the appropriate method for this study.

Organization of this Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into 6 chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced my personal story of identity development and provided the reader with an overview of the purpose and significance of this study. The literature review and theoretical framework comprise Chapter 2. Chapter 3 is a detailed discussion of the research process associated with heuristics methodology, including data collection, data analysis, the role of the research participants, and safeguards taken to protect participants. Chapter 4 is a presentation of the creative synthesis, comprising a brief biography of each participant, as well as a poem that encapsulates their experiences as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual educator. Chapter 5 describes the themes and insights gleaned from the data, and how these connect to the research questions. The study's implications and areas for further research are explored in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section is a summary of the

literature available on lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 teachers. Due to the limited

amount of research, studies on college/university instructors are also included. The

second section outlines the different models of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity

development. The third section discusses lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity management

strategies. The fourth section is a more detailed rationale for this study, addressing the

findings of the literature review. The final section addresses the major tenets and

historical context of Queer Theory, the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

Further discussion of the application of the theoretical framework will be discussed in

Chapters 3, 5, and 6.

The Literature on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual PK-12 Teachers

Please note: a variety of terms are associated with the population of lesbian, gay,

bisexual and transgender people. These terms have been used in accurate and supportive

ways whereas others are used to be pejorative and damaging (Campos, 2003). Where

appropriate in the literature review, positive and politically accurate terms have been

substituted for outdated and negative terms. In situations where authors are directly

quoted, the original terms are maintained. Please see Appendix A for further definitions and terms utilized in this project.

Researchers are in the early stages of exploring what it means to be a lesbian, gay, or bisexual teacher. One strand of research involves narratives that explore the experiences of these teachers. Very few quantitative articles exist in this subject area due to the difficulty in locating subjects willing to participate (Griffin, 1991; Juul, 1994; Khayatt, 1992; Rasmussen, 2004). Therefore, qualitative methodologies have been primarily used to study this population. The literature delineates between two primary groups of educators: those in higher education and those in PK-12 education. Most of the available literature focuses on those in higher education, due to job security, a more liberal academy, and maturity/experience of the educators (Jackson, 2001; Juul, 1994; Khayatt, 1992; Knopp, 1999). Thus, this study breaks new ground because of the paucity of PK-12 literature on lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers.

A second strand in the literature focuses on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development and identity management inside and outside school settings (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Lipkin, 1999; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Minton & McDonald, 1984). This strand possesses both limitations and potential for new research. One of the limitations is that, although there is current research available that addresses the experiences and needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development, this work has not led to the development of a new model or framework. Most of the research relies on

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Cass's (1979) model of identity development that was designed using the experience of gay males.

This strand of research is also limited with respect to generalizability, because of its overreliance on gay male participants (Evans & Wall, 2000). An emerging body of research focuses on the lesbian experience of identity, but does not address bisexual and transgender populations who have different experiences. Most of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development models have been developed from research on students on college campuses and do not look at the intersections of gender, class, race, and ethnicity (Evans & Wall, 1991, 2000). Other identity management research has been done in a business work place (Cain, 1991). The college and business settings may not be generalizable to the PK-12 school environment and the experiences of teachers.

Almost every author addresses the problem of sampling by acknowledging the challenge of gathering a large sampling pool that includes lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants who represent each level of identity development. When participants are in the early stages of development, they are not accessible by sampling techniques often used with this population such as contacting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Ally (LGBTIQA) organizations, snowball sampling, or representative case sampling (Cain, 1991; Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; DeJean, 2001; Elliot, 1996; Evans & Wall, 1991, 2001; Griffin, 1992; Jackson, 2001; Juul, 1994, 1995; Litton, 1999).

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Teachers

Although limited in its scope, there are a number of significant studies on lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators in PK-12 schooling environments. In the following section, I explain each study, highlight the major contributions to the field, and critique their limitations. Due to the relative new attention to this field of study, and although each contributes individually to the larger understanding of what it means to be a lesbian, gay, or bisexual educator, the field does not have enough depth to show how the studies build on each other. With that stated, the most logical manner to organize this literature section is chronologically.

In her article, Didi Khayatt (1992), a tenured faculty member and a lesbian, describes her own struggles with "coming out" to her students. One unique aspect of this article is the exploration of the different ways in which faculty members can reveal their sexual orientation; whether it is a declarative statement or even a casual mention in classroom discussion. Khayatt uses personal stories to explore the internal and external issues influencing teachers' decisions about whether to "come out" to their students. She also isolates the issue of revealing sexual orientation and discusses the five most prevalent arguments used to support teachers in making the choice to reveal their sexual orientation to students.

Juul (1995) surveyed over 900 gay and lesbian teachers to study the effect of tenure, state laws, inclusive contracts, and local ordinances on their openness and public identities. Many of these teachers were located through lesbian, gay, and bisexual teacher

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organizations and through informal networks. Juul concludes that tenure had a strong

negative influence on issues related to job satisfaction. Tenure did not appear to provide

protection or an avenue to openness about the respondent's sexual orientation and

therefore lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers remained "closeted." Juul identifies two

follow-up questions: 1) why did tenure fail to provide the expected increase in teacher

openness about their sexual orientation?; and 2) why were respondents largely

uninformed about their civil rights? Juul had expected that tenure, state laws, inclusive

contracts, and local ordinances would positively impact lesbian, gay, and bisexual

teachers' job satisfaction levels. Further research is needed, particularly utilizing

qualitative methodologies, to explore the individual experiences that connect with the

study's quantitative findings.

Carla Washburne Rensenbrink's (1996) article recounts the story of a fifth grade

teacher who "came out" as a lesbian to her students in her article, "What Difference Does

It Make? The Story of a Lesbian Teacher." Using interviews and classroom observations,

the author explores the aspects of the teacher's sexual orientation that positively impact

the fifth grade classroom and students. The key component identified by Rensenbrink is

the safe space created by the teacher and students, that supports students questioning the

dominant culture and taking an active stand. Rensenbrink argues that more research is

needed to address other positive aspects of lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers' classrooms.

Eugene Litton (1999) interviewed five Catholic school elementary teachers who

had only taught in secular schools. Being lesbian, gay, or bisexual carries additional

challenges for the Catholic school teacher due to conflicting identities of educator, faith, and sexual orientation. His intention was to give voice to this group of teachers who often are offered less protection from the law than their counterparts in public schools. Litton concludes that "the Catholic school teachers in this study have come to accept the oppression and are working with the system, as opposed to against the system; to create a more inclusive school environment that truly echoes the gospel message of loving one another" (p. 18). This study also raises the idea that when one group is oppressed, all individuals lose whether they have membership in the oppressed group or not.

Lawrence Knopp (1999) discussed personal experiences as an "out" gay male academic in his article, "Out in Academia: The Queer Politics of One Geographer's Sexualisation." Using personal anecdotes, Knopp outlined the positive and negative experiences he has encountered as a gay male in academia. He identified diversification of curricula, improvements in campus and community "social climates," and critical alliance building as likely contributing to a professor's comfort in revealing their sexual orientation. Knopp focuses on three negatives aspects: marginalism, the perception of privilege, and backlash. His main statement in the article is that, "ethical judgments about particular decisions and actions must consider processes as much as outcomes, and context as much as content" (p. 121).

William DeJean's article (2001), "Teaching from Truth," describes the author's experience as a gay high school teacher. DeJean describes how "teaching from fear" negatively impacted his connections with students and teaching. After "coming out" to

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his students, DeJean analyzed his students' reflection papers and used their narratives to reflect on their experiences of his "coming out." DeJean believes that the connections with his students were strengthened in ways that his "teaching from fear" never could accomplish (p. 19). Further research is needed to confirm whether DeJean's conjectures are evident in other educational settings.

Sandra Melillo's (2001) phenomenological study of nine lesbian PK-12 educators sought to understand their perceptions of instructional style, content, and the context of curriculum in relation to their sexual orientation. The study provides examples of how these teachers incorporated their lesbian identity into the classroom. Melillo also addresses the influence of heteronormativity, which is the belief that heterosexuality is superior to lesbian, gay, or bisexuality in the classroom and school setting. She concludes that if a teacher can accept being a lesbian, shared with the acknowledgement, rather than compliance or defiance, of culture she is more likely to enhance her curriculum to characterize all people and create a positive classroom climate accepting of all aspects of diversity.

Teacher credibility has been identified as a concern raised by many lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Russ, Simonds, and Hunt (2002) examined the influence of instructor sexual orientation on students' perceptions of teacher credibility. The experiment was conducted in eight sections of Introduction to Communications, a mandatory class for all first year students. A confederate presented a lecture maintaining consistency in all factors except sexual orientation. This included the content delivered,

the teaching methodologies employed and the confederate's qualifications. After the presentation students were asked to complete a survey, believing that the confederate was applying for a job in the university. This study concluded that students perceive a lesbian, gay, or bisexual teacher as significantly less credible than a heterosexual teacher and those students of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual teacher perceive that they learn considerably less than students of a heterosexual teacher. The study was limited because it only measured first impressions of the instructor and not the long-term experiences of the students. Future research studies should address long-term experiences with a lesbian, gay, or bisexual instructor. It should also be noted that the sampling method was limited to first year students who happened to meet on the same day; thus more rigorous sampling should be conducted to further articulate the correlation between teacher credibility and perceived student learning.

Mary Lou Rasmussen (2004) explored the relationship between inclusivity and "coming out" and how that relationship often situates the closet as a place of shame and exclusion. Rasmussen identifies the political and pedagogical arguments used to encourage and support teachers in revealing their sexual orientation in the classroom. Specifically, she explores the notion of being "out" as being better politically and pedagogically for her and the curriculum received by the students. This article begins to direct the conversation of "coming out" in the classroom, focusing beyond the how, when, and if you will "come out" dilemma faced by many lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators and towards a dialogue of identity integration in the classroom. This identity

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integration in the classroom is only minimally addressed by other authors and merits further exploration.

The insights and conclusions that emerged from this collection of studies are centered around ideas of oppression, credibility, fear, positive outcomes of revealing one's sexual orientation in a school environment, the method of reveal, and lastly, perceived and actual protection. As stated at the beginning of this section, the field has benefited individually from each of these studies, but as a whole has failed to address the larger implications and intersections of sexual orientation, integrity, and wholeness in the PK-12 classroom. The interview protocol in my research study addressed each of these ideas as a way to potentially offer connections within the research field.

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Development Models

Much as one grows into the role of educator, there is a similar progression into an understanding of one's sexual orientation. The previous section situated the experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers in the PK-12 classroom; this next section discusses the various theoretical models associated with lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development, which often begins long before the teacher enters the PK-12 classroom.

Scholars have proposed various linear and non-liner models to articulate the stages, phases, or tasks that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals progress through as they seek to understand their identities. Authors have utilized different vocabulary such as stage, phase, or task to explain the key learnings an individual seeks before progressing through the model. Lipkin (1999) created the chart below to synthesize the

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most referenced identity models and further integrated them into his proposed five-stage model. In the creation of the chart, Lipkin broke out each model into the nine common tasks articulated by each identity development theorist. These "continuum of pivotal moments" is set out on the left side, beginning with "awareness of stigma" and progressing to "recognition of sexuality's place as a part of a whole person" (p. 25). Then the chart maps these tasks with five of the most referenced lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development models. This section of the literature review discusses each of the five models identified by Lipkin as seminal works on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development. First, I outline each of the "pivotal moments" or tasks common to the five models. Next, I explain the models of Coleman (1982), Cass (1979), Troiden (1988), and Minton and McDonald (1984). Additionally, I include other relevant models present in the literature.

Figure 1- Lesbian, gay and bisexual identity development models
Source- "Understanding Homosexuality: Changing Schools" Lipkin (1999)

Continuum of Pivotal Moments	Coleman's Five Stage Model	Cass's Six Stage Model	Troiden's Four Stage Model	Minton and McDonald's Three Stage Model	Lipkin's Five Stage Model
Awareness of stigma	1) Pre-coming out	1)Identity Confusion;	1)Sensitization	1) Egocentric	1) Presexuality
Realization that "I am different"					
Sexualization of sense of difference	2) Coming out	2)Identity comparison	2) Identity confusion		2) Identity questioning
Denial and resistance				2)Sociocentric	
Realization	3) Exploration	3) Identity tolerance			
Acceptance of sexual identity		4) Identity acceptance	3) Identity assumptions; 4)Commitment	3)Universalistic	3) Coming out; 4) Pride
Exploration of the GLBT community		5) Identity pride			
Opening up	4)First Relationships; 5)Integration				
Recognition of sexuality's place as a part of the whole person		6) Identity synthesis			5) Postsexuality

The first task on the continuum is awareness of stigma. This is called the "pre-coming out" stage in Coleman's (1982) model and identity confusion in the Cass (1979) model. Individuals are beginning to process the numerous negative connotations with the emerging identity. The second task is the realization that they are different. Minton and McDonald (1984) have called this egocentric and Troiden (1988) classifies this as sensitization. Individuals are aware of the different feelings they have for other peers, but may not have connected this to a specific same-gendered individual. The third task is the sexualization of the sense of difference. In comparison to the previous task, an individual is aware of a same-sex attraction and this task is where the feeling of being different is sexualized.

The fourth task is denial and resistance. An individual may seek to avoid labels and trivialize their personal interests. The fifth task is the realization that they may be lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This task can result in isolation, justifications, and eventually leads to the sixth task of acceptance. Cass (1979) refers to this as identity acceptance. The isolation felt in the sixth task can propel an individual into seeking out role models and the beginning of communicating to others their sexual identity. This task is a pivotal point as the lesbian, gay, or bisexual individual "comes out" to other individuals. The next, or seventh task, is the exploration of lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. This is the individual's immersion into a sub-culture as they continue to express their sexual orientation. The eighth task is opening up. Many individuals at this point begin to reach a deep understanding of their identity and no longer make a choice to be ashamed or hide

themselves. The final task is the recognition of sexuality as part of the whole person. This task is defined by the understanding that sexual orientation is only one facet of a person's whole identity and does not need to be the only aspect that defines self. Lipkin's nine tasks are all part of each of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity models. No model uses each of these nine tasks as stages, but rather integrates the task into the theory.

Eli Coleman (1982) created a five-stage development model with the following stages: pre-coming out, "coming out", exploration, first relationships, and integration. During the pre-coming out stage, a person would only have a vague awareness of a possible lesbian or gay identity. When one recognizes and then tells another person about their emerging identity, a person is said to be at the "coming out" stage. Following this is the stage in which a person would begin to explore the lesbian or gay community and find other individuals in similar stages of development. The first relationship stage evolves as a person becomes comfortable with their identity and becomes involved romantically with a same gender partner. The final stage is a level of integration. This is marked by a person's ability to be "fully functioning" within society. This classic developmental model does not address the intricacies needed to move from first relationship to integration. This limitation could be addressed by studying and further articulating the key tasks that would occur and support the process of identity integration.

Vivian Cass (1979) developed a theory of lesbian and gay identity development which terminates in identity synthesis. She identified 6 different stages that one might experience as working toward integration of a lesbian or gay identity. Stage 1, *Identity*

Confusion, is characterized by an individual first becoming aware of their attraction to, feelings for, or thoughts about people of the same gender. This stage can involve conflicting emotions, fear, and eventually leads to acceptance or rejection of the emotions. Acceptance of these feelings can lead to Stage 2, *Identity Comparison.* Throughout this stage, a person might begin to accept the possibility that they are lesbian or gay. Individuals may begin to seek out other lesbian or gay individuals as they try and negotiate this stage, specifically as they deal with the stigmas attached to being lesbian or gay. This stage could also involve a certain amount of acting to maintain the public image of being heterosexual. Stage 3, *Identity Tolerance,* involves a lot of personal reflection, as well as seeking out others to reduce feelings of isolation. Stage 4, *Identity Acceptance,* is characterized by an acceptance of the label lesbian or gay, but may still involve a certain amount of role switching depending on the social circle involved. Often individuals will begin to reveal their identities to others in their lives. Stage 5, *Identity Pride,* is a time when the individual will focus on the lesbian and gay community and reduces the time spent with heterosexuals. Often, this time is when one would vocally express their sexual orientation and express outrage for oppressive practices and experiences. Stage 6, *Identity Synthesis* is the final stage in the development of a lesbian or gay identity. Individuals who reach this point will likely have found a way to mediate their lesbian or gay identity within a heterosexual world. There is less division of self as the lesbian or gay identity becomes just one factor of an identity, and not one's only lens through which one negotiates the world.

Trioden's (1988) identity development model is divided into 4 stages. The first stage, *Sensitization*, occurs in pre-adolescence and is "characterized by generalized feelings of marginality, perceptions of being different from same-sex peers" (p. 106). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals first notice differences in social constructions of gender and do not attribute this to same-sex attractions. Stage 2, *Identity Confusion,* emerges for most lesbian, gay, or bisexual individuals during puberty. At this point, individuals begin to identify a disconnect between developing sexual attractions and previous held notions of self. Five responses are identified by Troiden as typical responses to identity confusion: "denial, repair, avoidance, redefinition, and acceptance" (p. 108). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals may experience these different responses in a fluid and intersecting manner. Some will experience all five in order, whereas others will move between the different responses in a less linear manner or repeat responses depending on the context. The third stage, *Identity Assumption*, is largely marked by the "coming out" process. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals seek out community connections, role models, and a deeper understanding of the newly defined lesbian, gay, or bisexual self. Stigma management strategies are used to mitigate the perceived social stigmas attached to their new identities (p. 110). The final stage is *Commitment*, which is highlighted by a significant same-sex relationship. During this stage individuals create new stigma management strategies, such as "blending, covering, and conversion" (p. 112). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals are now able to fully integrate their once dissonant images and identities.

Minton and McDonald (1984) created a nonlinear model in which growth is based on the interaction between societal values, beliefs, and the individual. There are two primary developmental tasks in this model. The first is the formation of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual self-image which culminates in the formation of a positive lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. The second task is identity management and how one chooses the extent to which the identity will be shared. The end goal of this model is to achieve identity synthesis, which requires the integration of all aspects of one's personal identity. These tasks are presented in a similar fashion to other models. The stage before one recognizes the potential of a lesbian or gay identity is called *Symbiotic*. When one moves beyond that to address personal feelings and beliefs about being gay, one is in the *Egocentric* stage. After one addresses the self, one seeks out others who might have similar experiences – the *Sociocentric* stage. Once one has fully integrated the lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity into other aspects of identity such as race, religion, and class, one has reached the *Universalistic* stage.

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) developed a model of sexual identity development that separates the developmental tasks into two types of categories: individual sexual identity development and group membership identity development. These categories are independent of one another and can evolve at different paces. Each category involves four phases: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis. The *Awareness* phase is the point where an individual would recognize a feeling of being different, or where an individual would notice different

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sexual identities around them. The *Exploration* phase would involve the attraction to a partner of the same gender or an exploration of one's position in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. When one enters the phase of *Deepening/Commitment* for individual identity development, one would enter into an intimate relationship with a person of the same gender. To further the group identity, one would start a more permanent relationship with people and politics in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. The final phase is *Internalization/Synthesis* when the individual integrates both the personal identity and the group identity into the whole. This model was developed to be fluid and to allow for factors such as self-esteem to be looked at in conjunction with the different phases. This model addresses the differences between the personal identity development and the group membership identity development; however, rather than highlighting the "coming out" process as a critical moment, it balances the self and the larger community. With further research this model could provide insights into how one could advance in one area and yet still be foreclosed in another.

Anthony D'Augelli's (1994) model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development is structured around 3 distinct areas: personal subjectivities and actions, interactive intimacies, and sociohistorical connections. The way that an individual experiences and responds emotionally and behaviorally is the category of personal subjectivities and actions. Patterns of personal interactions between peer groups and familial networks influence the development of an individual's sexual behaviors and beliefs, or what D'Augelli has termed "interactive intimacies." The final area is the

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interacting factors of norms, culture, laws, and events that shape the individual's

historical time period. These historical connections influence the development of a

lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity and further impact the role of identity development.

Utilizing these three structures, D'Augelli (1994) identified a variety of

intertwined processes that are involved in the development of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual

identity: exiting a heterosexual identity; developing a personal lesbian, gay, or bisexual

identity status; developing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual social identity; becoming a lesbian,

gay, or bisexual offspring; developing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual intimacy status; and

entering a lesbian, gay, or bisexual community. D'Augelli believes that individuals'

progress through these processes and that each will be further influenced by the three

previously articulated factors. The individual's choices and personal dispositions are not

removed, but rather incorporated into D'Augelli's theory.

The process of exiting from a heterosexual identity involves the

acknowledgement and letting go of the privilege associated with that identity. The tasks

during this time include labeling and exploring of one's attractions and "coming out" to

family and/or peers. All of this is influenced by an individual's personal subjectivities

and actions, interactive intimacies, and historical connections. For many, this set of tasks

can be a painful and time-consuming process.

The second and third tasks are often undertaken at the same time as an individual

is exiting from a heterosexual identity. In the process of trying to develop a lesbian, gay,

or bisexual identity, a person may seek to connect initially with a member of the lesbian,

gay, and bisexual community in order to find positive role models for what it means to live a non-heterosexual life. The third task is the creation of a social network of other lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Additionally, an individual is looking for a supportive network of individuals who affirm one's sexual orientation, but who may not identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

D'Augelli's model includes a specific task as lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals reveal their sexual orientations to parents. This task involves a redefining of the parent-child relationship and can be stressful or painful as the child struggles to gain parental acceptance. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals who have developed strong identity status and social identity markers in tasks two and three may rely heavily on these social networks as they become lesbian, gay, or bisexual offspring.

Developing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual intimacy status is often defined by the first significant intimate relationship. Savins-Williams (2004) cautions that "sexual identity milestones are likely to be emotionally orientated for young women and sexually orientated for young men" (p. 324). This can vary how individuals define significant intimate relationships at this stage.

Finally, D'Augelli suggests that a lesbian, gay, or bisexual individual will determine to what extent they want to be involved in the political community in reference to lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues. The activist role is a personal choice, not undertaken by all individuals. This stage is also influenced by a person's individual subjectivities, interactive intimacies, and sociohistorical connections. This model warrants continued

attention as social justice issues remain on the forefront of political and institutional agendas.

Richard Allen Stevens (2004) added a new dimension to gay and lesbian identity development models. Utilizing a sample of 11 undergraduate gay male students and a grounded theory methodology, Stevens explored how critical incidents impact identity development, and generated a five-stage identity development model. The stages are: self-acceptance, disclosure to others, individual factors, environmental influences, and finding empowerment. What makes this model different from others is the inclusion of individual factors and environmental factors. The individual factors include support networks and personality factors, which could impact identity development. Environmental factors take into account the way a person's context might impact their personal identity development. The addition of these two components to an identity development model provides a deeper picture into a person's personal experience with a lesbian or gay identity. With further work, identity management strategies could easily be examined within these two categories.

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Management Strategies

Integral to comprehending the lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 classroom experience is an understanding of the specific strategies used by teachers to manage the sexual orientation identity within an often conservative school context. This section focuses on the specific strategies identified by researchers who have primarily focused on the PK-12 environment. In order to adequately review these strategies, it was necessary

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to include some research that was set in non-school environments. With that stated, the most logical manner to organize this literature section is chronologically.

Cain (1991) completed in-depth interviews with 38 gay men. The men ranged in age from 19 to 50 with the average age being 31. His research provides an interesting link between identity management and identity development. After analyzing his interviews, he determined six different ways or reasons that these gay men disclosed their sexual identities and five different ways or reasons why they concealed their sexual identities. The first type of disclosure Cain termed *Therapeutic disclosure*. This is when one reveals the sexual identity as a way to feel better about one's self, and could be motivated by feelings of isolation, lack of self-esteem, or guilt, and by telling someone one he is seeking approval and validation. *Relationship-building disclosures* occur when one is seeking to improve one's relationship with another person. *Problem-solving disclosures* are a way of solving a situational or interactional problem. For example, a son may tell his parents so that he no longer needs to address questions of girlfriends and marriage. The fourth type of disclosure is done in hopes of avoiding future problems or situations. *Preventative disclosures* could be made to a doctor to ensure proper care or to a future employer to make sure issues would not arise later in their career. *Political disclosures* are done in the hopes of being a role model, challenging oppression, and to improve the current political climate. An example of this would be the gay couple who file a lawsuit against the state in hopes of addressing gay marriage. The unplanned, slips of the tongue are called *spontaneous disclosures*. All of these types of disclosures are ways that one

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could manage one's identity. Cain also found that some of these disclosures could be motivated by factors of identity development. For example, political disclosures could be connected with Cass's level of Identity Synthesis. This is, of course, dependent on the individual.

To balance the six types of disclosures, Cain articulates the five different ways that sexual identity is concealed: Inappropriateness, perceived lack of pay-off, deference, avowal of responsibility, and politics. *Inappropriateness* concerns situations where it would cause extreme discomfort or could be viewed as irrelevant to reveal one's sexual orientation. Sometimes people chose to conceal their sexual orientations when there was a *perceived lack of pay-off*. In these cases, it is a cost-benefit situation where the risks of revealing one's sexual identity are too high. *Deference* is when one does not reveal one's sexual orientation out of respect for the other person. This is similar to the lack of pay-off except the focus is on the risk for the other person and not the one who reveals his or her identity. When one lacks the courage and blames oneself, one is using the *avowal of responsibility* concealment type. One has located a characteristic, usually secrecy, within oneself and places a lot of self-blame internally, thus preventing one from having the confidence to reveal one's sexual orientation. Cain's last reason for concealment, *politics*, is when sexual orientation is concealed because the men did not want to harm the gay movement. They do not want to bring scorn or ridicule from society, thus impacting other gay men.

Pat Griffin (1992) defines the strategies that lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers have developed to exist in heterosexual schools. She describes four common identity management strategies that lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers use: passing, covering, being implicitly "out", and being explicitly "out". *Passing* is the most closeted strategy and involves performing or talking about actions and events that would portray lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers as heterosexual. Thus, lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers who are passing make up stories about spending time with a person of the opposite sex even if, in actuality, the other person was of the same sex. Lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers who use *covering* do not lie about their activities. Instead, covering involves omitting information that would lead others to believe they are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Teachers who are *being implicitly "out"* do not directly label their orientations as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. They will share personal life experiences and activities without lying or covering details, thus allowing those around them to interpret the information. Teachers who are *being explicitly "out"* are open about their sexual orientations to selected groups of people, who could range from a few selected colleagues to the entire school community.

Sherry Woods and Karen Harbeck's (1992) phenomenological study involved twelve lesbian physical educators. The authors studied management strategies employed by these educators in two different scenarios. They looked at strategies used to conceal one's lesbian identity and strategies used to mediate risk-taking behaviors that could disclose one's lesbian identity. When these educators were trying to conceal their

identities, they often would utilize techniques that would allow them to pass as heterosexual. Participants would also employ strategies of distancing. The educators would remain distant from colleagues to avoid situations where personal conversations might arise. In some cases, not only would they distance themselves from others, but they would also distance themselves from lesbian, gay, or bisexuality issues. Often these educators would avoid intervening in a school situation, such as derogatory name calling, if they perceived that it might reveal their sexual orientation. Risk-taking behaviors that these educators used were often an attempt to merge the personal with the professional and were premeditated, calculated steps. The first might include obliquely overlapping the personal with the professional. There would not be any direct reference to a partner, but one might refer to a roommate or bring a friend to school functions. The second risk-taking behavior identified was actively confronting and supporting issues connected to the lesbian, gay, or bisexual community. A teacher in this situation would not avoid a name calling incident and would push the students' thinking. The final step would be for an educator to overtly overlap the personal and professional. The risk-taking behavior could include disclosure to colleagues, students, or former students.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers often pressure themselves to work hard or "fit in" in order to survive in educational settings. "Hiding" is a common survival strategy (Kissen, 1996, p. 53). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers also feel the need to work harder than their heterosexual colleagues. Kissen (1996) stated that many lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers "feel they need to be outstanding in order to be seen as equal to

heterosexual colleagues" (p. 42). Lesbian, gay, or bisexual teachers may also monitor their actions or manner of dressing more than heterosexual teachers because they worry about being identified at lesbian, gay, or bisexual. These self-protection strategies can lead to even more pressure because "the energy teachers spend on hiding is more than a drain on their time; it is a drain on their minds and bodies as well" (p. 53).

Summary

It is clear that these concealment and disclosure strategies are a part of the "coming out" process, but they delve deeper into the rationale behind why someone might choose to reveal their sexual identity and offer clear research connections to the literature on identity development. Although most of these literature contains studies that address "coming out" and not the daily management of one's sexual identity, they shed light into the process of management, as well as some of the motivating factors. Identity management, identity development, and the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators each contribute to a larger understanding of this small area of literature. Each area informs the other, and yet few connections or studies have been designed to pull from the knowledge known in each section. The three segments of the literature, when looked at in conjunction with each other, clearly show the large gaps in the literature on the complex experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators.

Rationale for the Study

Under the Colorado State Law:

> 1. As of August 3, 2007, Colorado's non-discrimination law was amended to apply to "sexual orientation", which is defined as "a person's orientation toward heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or transgender status or an employer's perception thereof." Colorado Revised Statutes 24-34-401, 24-34-402.

> 2. No provision of Colorado law explicitly addresses gender/gender identity-based violence or other similar issues under the safe schools law.

> 3. Colorado code does not mention specific protected categories under the safe schools law. The code specifies only a "bullying" prevention provision to protect students from verbal and physical abuse. C.R.S. 22-32-109.1 (2001).

> 4. Colorado law states: "Except as otherwise provided in subsection (3) of this section, a marriage is valid in this state if it is licensed, solemnized, and registered as provided in this part 1; and it is only between one man and one woman. Notwithstanding the   provisions of section 14-2-112, any marriage contracted or outside this state that does not satisfy paragraph (b) of subsection (1) of this section shall not be recognized as valid in this state." The state constitution declares, "Only a union of one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in this state." (Retrieved on 5/3/08 from http://www.hrc.org/laws_and_elections/state.asp)

Given the still conservative status of Colorado state law, why would a teacher take the risk to be "out" in the classroom? State law does currently provide protection to lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators, but this protection does not extend to the federal level. However, it is important to acknowledge that on November 7, 2007 the U.S. House of Representatives successfully passed the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). The vote, 235 to 184, marks the first time ever that either chamber of Congress has passed employment protections based on sexual orientation. Yet, in 31 states, it is currently legal to fire someone based on their sexual orientation. Colorado may no longer

be counted as one of those 31 states, but that does not reduce the discrimination and the conservative culture perpetuated in schools and the potential impact on lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers (Juul, 1995).

At the district level, only 12 of the 146 districts in Colorado have amended non-discrimination policies to reflect the new inclusion of sexual orientation in district guidebooks or on district websites. This is indicative and insightful to the actual culture currently present in Colorado school districts. Even with such a hostile policy and cultural reality, there are gay teachers in Colorado schools. So, what are their experiences? What conditions are in place to help them make the decision to reveal themselves to colleagues or students? What barriers are in place to prevent teachers from feeling that Colorado schools are a safe place to reveal their sexual orientations? How do teachers deal with potentially dueling identities?

Teachers, school administrators, and state and federal policy makers need the answers to these questions for different reasons. For teachers, the answers are quite personal and address larger issues of social justice in our school systems. For administrators seeking to create safe and productive environments for teachers and students, the answers provide guidance as they facilitate the integration of multiple identities within their schools. Lastly, state and federal policy makers must critically examine the impact of law and regulations on a diverse group of citizens. This study sheds light into how stakeholders can address their needs and questions around what it means to be a lesbian, gay, or bisexual PK-12 educator.

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This study does not attempt to argue that being "out" is better, but rather stresses the importance of helping teachers find wholeness and synthesis within their identities. Parker Palmer (1998) eloquently describes the concepts of identity and integrity in teaching. He describes identity as, "an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self… identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human" (p. 11). He adds, "By *integrity* I mean whatever wholeness I am able to find within that nexus as its vectors form and re-form the pattern of my life". Palmer also articulates that, "by choosing integrity, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am" (p. 11).

Building from Palmer's (1998) idea of wholeness, I seek to find this with my participants through the interview process. I personally connect with Palmer's definition of wholeness, but recognize my participants may have other ways of conceptualizing the idea. Therefore, I keep the essences of Palmer's definition in mind, specifically the idea of being "real" in the classroom, but am open to having it expressed in different ways through my participants' eyes. Integrating one's identities into the whole self has been a paradoxical journey for me at times; it is the process of embracing the opposites in our lives where we find that we can finally see the world and self as whole (Palmer, 1998). The purpose of sub-question two is to see *if* and *how* my participants had similar

struggles of coming to wholeness and how they mediate these struggles in their lives and in the classroom.

Defining what constitutes a good teacher means looking beyond the teaching methodologies employed and the curricular theory enacted. It requires looking at the person who is in the classroom. "But a good teacher must stand where personal and public meet, dealing with the thundering flow of traffic at an intersection where 'weaving a web of connectedness' feels more like crossing a freeway on foot" (Palmer, 1998, p. 17). From my own personal reflections, I know that the times my students did not get a whole and present teacher were when I felt out of integrity or in conflict with my personal identity. Teachers and administrators need to understand the varied intersections of identity and integrity when seeking to support teachers, which in turn supports students. This research study investigates one specific aspect of identity, but the ideas of wholeness, identity, and integrity have implications for all teachers. "The more familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more surefooted our teaching—and living—becomes" (Palmer, 1998, p. 5).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides a lens through which to view all aspects of a project. The lens allows the literature, methodology, data, and end project to be interpreted with a similar focus or bent, and therefore be placed within a wider context. As the researcher, congruence between the chosen theoretical framework and

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methodology was of great importance to me. Kirk and Okazawa-Ray (2001) offer eight

questions to reflect on when trying to understand and use any theoretical perspective:

1. What does the theory aim to explain?

2. How does it do this? What are the basic arguments and assumptions?

3. What does the theory focus on? What does it ignore?

4. What is the cultural and historical context giving rise to the theory?

5. So you find this perspective useful? If so, why?

6. Are you convinced by the arguments? Why or why not?

7. What kinds of research questions does this perspective generate?

8. What kinds of actions and projects from this perspective? (p. 19)

After exploring these eight questions in the literature, I am confident that a Queer

theoretical framework best matches my research question, methodology, and personal

aims.

Queer Theory's origins are rooted in a social reform movement. "Queer activism

seeks to break down traditional ideas of normal and deviant, by showing the queer in

what is thought of as normal, and the normal in the queer" (Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p.

60). Queer Theory looks to utilize the tools of activism and "questioning what (and why)

we know and do not know about things both normal and queer" (p. 62). This view of the

normal and queer is part of what differentiates Queer Theory from Lesbian and Gay

Theory. "To set up the distinction between queer theory and lesbian and gay theory in

such a crude binary opposition is, of course, to oversimplify grossly much of the major

works in both fields, which carefully avoids reproducing such oppositions" (O'Driscoll, 1996, p. 30). However, a Queer theoretical framework was selected for this research endeavor because of the key differences.

First, Lesbian and Gay Theory is based on a "theoretical basis unifying that lesbian identity, or gay identity, is a stable attribute, a universal essence" (Nelson, 1999, p. 374).

> Gay and Lesbian Studies are the examination, analysis, and interpretation of the phenomenon characterized by romantic and affectional preference by individuals for others of the same sex. It is by nature cross-disciplinary, covering a wide range of intellectual bases: literature, history, religion, psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, medicine, law, fine arts, and others (Retrieved on 11/8/07 from http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/grd/resguides/gay/index.html).

However, for my theoretical framework this is not enough. Although Gay and Lesbian Studies are cross-disciplinary, they failed to adequately address the larger social and political context. Gay and Lesbian Studies has remained focused on practical applications and this limits its ability to provide a framework for research applications. Queer Theory has been able to move beyond academic practice and into the complex realms of the personal and the political. Queer Theory "shifts the focus from gaining civil rights to analyzing discursive and cultural practices from affirming minority sexual identities to problematising all sexual identities" (Nelson, 1999, p. 373). This shift was central to the types of questions I sought to answer in this research study.

Gay and Lesbian Studies tends to address "coming out" within a developmental framework (see Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Lipkin, 1999; Minton & McDonald,1984;

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Troiden,1988) and the assumption in most models is that the "coming out" process leads

to wholeness or identity synthesis. Queer Theory in comparison is a stance in which:

1. Both the heterosexual/lesbian, gay, or bisexual binary and sex/gender split are challenged.
2. There is a decentering of identity.
3. All sexual categories are open, fluid, and non-fixed (which means that modern lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered identities are fractured, along with all the heterosexual ones).
4. It offers a critique of mainstream or "corporate" lesbian, gay, or bisexuality.
5. It sees power as being embodied discursively. Liberation and rights give way to transgression and carnival as a goal of political action, what has been called a "politics of provocation."
6. All normalizing strategies are shunned.
7. Academic work may become more ironic, is often comic and paradoxical, and it is sometimes carnivalesque: "What a difference a gay makes," "On a queer day you can see forever" (cf. Gever, Greyson, & Parmer, 1993).
8. Versions of lesbian, gay, or bisexual subject positions are inscribed everywhere, even in heterosexualitites.
9. The deviance paradigm is fully abandoned, and the interest lies in a logic of insiders/outsiders and transgression.
10. Its most common objects of study are textual – films, videos, novels, poetry, visual images.
11. Its most frequent interest include a variety of sexual fetishes, drag kings and drag queens, gender and sexual playfulness, cybersexualities, polyamoury, sadomachism, and all the social worlds of the so-called radical sexual fringe. (Plummer, 2005, p. 366)

"Queer theory attempts to disconnect sex and gender by suggesting that the two are not

necessarily related" (Morris, 2000). It is this separation that also makes Queer Theory

applicable and relevant to the field of education. The complexities of identities are

evident in the students being educated in PK-12 classrooms, as well as the teachers

leading this educational endeavor. As Davis and Sumara (2000) posit:

> Co-opting the term "drag"—which, for the most part, has been used in reference to men dressing as women – we came to understand that each of us continued to perform "teacher drag" in our classrooms, schools and universities. Teacher drag had become for us a signifier for robing and disrobing we felt must take place in order to re-complexify our teaching identities – that is, to acknowledge and announce our complexities in schooling practices we considered oppressive, particularly for those who identity as "other" (p. 106)

Beyond identities, "queer theory is not simply about the studying of people whose sex lives are not heterosexual, or even the positionalities of those people; at its core, it is about questioning the presumptions, values, and viewpoints from those positions (marginal and central), especially those that normally go unquestioned" (Dilley, 1999, p. 462). In this research project, although identities are central to the primary and secondary research questions, the queer perspective moves this project further into the realm of exploring the fringes.

Queer Theory is complex and by the very nature of its assumptions, fluid. It challenges the researcher to recognize multiple perspectives and make sure voices are not lost by remaining fixed on one particular position. If the researcher does not remain cognizant of the fluidity required by a queer framework, the researcher could unintentionally exclude and/or silence other aspects of identity. For example, Queer Theory can help a lesbian or gay researcher center the often overlooked concerns of race, ethnicity, and class (Beasley, 2005). Queer Theorists recognize that intersectionalities of identity inform and offer insight into the other. As a researcher, I work to acknowledge these intersections through the interview questions and data analysis.

Summary and Statement of the Problem

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While there is extensive literature on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development, the body of knowledge does not address the intersection of the identity development and identity management literature. Identity development literature currently bases identity synthesis or identity acceptance on an individual level of "outness". When looking at the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers this distinction is arbitrary and requires that the main source of the person's identity is their sexual orientation. However, identity and integrity do not have to be based solely on one of the many facets of identity. This study explores the intersections of identities and the role of management strategies, as well as the many ways educators find wholeness in the classroom.

This study addresses several gaps in the current literature. The first gap is the lack of research in the area of lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 teachers. A second gap is the lack of extensive connections between identity development literature and identity management literature. Lastly, without setting the notion of being "out" as better, further exploration is needed on how lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers find "wholeness" in the classroom. Additionally, this study is conducted within the context of a state known for its conservative laws, especially for lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights and makes this a particularly fertile setting for exploring the topic.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide the context and rationale for this investigation. They define the questions which guided research design, provide the literature and theoretical basis for the study, and present the statement of the problem. Chapter 3 is designed to

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familiarize the reader with the nuances of Heuristic Methodology and the steps taken to

connect the aim of the research questions with the research process.

Chapter 3: The Research Process

The purpose of this study is to bring to light the many factors that hinder and

support lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 educators in schools and their larger

communities. This study aims to connect the areas of literature on identity development,

identity management, and the personal narratives of a group of PK-12 educators in

Colorado. Chapter 1 oriented the reader to the significance of this study, as well as the

origins of the research questions. The literature review of Chapter 2 highlighted the need

for further research to understand more deeply the experiences of lesbian, gay, and

bisexual educators. The gaps in these pertinent topic areas offer a myriad of areas to

research; however, selection of the qualitative methodology enabled the research

questions to be crystallized.

The following questions were used to guide data collection and were formulated

to match the methodology aims of heuristics as guided by a Queer Theory framework.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12

educators as they manage their sexual orientation identities within a teaching role?

Sub-Question 1: How do identity development theories and identity management

strategies match the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 educators?

Sub-Question 2: How does the synthesis of various identities support teachers in

finding wholeness and satisfaction in PK-12 classrooms?

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The methodology that is best suited to address the above questions is heuristics. "Through exhaustive self search, dialogues with others, and creative depictions of experience, a comprehensive knowledge is generated, beginning as a series of subjective musings and developing into a systematic and definitive exposition" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40). The process undertaken in this type of qualitative approach mirrors much of the fluidity that Queer Theory holds central. "The object is not to prove or disprove the influence of one thing or another, but rather to discover the nature of the problem or phenomenon itself and to explicate it as it exists in human experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). It is the essence of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual teacher experience which I am trying to uncover and capture through this study.

This chapter introduces the complexities of the heuristic methodology in three sections. The first section provides an overview of the development of heuristics as a methodology and compares and contrasts heuristics and phenomenology, which are intimately related. The second section discusses how heuristics research is informed by Queer Theory. I briefly lay out how the theoretical framework will be utilized in the study. The final and most important section of this chapter describes the six distinct phases one undertakes in heuristics inquiry. This is first presented generally and then more specifically with reference to its use in my study.

Heuristics as a Research Methodology

"In its purest form, heuristics is a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the

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internal pathways of self" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39). The root meaning of heuristics is derived from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristics is a qualitative research methodology that directs the researcher to a "process of discovery which leads investigators to new images and meanings regarding human phenomena, but also to realizations relevant to theory of one's own experiences and lives" (Moustakas, p. 9). The process combines personal passions and inquiry to illuminate larger universal significance.

Heuristics is closely related to the field of phenomenological research and often utilizes similar data collection and analysis strategies. However, Douglass and Moustakas (1985) delineate four key differences. First, heuristics is a methodology that focuses on the connectedness of the researcher to the question, whereas phenomenology encourages a detachment from the phenomena being investigated. Second, a primary outcome of phenomenological research is to create definitive definitions of the phenomena being studied. Heuristic research "leads to a depiction of essential meanings and portrayal of the intrigue and personal significance that imbue the search to know" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43). A third difference between the two methodological approaches is connected to the final product. In phenomenological research, the researcher seeks to distill the structures of the experience to a single essence. In heuristics research, a creative synthesis is the final product that engages the researcher to rely on intuition and tacit understandings. The fourth component that separates the two methodologies is the role of the researcher. "Phenomenology ends with the essence of the experiences;

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heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, p. 43).

Sela-Smith (2002) examined Moustakas' work in heuristics methodology and articulated six elements essential to heuristic inquiry:

1. The researcher has experienced what is identified as being researched.
2. The researcher makes reference to some intense or passionate concern that causes the investigator to *reach inward* for tacit awareness and knowledge.
3. The research indicates surrender to the question has taken place (living, waking, sleeping, and dreaming the question).
4. Self-dialogue, not simply a one-way reporting of thoughts or feelings is evidenced. To report a feeling is not the same as dialoging with the feeling.
5. The search is a self-search.
6. There is evidence that transformation has taken place by way of a "story" that contains the transformation and may transform those who "read" it (p.69).

Beyond distilling the six elements of heuristic inquiry, Sela-Smith (2002) offered guidance for future heuristic researchers. She concluded that researchers are often caught in a trap where they "shift from experience and self-search to observation of experience of self and others" (p. 71). When this shift happens, the researcher can lose the intent and focus of authentic heuristics inquiry.

The objective of heuristic research is not "to prove or disprove the influence of one thing or another, but rather to discover the nature of the problem or phenomena itself and to explicate it as it exists in human experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). To achieve this objective, the researcher must be flexible in determining appropriate steps in the process. "There is no exclusive list [of methods] that would be appropriate for

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every heuristic investigation, but rather each research process unfolds in its own way" (p.

43). This methodology requires "rigorous definition, careful collection of data, and a

thorough and disciplined analysis. It places immense responsibility on the researcher"

(Frick, 1990, p. 79). In conclusion:

> it is difficult to describe the heartbeat of heuristic inquiry in words alone-
> so much of the process lurks in the tacit dimensions, in mystery, in the
> wild promptings of imagination, and in edgings of subtlety. The
> opportunity for heuristic search inheres in every moment and needs only
> to be blown into flame by one who is ready to surrender to the pursuit of
> meaning via the inspirations of self, the complexities of human
> experience, and the challenges of the reflective process (Douglass &
> Moustakas, 1985, p. 53).

Heuristic Research Informed by Queer Theory

The selection of a research methodology must also consider congruence with the

selected theoretical framework. Nelson (1999) articulates six potential ways that Queer

Theory might inform an inquiry approach to research, such as heuristics:

1. Acknowledging that the domain of sexual identity may be important to
   a range of people for a range of reasons;
2. Examining not only subordinate sexual identities but also the dominant
   one(s);
3. Looking at divergent ways of producing and "reading" sexual identities
   in various cultural contexts and discourses;
4. Identifying prevailing, competing, and changing cultural norms that
   pertain to sexual identities;
5. Exploring problematic and positive aspects of this identity domain;
6. Considering sexual identity in relation to other acts of identity and vice
   versa (p. 377).

In this study, particular attention to numbers 1, 3, 5, and 6 inform and guide the interview

questions, methodology choices, and data analysis. Queer Theory provides the researcher

with a flexible and open-ended framework for approaching the research project.

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"Furthermore, a queer approach recognizes that sexual identities are not universal but are done in different ways in different cultural contexts, and it calls for a close look at how identities are produced through day-to-day interactions" (Nelson, 1999, p. 378). This focus is in close alignment with the primary and secondary research questions.

The Phases of Heuristics Research

There are six distinct phases in heuristic inquiry: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. While the phases have unique tasks, the process of working through each phase is determined by the research. It may not be linear or hierarchical. As appropriate, I have described my interaction with each phase of the methodology.

Initial Engagement

The first phase of a heuristic methodology is initial engagement with a research question. The goal is to find a topic that exists within the researcher that stirs a passion and ignites a drive to explore the varied dimensions of the topic. Such connection and personal passion is an aspect that sets this methodology apart from other qualitative methods. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) describe the commitment to this passion: "it moves beyond the usual energy that we bring to our lives; it carries the urgency needed to reveal and explore shadings and subtleties of meaning" (p. 41). Most heuristic research questions arise out of a personal inner crisis or challenges. This may be:

> …something that is being conscious or unconsciously experienced as
> incomplete and that needs to be completed. It may be something that is

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discordant that needs to be brought to harmony or something that is unclear that needs to be clarified. It may be something that is misunderstood that needs to be understood or something that is disassociated that needs to be integrated. Perhaps it is something that had not been known before that seeks to be known (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 64).

This initial engagement phase sends the researcher on an "internal search to discover, with an encompassing puzzlement, a passionate desire to know, a devotion and commitment to pursue a question that is strongly connected to one's own identity and selfhood" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 40). My identities of being a lesbian and being an educator have been in opposition. This dissertation has furthered my quest to seek a deeper level of synthesis within these two driving forces of my inner being. The research questions for this dissertation were designed as one way to understand my own experience with these conflicting identities. The other goal of the research questions was to illuminate the complexities of integrity and identity that lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers encounter in schools and school communities. My primary research question emerged as, "What are the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 educators as they manage their sexual orientation identities within a teaching role?"

Immersion

After the researcher has committed to the engagement of a research question, the second phase of a heuristic methodology is immersion. During immersion:

…the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states. Everything in his or her life becomes crystallized around the question. The immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question-to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).

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This phase requires the researcher to interact with the question on many levels. The goal is to define and clarify the terms connected with the research question (Moustakas, 1990) as well as develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of the question. Immersion is central to this phase. It is an organic process that signals to the researcher the integrity and commitment to the question. "When the question has been properly formed, it appears to have a power that draws the image of the question everywhere in the researcher's life experience" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 65).

After first writing my "coming out" story in 2003, I became immersed in my own gay identity. I have dreamt of my past and had nightmares of what could have happened if my two identities were discovered while I was in the classroom. Every text I read offered new meaning and insights into my personal turmoil. Over time, my identity lens has shifted and become more sophisticated. Vocabulary has emerged to help me better articulate my feelings and experiences. Stories of other gay teachers have connected with me on many different levels; I see how they are similar to and different from my own experiences. As a PhD student, most of my class and research projects have focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender issues. This dissertation research was only possible because I engaged in a lengthy reflective period in which I acknowledged the ramifications of my gay identity and my future career in teacher preparation. It was only after this was resolved internally that I was able to begin the laborious task of putting down my emotions on paper. The continued drive and passion connected to this research area have only reinforced the power of this personal exploration and, I hope, the value for

future teachers who may happen upon my study. In the last year, rather than writing, my time was spent in many cycles of immersion. "Immersion requires the whole self to be engaged in the focus of the research by surrendering to it in such a way that the research unfolds, rather than an observing self attempting to control and direct the process to ensure that it moves in the right direction" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 66).

Incubation

The third phase of incubation is a stepping away to gain perspective. This time is for the researcher to grapple with the numerous dimensions explored while living the question. The researcher is reorganizing and re-conceptualizing the meaning and form of the question as a way to gain clarity (Sela-Smith, 2002). There is not a plan to this phase; rather the organic nature of heuristics again emerges. "Incubation is a process in which the seed has been planted; the seed undergoes silent nourishment, support and care that produce a creative awareness of some dimension of a phenomenon or a creative integration of its parts or qualities" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29). Incubation is a critical part of this research methodology and cannot be planned or rushed.

Illumination

"Illumination opens the door to a new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery of something that has been present for some time yet beyond immediate awareness" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 30). This fourth phase is about seeing what may have been

previously unseen or felt during the immersion and incubation phases. The researcher brings to the forefront of consciousness the inner reflective work completed during the incubation phase. "Illumination is that moment when there is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of wholes and clustered wholes that form into themes inherent in the question" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 67). Depending on the depths of the themes that emerge, this phase can send the researcher to the next phase of explication, or force the researcher to return to previous heuristic phases.

Explication

Moustakas (1990) describes the purpose of the fifth phase of explication as a time to "fully examine what has been awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning" (p. 31). Reviewing data for salient, emergent themes combined with extensive self-awareness helps focus the researcher on the multiple layers of knowledge being unearthed. A heuristic researcher seeks understanding of the essence of an experience. She is constantly cognizant of the internal frames of reference being used to decipher text. "Indwelling," the focused turning inward to gain deeper insights, is a tool often used by heuristic researchers during this phase. Researchers also rely on self-searching, self-disclosure, and continued focus on the question. These tactics help heuristic researchers fully articulate the textures and nuances as they craft an image of the whole experience.

Creative Synthesis

The final phase, creative synthesis, challenges the researcher to synthesize the essences or story of that which has emerged. Moustakas (1990) describes this as the time when the:

> …researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis. This usually takes the form of a narrative depiction utilizing verbatim material and examples, but it may be expressed as a poem, story, painting, or by some other creative form (p. 32).

This creative synthesis should resonate with both the knowledge learned, as well as with the researcher. Sela-Smith (2002) describes this final phase as "an amazing time of synchronicity, harmony, connection, and integration" (p. 69).

The creative synthesis medium which I selected for my final products was poetic transcription. Poetic transcription, as defined by Glesne (1997) is "the creation of poem like compositions from the words of the interviewees" (p. 207). The poems created, as part of this creative synthesis, were used as a tool to help illuminate the themes and essences that emerge through the interview and data analysis process. As the researcher, I was "searching for the essences conveyed, the hues, the textures, and then drawing from all portions of the interviews to juxtapose details into a somewhat abstract re-presentation" (Glesne, p. 207). Using poetic transcription further allowed me to draw from my own understanding, as well as from the data gathered throughout the project.

Implementation of a Heuristic Research Process

Participants

Participants were recruited in a variety of ways. Initially, I utilized the tools of

snowball sampling which is "an approach for locating information-rich key informants

or critical cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 237). In looking to locate potential participants, I

contacted known lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers and/or allies (University of Denver

colleagues and/or current classroom teachers) who subsequently directed me to current

lesbian, gay, bisexual, or ally PK-12 teachers. I provided these individuals with a hard

and electronic copy of a research study description flyer, which contained my contact

information. Potential participants were encouraged to contact me directly for more

information upon receipt of the flyer (Appendix C). This procedure was necessary so that

potential participants could self-identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, thus reducing risks

of initial individuals "outing" potential participants. After participants contacted me, I

arranged an interview schedule via personal email or phone. Prior to the first interview,

participants received an informed consent document via personal email, and before

starting the first interview I reviewed the document with each participant including

vocabulary and benefits and risks of the study (Appendix B). On obtaining written

consent, I gave the participant a copy for their records.

Originally, I had hoped to interview between 6 and 8 lesbian, gay, or bisexual

self-identified teachers. As stated above, allies were included in the call for participants

so that initial individuals did not "out" potential participants. However, I did not foresee

receiving interest from self-identified allies to participate. When two allies contacted me, I chose to interview them not knowing whether or not I would use the data, because I was unsure how their narratives would add to answering the research questions. The richness of their data added a depth that was unexpected and I decided to include them in the study. In the end, I completed interviews with 14 lesbian, gay, bisexual and allied identified teachers, and included my own self-analysis, bringing the total participants to 15.

All together, the participants possessed over 116 years of teaching experience, ranging with one individual having over 30 years of teaching to another just entering his first year. The participants, including myself, included nine females and six males and of these six identified as lesbians, and six as gay, one as bisexual, one as "straight but open," and two as allies. The group spanned grade levels and content areas and included teachers in traditional public schools, as well as charter schools. Additionally, the participants varied in their level of "outness" to colleagues, parents, and students. Although this participant pool was diverse, a few areas were not represented. For example, I was not able to locate a lesbian elementary teacher willing to participate and therefore my voice is the only representative of this population. As expected from my literature review, I did not interview any individuals who would be considered totally "in the closet." All of the participants were at least "out" to one colleague and several are regular speakers on panels or media contacts when LGBT issues surface in local schools. This group of

participants did represent gender and sexual orientation diversity, but not racial or ethnic

diversity, with only one of the participants identifying as Hispanic.

Data Collection

Heuristic design requires the researcher be flexible in exploring a variety of data

collection strategies. Commonly, heuristic researchers use "narrative descriptions,

dialogues, stories, poems, artwork, journals and diaries, autobiographical logs, and other

personal documents" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). Techniques utilized by most heuristic

researchers are interviews, which are dialogues with participants as well as with self.

Drawing from the heuristic and phenomenological research methodology, I prepared a

three-interview series for each participant. Each interview was scheduled take between

60-90 minutes depending on the needs of the participant (Seidman, 2006). The goal of the

first interview was to generate a focused life history. The questions sought to create a

picture of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers and the context of their experiences. I posed

questions which tried to set the context for their identity as a teacher, as well as a lesbian,

gay, or bisexual individual (Appendix D). The second interview took the context of the

experience and "concentrate[d] on the concrete details of the participants' present lived

experience in the topic area of the study" (Seidman, p. 18) (Appendix E). The third

interview asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. This interview

focused on the emotional and intellectual connections between the interactions and

experience. It was also about meaning making (Appendix F).

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As suggested by Seidman (2006) I tried to schedule the three interviews about one week apart. However, I was mindful of the phases and needs of heuristic methodology, which included a revisit to a previous phase or additional reflective time between interviews. I also remained cognizant of the schedules and needs of the participants throughout the research process. In some cases, Seidman's suggestion of a three interview series one week apart was not conducive to this study and the participants involved. As an example, some participants explored topic areas that were included in future protocols, but I chose to not hinder data collection and to continue interviews as they naturally progressed. In cases where the interview series protocol was altered, I made sure to address all the questions in each of the three protocols to ensure consistency and validity for all participants. Each of the interviews was audio recorded and fully transcribed. Once all interviews were transcribed, they were checked with the original recording for accuracy and any inconsistencies were corrected. These previewed transcriptions were emailed to each individual participant who was asked to review the transcriptions, note any changes, and submit a pseudonym of their choosing. To minimize the potential risk to the participants' confidentiality, interview tapes and transcripts were locked in a file cabinet in my personal residence and will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an on-going, cyclical process, through the methodological phases of heuristic research. Specific attention was given to the concepts of meaning

making and emergent themes through the phases of illumination and explication. All

interview transcriptions were coded and analyzed in order to identify salient themes.

Interviews were analyzed at two levels: individual and across group. I sought to

understand the individual experience, as well as the generalizable themes that can

contribute to the literature of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers. This same process of

deep analysis was applied to my personal journals and self-interview transcriptions.

> The challenge is to examine all the collected data in creative combinations
> and recombinations, sifting and sorting, moving rhythmically in and out of
> appearance, looking, listening carefully for the meanings within meanings,
> attempting to identify the overarching qualities that inhere in the data. This
> is a quest for synthesis through realization of what lies most undeniably at
> the heart of all that has been discovered (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p.
> 52).

One of the early aspects of data analysis occurred between interview cycles. In

preparation for each interview, I listened to previous interviews, self-interviewed, and

journaled. The goal of this step was two-fold: first, to listen for components that may

have been previously missed during the interview and to keep each person's previous

narrative salient before going into the next; second, to confirm that all interview

questions had been asked and answered.

"In essence, when data collection has formally ended and it is time to begin the

final analysis, the investigator has two primary sources to draw from in organizing the

analysis: (one) the questions that were generated during the conceptual and design phases

of the study, prior to fieldwork, and (two) analytic insights and interpretations that

emerged during data collection" (Patton, 2002, p. 437). As Patton suggests, my seven

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themes emerged from reflection upon both my original research questions/interview protocol and my reflective journals that I kept during the data collection phase. These seven themes were: sense of self, isolation vs. support, educational philosophy, personality, non-negotiables, navigations, and experience. Every interview was coded for each of the seven themes. As suggested by Moustakas (1990), interviews were coded one theme at a time before progressing to the next theme. Also, as I was delving deeper into the coding process, I remained open to new themes emerging. In heuristic methodology, this state is often referred to as focusing. "Focusing facilitates a relaxed and receptive state, enables perceptions and sensings to achieve more definitive clarification, taps into the essence of what matters, and sets aside peripheral qualities or feelings (Moustakas, 1990, p. 25). Further explanation of each of these themes is provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

After coding for the seven themes, I re-listened to parts and/or wholes of selected interviews to make sure I understood the texture of each story. I felt the need to reconnect with participants' voices again in order to avoid their stories becoming detached from the text. It was during this part of the process that indwelling became increasingly important. "Indwelling refers to the heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehensive of the nature or meaning of a quality of theme of human experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24). This indwelling and reconnecting with the voices of participants was essential in order to move forward to the creative synthesis.

Patton (2002) provides this caution: "The creative analyst who finds a powerful metaphor may be tempted to manipulate the data to fit the metaphor" (p. 505). I was mindful of this warning during the data analysis process as I experimented with metaphors. One of the ways I looked to connect the participants' stories was through a visual metaphor. Many participants referenced bridges and/or bridge building in their interviews; thus, I worked with the key terminology and sought larger references to the concept of a bridge. At points, this analysis began to feel forced and therefore I backed away from that thread. In playing with metaphors, no single one emerged in the process, but the process helped me understand the larger connections between the participants.

"Raw field notes and verbatim transcripts constitute the undigested complexity of reality. Simplifying and making sense out of that complexity constitutes the challenge of content analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 463). It is this raw, undigested feeling that one must work through in order to reach the point of saturation in the research process. It was only at this point of saturation that creative synthesis was possible.

Validation of Heuristic Research

Moustakas (1990) poses an important question for researchers to answer as one means of reaching validity: "Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching, and from the explication of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?" (p. 32). Judgments of validity were involved in every phase of the study and required me, as the researcher, to stay connected to personal exploration and the experiences of

researcher participants. Member checking was a vital step in the validation process. I

asked each participant to review each piece of poetry to ensure that it matched the

essence of their experience. According to Moustakas :

> In heuristic investigations, verification is enhanced by returning to the
> research participants, sharing with them the meanings and essences of the
> phenomenon as derived from reflection on and analysis of the verbatim
> transcribed interviews and other material, and seeking their assessment for
> comprehensiveness and accuracy (p. 33-34).

Another vital step was attending to issues of triangulation when making different

methodological choices. "To be considered triangulated studies must "meet" – that is, one

must encounter another in order to challenge it (for clarification), illuminate it (add to it

conceptually or theoretically), or verify it (provide the same conclusion)" (Richards &

Morse, 2007, p. 91). I used participant interviews, personal reflections, themes from the

data, and the literature to establish points of triangulation. These aspects are further

illustrated in Chapter 4 and 5.

Ethical Issues

Peled and Leichtentritt (2002) offer five interrelated assumptions to guide ethical

responsibility in qualitative research;

> "a) research ethics are an integral aspect of the research act and of each
> phase of the research process; b) ethical research empowers participants,
> particularly those of vulnerable and disenfranchised groups; c) ethical
> research benefits participants; d) ethical research prevents harm for
> participants and involved others; and e) ethical research requires
> researchers' technical competence" (p. 148).

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Each assumption was important to acknowledge when designing and implementing this study. In order to address point "a", it was crucial that I maintain vigilance around the methodological phases of heuristic design and revisit the established and peer-reviewed works of Douglass, Moustakas, and Sela-Smith as I moved through and between each phase. In an effort to address points "b," "c," and "d," careful consideration was taken in the design of the research study, interview protocol, and other Institutional Review Board documents. I discuss the benefits, potential harms, and aspects of participant empowerment below.

There were many potential benefits for the study's participants. First, this may have been the first and only time the participants' intersecting identities were listened to in a comfortable environment. Hopefully, they found the interview process to be affirming and helpful in understanding their identity. Second, participants may have also found a renewed sense of personal wholeness or connectedness. Additionally, participants may have found satisfaction in the sharing of their personal stories knowing that they contributed to a very small body of literature. Participants will be provided copies of the final report and poetry. Being able to see how other stories intersected with their own could reduce the isolation and loneliness often experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers. Additionally, these stories may assist others in the future as they work through their own process of identity understanding.

It was essential that I address ethical concerns of confidentiality and potential risk to research participants. Their psychological well-being was of paramount concern to me.

This study asked participants to explore past and present struggles and successes with identity development. However, exploration of this topic could have brought forth unresolved emotions around sexual orientation, identity management, and the dual identity of being a teacher and a sexual minority. To reduce these risks, I was available for support between interviews and provided the participants with resources in the community for further support. Two examples of these resources were the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Teachers Network (GLSTN) and The Center of Colorado (the Center is the only statewide, nonprofit community center dedicated to providing support and advocacy for Colorado's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender population). To address more serious psychological issues, participants were provided with information about the Mental Health Center of Denver (http://www.mhcd.org/). This center provides assistance to both insured and uninsured individuals, therefore reducing the risk of alerting one's employer to mental health concerns. I acknowledged that the psychological well-being was the largest risk area associated with the study and was particularly attentive to the psychological needs of the participants. None of the interview questions asked participants about deeply personal issues such as sexual activity, violence, abuse, or victimization. Participants could have chosen at any point to withdraw from the study or to not address an interview question if it made them uncomfortable.

Due to the socially and politically conservative nature of Colorado and relatively new adoption of protections in state law, I acknowledged the risk associated with being "outed" in a school or school district and the potential employment impact. To minimize

this risk, I maintained strict confidentiality protocols. This included, but was not limited to, conducting interviews away from school property and disguising school or other identifying characteristics in the final report. All participant contact was conducted through personal email accounts (instead of school email accounts) or phone to further ensure confidentiality. The research project did not necessitate classroom or school observations and I did not visit school sites.

As previously stated in economic risks, there was a level of personal social risk involved in being "outed" to colleagues or friends. The participants agreed to be a part of this study and therefore acknowledged, to a certain extent, their sexual orientations. I acknowledged that participants were at various stages of identity development and disclosure. Therefore, I maintained strict confidentiality protocol to ensure that the participant's participation would have minimal social risk.

The final point, "e," made by Peled and Leichtentritt (2002), requires researchers to be aware of their own technical competencies. The researcher needs to be aware of her research strengths, as well as her weaknesses and take specific steps to address both through the design, collection, and analysis phase of the project. I strived to mitigate this ethical concern by saturating myself in the technicalities of the established methodology and accessing critical colleagues, who acted as sounding boards for my emerging insights. Finally, through my self-reflection and journal work, I was especially mindful of my own limitations and biases in order to prevent these from interfering with my technical competencies.

Writing

Creative Synthesis within heuristics requires that "throughout the investigation, one must openly and energetically accept the way in which knowledge can be most authentically revealed, be it through metaphor, description, poetry, song, dance art, or dialogue" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 53). For my final creative product, I created poetry using the strategy of poetic transcription. Glesne (1997) defines this process as "the creation of poem like compositions from the words of interviewees" (p. 202). The potential to preserve the interview participants' voices through this process drew me to this form of creative synthesis. I adhered to two rules Glesne created while defining the process of poetic transcription, and these rules, while not the only way I could have approached the process, offered a structure to begin. Glesne's first rule is that phrases can be pulled from any part of the interview transcription and juxtaposed to each other, as long as used appropriately within context. The second rule is that the poems need to "keep enough…words together to re-present…[her] speaking rhythm, her way of saying things" (p. 206). "Heuristics encourages the researcher to go wide open and to pursue an original path that has its origins within the self" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 53). Poetry for me impacts individuals personally and is often connected to an inner dialogue. The research topic presented is also deeply personal, and poetry seemed the best way to capture the elusive nature of the findings.

Creative Synthesis

The process of creating these poems was a labor of love. Each interview was a gift given to me by the participants. Their stories triggered aspects of my own development and offered new moments of personal and professional illumination. New insights were gleaned with each interview and the broader scope of what it means to be a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or ally educator emerged over the period of data collection and data analysis. While crafting these poems, I tried to capture the essence of each story and each participant's distinctive voice, cadence, and mannerisms as they shared their personal experiences with me. These nuances are most evident when the poems are read aloud.

Choices were made during the process of creative synthesis. For each participant, I had at least three hours of interview data which often translated to more than 50 pages of narrative transcription. When making the difficult decision of what to maintain in the poems and what to leave out I often found myself needing to set aside the "little nuggets." These little details or short stories were wonderfully interesting, but did not contribute to the larger flavor of the poem. I adhered to three informal rules as I selected what would stay and what would be set aside. The first rule concerned length. I wanted to have enough breadth and depth in each poem, while being diligent to issues of redundancy and tangents. In some cases, this meant a "letting go" of sorts as I set aside stories I enjoyed but that did not contribute to the flow or follow the course of each poem. The first draft of each poem was often more than fifteen pages and this made the culling

and editing process vital. This task was more emotional than expected, but in the end each poem was stronger and more cohesive after extensive pruning. The second rule was that the individual must be present in each poem: in other words, enough stories and details were included in each poem to capture voice, without overloading the reader and distracting from the themes. This rule often guided me in selecting portions of the poem to keep and which to set aside. I selected the sections that best encapsulated the uniqueness of each person and would therefore translate most strongly on paper for the reader. The third rule was centered on the themes. I did not use the most prominent theme, present in each account, as the sole decision making factor in the creation process. Although many of the participants' stories revealed one or two more salient themes, within the structure of the interview protocol all participants did address each of the seven themes. Therefore, many themes are woven together in each participant's final product. To limit a poem to only one theme lost the heart and soul of the narrative.

Summary

Chapter 3 has described the research process undertaken in this study including the selection of a method, participant recruitment, ethical issues, and the culmination of data analysis and writing. The overall purpose was to prepare the reader for the presentation of the creative synthesis and summary of findings in Chapter 4. These are presented as sketches and stories of each individual participant in poetic form.

Chapter 4: Creative Presentation

Chapter 4 is a unique blend of creative synthesis and data analysis. The following presentation of creative synthesis contains a brief biography of each participant followed by their poem, which was generated through poetic transcription. Each poem holds value and merit on its own, while also adding to the collective understanding of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers' experiences in and out of the classroom. As discussed in Chapter 3, the seven coded themes are woven throughout this chapter. Chapter 5 will provide further analysis of the themes and explore their connections to the study's research questions.

A detailed analysis of each theme and the connections to the research questions will be presented to the reader in Chapter 5. However, a brief introduction to each theme is necessary here and appropriate before the presentation of the creative synthesis. This will help guide the reader, as they read each poem, and further set the context for Chapter 5.

The first theme, *Experience,* captures the specific events, moments, and time periods that contributed to and collectively shaped, the personal and professional life of each participant. For some individuals this was the first "coming out" experience or achievement of tenure in the public school system.

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The second theme, *Personality,* is the elusive, but defining aspects of personality that supported navigations for each participant personally and professionally. Participants self-identified as introverted or extroverted or described themselves using such words as "goofy" or "genuine."

The third theme, *Philosophy*, emerged as a point of intersection for many participants; the intersection of the personal and professional where one was often used to help define the other. Participants articulated their stance on their level of "outness" in the classroom and its connection to teaching. An example would be the teacher who does not believe any personal components belong in the class, including sexual orientation. Or the teacher who feels the heart of teaching is relationship building and how his level of "outness" can hinder or support this.

The fourth theme, *Isolation versus Support*, is best visualized as a continuum. At one end is *Isolation*, often expressed using words like shame or fear. The opposite end is *Support,* which depicts the highest level of support offered by colleagues, families, friends, communities, and districts. The role and the importance of the ally were often denoted in this portion of the theme.

The fifth theme is *Non-Negotiables*; the points of least flexibility for participants. This theme was often identified by the tone or strength in which they conveyed the material and the written and unwritten rules that they closely followed. For example, participants precisely describe rules of not lying when directly asked if he or she is gay,

or that matters *must* be handled if they include any aspect of discrimination, as defined by law.

The sixth theme, *Sense of Self*, captures the presence of wholeness and the inner dialogues used by participants as they make personal and professional decisions. This theme offered the most fluidity and flexibility through a person's life, but progressively showed strength as the narrative worked its way to the present day. Examples of this theme include discussions of internalized homophobia and how that has changed over time, and the depth to which both allies explore their own sexual orientations as part of their progression of identifying as allies.

The final and seventh theme is *Navigations*. This theme attempted to encapsulate the stories, tips, and insights offered by the participants to help others as they look to navigate personally and professionally. This theme included examples of how individuals have addressed concerns of risk in the classroom or the way they phrase items in the classroom when asked about their sexual orientation.

One last note to the reader: In order to maintain confidentially for each participant, all identifying names have been changed. School districts have all been reassigned and named after planets, reminiscent of my science teacher days. Intentionally, no structure was given relating the size of the school district and the size of the planet. High schools, middle schools, and elementary schools have all been reassigned and named after presidents. Context was important to this study, so if more than one participant referenced a particular school or district, the reassignment was the

same in both cases. For example, if two participants referenced Colorado Generic High

School, in both poems they would be referred to as Kennedy High School. The purpose

for the common pseudonyms was to ease the reader's experience through the often

artificial nature of reassignment in data presentation.

The Participants and Their Stories

Samuel

Samuel is a gay male in his early forties, who spent 15 years as an actor before

becoming a teacher. He was the type of guy in high school to do the "Pee-Wee Herman"

dance on the cafeteria table and not get into trouble. He is currently entering his second

year in a fifth grade urban classroom. He is a white male and has done extensive self-

identity work through his urban teacher residency program. Samuel is a risk-taking

storyteller and playwright. It is clear he has a way of putting those around him at ease

whatever the topic may be.

We Are Like Two Eagles Soaring Side By Side

I grew up in Kansas.
I am from the northeastern part, Kansas City.
I have been here since 1996.
Almost 12 years,
  July 11th will be the official twelve year anniversary of my move to Colorado.

I have always been that goofy, crazy, up-front person.
I was very much shy growing up,
  lacked a lot of confidence,
  but something happened just before high school.
  1982,
I got a job working at the summer camp.
Boy Scout Camp,

became a leader at camp.
Doing stuff up in front.
Camp fires.
Always one for doing a goofy skit,
        leading a song.
Samuel's Amazing Summer Camp Sing Along.
It was just a wonderful time.
That so really was almost kind of a love letter to my history.
Saying this because of all of my time spent at camp,
        being a leader and Boy Scouts.
All that sort of extracurricular stuff,
        set me up in that direction to keep going in
        one: a leadership role, but two: just people.
Some people are in sales,
        some people are into research.
        I am just into people.
There is something about that,
        for me.

"It's going to be education or the priesthood or something."
I am not catholic so I couldn't be a priest, but you know?
…for me my drive into education was always
…I am just so interested in hanging out and talking to people.
I have always said,
        that if I could make my living just hanging out and talking to people
        I would be so incredibly happy.
After I graduated from college,
        I found myself auditioning for a couple of shows
        then all of the sudden getting the lead.
I was like, "Oh God, I think I am an actor. I am an actor now."
From 2000 to 2006,
        I was able to make my living,
        full-time as an actor,
        not working in a restaurant,
…just full time acting.
I worked on an educational tour that Kaiser Permanente sponsored.
We would go to schools.
Set up at seven or eight o'clock in the morning,
        do a couple shows, hang out, talk to the kids and leave.
From that experience of being in the schools for a day,
        to being in the schools for a week or two weeks
        really got me back into schools and saying,

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"You know this is where I belong…not on the stage."
In the school this is where I need to make the difference.
This is where I need
        to make a difference,
        to stand up with the students,
        for the students.
Give them the skills and the voice that they are going to need
        to stand up for themselves,
        to make a difference in their communities.

Let's see. Well, I became an Eagle Scout when I was 16,
I came out of the closet when I was 17,
        then I became a Christian when I was 18.
So there is a lot of stuff that converged at the same time
I was an athlete,
        and a cheerleader
        and a theatre person
        and in advanced math.
For me it was 1985, when I came out.
So I have been living with this identity,
        coming in and out of different circles and coming out of the closet.
In and out of confidence
        or comfortability with it,
        for many years.
Everyone has always been very positive,
        I mean there have been times where it's just
        …well I should say, has not been negative.
Times it's been neutral or silent.

The first coming out.
My junior year we were given a journal assignment.
I just latched on to this project.
Just pages and pages and pages of trying to pour this stuff out.
I am very much an external processor,
        the thoughts were just kind of running around in my head
        and I couldn't make sense of them.
 I came out several times in this journal.
And I finally turned it in.
I was like, "Oh God,
        now we have done it; the whole thing is cracked wide open."
I was in the last seat on the row,
        closest to the door

if I needed to escape at any time, there it was.
And so he was like,
  "Okay. Row closest to the windows; all of your journals are stacked up
  on the radiators by the windows, please go find yours."
And so people are going and I am thinking,
  "Oh God, somebody is going to find it and I am going to be destroyed."
But he excuses row,
  after row,
  after row
  and he is walking around this side of the room,
  saying, "You know, it was out of thirty five and everyone did really good.
  "The highest score that I gave was a thirty three."
Just, you know, "I hope it was a good experience for you."
This whole time he's got his hands behind his back,
  he's walking over and the next row goes
  our turn is next.
"Okay, last row please go over."
As everyone gets up he just puts mine on my desk,
I put my hands on it.
He just kind of walks around.
I don't think nobody had any idea what was going on,
  so it felt good.
Flipped to the end; 35.
Different than what he said.
He was acknowledging there again that there is some good work.
Not necessarily quality of the writing,
  but it is the processing,
  the thinking that is going on here.

I didn't really see anybody in the school treating people badly.
There was another gay man who was there,
  he kind of oiled
  …the closet doors.
In junior English,
  we had one senior who failed English.
He needed it to graduate.
He is taking it again.
I am in the last chair, so he is assigned a desk,
  he gets to sit next to me.
This is the bad boy who lives two streets over from me;
  we have ridden the bus together since I was in sixth grade
  he had a muscle car,

I had a muscle car,
       we would like drag race down these little strips.
 I developed a huge crush on this guy.
We were reading all of the like romantic love poetry of the eighteenth century.
There were not enough books for him to have his own,
       so he's got to pull up his desk and mine.
I was like, "Oh God this is not good."
So, oh gosh I just laugh at this story
       because I just can't imagine
       how I just did not get the snot beat out of me,
       by him and any of his friends.
He rode a motorcycle to high school.
Anyway, I took it upon myself,
       not as a class project, not for any reason
       just start writing my teenage angst filled love poetry.
I wrote them all.
A vision of what I longed for in a relationship,
       what I wanted in a partner.
I didn't call it a partner at that time, I called it a boyfriend.
In order to create something to give to somebody,
       you had to do it by hand.
So I spent
       …and I am not an artist and so didn't have all these fancy papers and stuff,
       pulled out graph paper, it's got lines on it and I can write,
       so I wrote 6 or 8 poems,
       copied them all down,
       illustrated a couple.
Put them in a little presentation folder
       gave them to him.
I mean these were poems like I love you,
       I dream about us being together,
       we are like two eagles soaring side by side.
 I gave it to him,
       he never said anything about it;
       nobody ever came up to me with a bat.
One of the very last days
       …because he was a senior, so he was in the upper hall
       my locker was in the middle hall,
       I was running around one day leaving school.
Going to one of my many extracurricular activities,
       I looked at him and he was like, "Hey Sagg's."
I turned around and he's got the folder,

in his hands
    just rolled up
    …I don't know if he had just been carrying it with him or whatever.
He was like, "Thanks for this."
And I think to this day there is a reason; I have an affinity for a man that rides a motorcycle,
    it's because of him. I can track it back exactly to that moment.

At our reunion a guy came up to me
    … he was actually a friend of my sister
    …he went to my middle school and my high school.
He's gay and he told me
    when you came out
    …I worked in the office, you know?
I had access to your schedule.
I looked at your schedule.
I memorized it so every time that you were walking to class,
    I could go and stand near where you were walking.
So I could just see you and know that there was another one,
    another person like me in the school.
Because you were out,
I didn't make the big announcement,
    but told all of my friends one on one.
I pulled them aside and I talked to them.
Usually I wrote them a note,
    said something like,
    "Hey we have had a lot of fun doing this and would you still push my car through
    the parking lot because it ran out of gas?"
Or "Would you still meet with me after school to study for this?"
"Would you still come and cheer me at the diving meet?"
"Would you still do this, would you still be my friend if you knew that I was gay?"
And every single person said yes, not a problem.
I am so proud of you,
    I am so happy,
    I am glad that I know you.
You know I think partly it is because I had some of that cultural capital.
They were all so incredibly supportive.
My parents on the other hand,
    were very, very conservative.
They were born, both in the early thirties,
    at the time of the depression,
    come from rural Wisconsin.

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They don't latch on,
        they don't support me in that same way.
Everybody knew it and everybody was fine.
And of course unbeknownstced to me,
        people just started talking.

At one point I almost came out to my class this year,
        it was kind of in this fit of
        "I am going to prove to you something;"
        "That you're talking bad about somebody."
This boy was making fun of another boy.
He was saying, "Well you like him. You were kissing him."
I was like, "You've got to be really careful when you say stuff like that because you never know
        who is in the room."
Unless you know every detail about every single person, which is impossible.
You know and "Maybe somebody's uncle is gay"
        or "Somebody's father is gay"
        maybe "Somebody's mother is gay."
You know ….maybe somebody's teacher is gay.
Of course, I reflected on that later.
Coming out to them in this anger place.
No, never, never a good idea.
My car pool partner said, "I don't think they really deserve that."
You are really opening up,
        you are really going to rock their world
And she's like, "I don't think they earned it."
I have a friend of mine who is an educator.
Her advice to me was
        never, ever, ever, ever come out to anyone in the schools.
Because it just takes one person to make your life hell.
I thought about that and I was like well, yeah maybe?

Then it becomes
What is the purpose of school?
Is the purpose of school to teach values, is it to teach morals,
        is it to teach thinking skills?
Processing skills,
        I mean if I then present to you information that's
        okay what do you think about those facts?
What side of the issue are you one? Where do you fall?

Thomas Moynahan's quote, "Everybody is titled to their own opinion, but not their own facts."
I am totally out to my staff.
The older I get the less I care about,
        what people think about me.
I reserve that right for my classroom.
It is a distance or structure that I need to maintain.
I haven't gotten to the place where I am sure.
I am not quite sure how I would do it?
I am not quite sure why I would do it?
What kind of support I would need, you know?

Perception…so much about it is perception.
I have a friend of mine who came out to the fire department.
He wanted to prove himself first as a good fire fighter.
I think when you are good at what you do, people can't fault…
        people try to but people can't really fault you for something else.
Obviously they try.
At the Olympics a couple of years ago Juliet Coolic,
        who always wins from Russia.
He's got just this totally crazy flamboyant outfits,
        one was a swan.
It just this whole ridiculousness
        one of the commentators said, "He's really not that good."
But what he does,
        he does all this stuff with his arms.
He's flailing around so much that you just have to watch that
        you are not watching his feet; he is not doing anything with his feet.
He's skating in a straight line.
He does all this and people aren't watching his feet.
Or it's the other way around where it's the duck analogy,
        where the duck is just gliding on the surface.
You see that they are all put together,
        they have got everything going on.
But under the surface they are paddling like hell,
        to stay up with it
        to try to keep all of it,
        if you will the ducks in a row, to keep the image.

The ideal situation,
        I think I have several of these elements at this moment
Key things for my ideal situation

would be an administration that really knows me and trusts me
stands behind me.
I would hope in a situation where it ever came up
that a parent complained
or there was some question of appropriateness
that my administration,
first and foremost,
would throw themselves behind me.
"We know this guy, he's a good teacher, we're willing to go to bat for him and throw the
resources at the situation."
I also think, ideally I would like to see a culture
in the school
that is very much celebrating diversity.
So, like this year, when my kids make fun of somebody
a "it's so gay" kind of thing
ideally it shouldn't happen because using that term is just derogatory .
I think that's part of my passion
working with LGBT youth at some point.
I was in my teachers program,
one of the women came to me and said,
"I've got a girl in my class who is a 7th grader, who just came out to her family
and it is not going so well, what can I do?"
I was like, "Oh, girl. Here's the resources, here's the people, here's some websites to
look at,
here are some books."
 I was able to give her the book my friend had written about gay high schoolers.
This girl just goes through the roof,
she's like, "Can we do free read today,
are we doing free read today
I want to read my book."

Different ages understand,
express
and process differently.
There's always that fear
that we're going to try to recruit the children
It's like, "Oh, good Lord."
It's baffling me
I don't want your son to be gay if he is not gay.
I don't want your daughter to be a lesbian if she's not a really lesbian.
It's not my job to try to create them.
It's my job to teach them

I want people to come out who are happy with themselves,
    who want to find love.
If they're a man that wants to find love with a man,
    I want them to come out.
I want them to be okay with that.
I don't want this, "I'm going to get married, try to live my life happily or change my
    orientation."
We always want them to be able to change orientation,
    but they always want them to change from homosexual to heterosexual.
And I'd be like, "Okay, we'll give it a try. I'll change mine, if you change yours."
    You know, "I'll give you a year, does that sound good enough?"

Afterschool specials.
There's one where this kid gets made fun of for being gay,
    beat up on the way home.
He meets the Fairy God Father,
    it's like a Carson Kressley character comes out,
    dresses just impeccably, and
    he'll grant you one wish.
The boy says "I wish everyone who's gay would turn blue."
    the next morning, all hell broke loose.
Everyone, I mean, and not like everyone was blue.
But people were blue,
    people were shades of blue,
    some people were darker blue than others.
And it was really such a fascinating idea.
You come out, and you want to be accepted.
And then there are a couple of places where you are like,
    "I want you, I need you to approve."
I'm talking about the close people.
I'm inviting you into this circle because I need you to support me,
    that is to keep me in a relationship
    or to get me out of it; whatever is best.
Pretty soon you get to a point where you're like,
    "This is who I am, and if you don't like me, I don't care."
I have this group of friends, and that's kind of how it evolved
    for me.
I need to be with who I need to be with,
    not who is going to make you happy.
Like the topic of the sins of co-mission and the sins of omission.
We're not doing anything to intentionally push you out,

but I can't do anything to intentionally bring you in.
I think about calling you,
		yelling at you.
I'm just not calling.
And you're not calling and yelling at me; you're just not calling.
Surround yourself with the people who care about you,
		are going to support you in relationships.
And with the people outside of that circle…

My first year of teaching and so what I'm realizing is
		there's always a need to take a little risk.
Sometimes the need is bigger, take a bigger risk.
There's always need to take a risk.
The size of the risk is what is the variable.
I have a friend of mine who has been in ministry for about 20 years,
		left her post and now she's trying to be okay with herself.
We had a great conversation the other day,
		she said, "You know, it sounds like as you've been figuring this all out, you've
		always been honest."
You know, I've always told people where I am and what I'm doing.
Sometimes I was like,
		"I don't want to be gay."
		"I don't want to be a Christian."
		"I don't want to be sexually active."
I think there are some people that
		they're 8 years old
		they know that they're going to be gay, and still don't do it.
My journey was different.
I came out on the other end.
And hopefully I have some stories to offer to other people who are going through it.
It's a powerful testament to that
		just being honest along the way.
You know,
		you're either garlic or you're tofu.
You're either a flavor that affects the meat,
		or you absorb the flavor of what you're cooking with.

Karly

Karly is a spunky, mid-twenties, lesbian physical education teacher. She has been teaching for four years, two of which have been in a Colorado urban district undergoing drastic restructuring. Karly is athletic and energetic, but by no means would fit the stereotypical lesbian gym teacher. She has been "out" since high school and has chosen to be "out" in her school. Part of the motivating factor to take this risk in her school, is to be a pioneer for others coming behind. She builds strong relationships with students and takes the time to know them inside and outside her classroom. She strives to have individuals see physical education for more than just physical exercise, but as intellectual stimulation too.

We Have Extra Weight In Our Backpack

I think idealistic would be,
    I could start my first day and say,
    "Hi, I'm Karly.
    I've been teaching for four years.
    I love P.E. and this is my favorite stuff
    I've been with my partner for seven years."
Just talk like everybody else does,
    when they introduce themselves on the first day.
I don't do that.
I am secretive,
    …and I hold that in.
It sucks, but that would be ideal
    …to be like everybody else.

Coming out?
A multi-tiered system,
    first you have to come out to yourself;
    acceptance the self discovery part;
    intense against the grain;
    against culture;

acceptance and images that you're fed with all the time,
it's isolating,
it's frightening,
it's a traumatic experience that we've all experienced.
You're not just in one box but you exist in one somewhere else.
As long as you know it, you're out.

You don't have to tell your mom before you're *really* out.
You can be crazy out and let everybody know that you meet,
but you can also have just one or two people know and you're still out.
I had a very good coming out process actually.
I feel very lucky for who I am and the climate; atmosphere.

I was about 16 when I came out.
I knew I was different, I didn't really know what was going on.
Had boyfriends and stuff,
didn't really know what was going on
and things weren't quite so great.
Had crushes on certain people,
didn't really know it was a crush.
I just always wanted to be by them.
A pleaser myself.

I was a bit homophobic
because when you're questioning your orientation
you can be a bit in the opposite.
So I was a little like "That's gay;"
a little more negative.

When I came out I was a good athlete.
State champ my freshman year in high school.
The high school very much supported me.
I graduated with 50 kids,
probably 20 of whom I went to kindergarten with.
I did it very much on my own.
But when I came out I was pretty excited by it,
…called support centers.
I didn't know about them.
I looked them up and found them in Ann Arbor.

And so I came out;
I thought I would just come out quietly,

and slowly,
　　but I think within the month everybody knew.
Really small town ethics and knew everybody all the way through out.
Didn't really receive any sort of negative pressure from my peers at school.
People were like why do you have to do this?
But they were pretty accepting.

My father.
I told him immediately,
　　"I needed a psychologist because I thought I was gay."
He said, "okay."
My mother was the person who had the most difficult time with it.
My sister, she's funny,
　　…out to dinner and she says,
　　"You're not gay, it's just what we're like.
　　There are no cute guys there.
　　I guarantee when you get to college there are good guys out there."
I was like,
　　…"Yeah, but I really like women,"
　　… and she was like, 'Oh, I don't like women."

I felt, when I went to college
　　…because I was the only out person in my high school,
　　…there would be a lot more out people,
　　…a nice presence of gayness happening around.
Or an alliance.
Or something.
　　…but it was really small there at my first University.
I was disappointed when I went to college,
　　and there wasn't really a supportive community

It's funny.
I introduce myself in social settings,
　　　"I'm the stereotype, I'm the gay P.E. teacher,"
　…but I know I'm not the stereotypical P.E. teacher either.
I really value bringing a more intellectual spin on things,
　　…the fitness component and more variety,
　　…not just valuing the athletes over the non-athletes.
I think it's whatever you construct.

I'm going to go be the gay gym teacher.
In the beginning,

I was really disappointed by that stereotype.
It was like, oh I don't want to do this.
But I had a gay gym teacher and she was cool;
 …in the school I'm the person who's moving around,
 …playing the games with the kids.
 …it's a great female role model to be.
Female,
Sweating,
Excited,
Having fun,
Not being afraid to be more aggressive,
 or challenge people who are larger than I am
 …whether they're male or female in sports.
So I always felt like that piece eventually overshadows the whole gay thing.
So what if I'm a stereotype, who cares.

When you're dealing with people,
 …particularly children,
 …you have be kind of aware of that factor.
So I figured whatever I would do…
 I thought of myself as like a pioneer.
It's important for me to be who I am
 …to help people behind me more.

I never fathomed being closeted necessarily,
 and in my first job I tested the water.
I told people in the interview,
 that I had a partner, blah, blah, blah.
I was always honest,
 testing as long as the principal was good with
 …it would be okay, I would not have a backlash.
I definitely never came out to any students or anything.
But with all the staff I was out,
and I think people kind of think it's neat or whatever
 "My party's cooler because I have lesbians here "
Sometimes it's sad because people…
Everybody knew about so-and-so's husband,
 because they talked about it all the time
I know that that wasn't something I could do.
I'm aware of the prejudice that exists,
 saddened by it,
 angered by it;

and that I couldn't be more open with people on my amazing, loving relationship.
I certainly go up and down through process and learning.

I haven't actually had any negative colleague experiences,
 …other people probably certainly have.
The most negative thing,
 is that I'm one of three teachers in the school.
Other two are totally **not** out,
 they're very, not visibly out.
…their choice
…their process,
 but sometimes I want to be like,
… look,
…it's not like I'm the only one.
Obviously that's not professional.
It's not my place to do that,
 so if anything I'm just like,
 "Why don't you guys just be more out
 …just a little bit more out?"
But that's okay.
It's not blaming necessarily.
I just think this would be great.
I'm having this experience,
 it would be great to know that I have your support,
 or… I know I have their support but even just publicly for the students.
I feel like the more we're out to other people,
 …the more people behind us who are gay benefit.
"I already know the person, they're gay, it was no big deal"
If they have one experience with their gym teacher they're going to hold onto those
assumptions,
 …and if they realize there's actually four gay people here,
 …they're all very different and,
 …they all look different and,
 …they all express differently,
 …it's not just one side of the story.
Which I think is just a much more valuable
 message, experience,
 …and model.
Don't blame them, I certainly understand.
Like where you put yourself out there?

What am I evaluating in my environment before I come out?

It's like everybody's walking up the hill,
     …and as queer,
     …or as someone that is not mainstream,
     We have extra weight in our backpack.

Even though I'm very out,
     I'm very open,
     …it's still is something I risk all the time.
I am always afraid it's going to come back and bite me,
     …that constant fear and teaching health and sexuality in particular,
     …helping a small child do proper gymnastics or spotting.
There's all these risks there that people could misconstrue.
Very conscious never to be one-on-one alone,
     …with the door shut
     …ever.
Because even with the nicest youth,
     …things can change,
     …they can be like, 'Oh, Miss tried to touch me."
All these risks that I'm going to run into.
It is risky and it's frightening.
It's an ever-going, conscious, intentional thought process,
     …that I sometimes think so and so is coming into my office,
     … and I make sure I prop open the door as we walk in and think,
     …does Miss Sheer have to do that?
Does anybody else really have to think about that as much as I do,
     because I'm gay?

It's the same thing for people of lower class or black,
     …all these extra things that we just have to be intentional about.
I did have some really dramatic attitude changes,
        with students when they found out I was gay.
I didn't tell them, they found out some other way.
     …so they thought,
     …"Oh, you're gay, I don't have to listen to you anymore"
     …"What? You were so cool before, what happened? "
It's certainly frustrating to be judged for something.

I'm not going to go into the philosophy,
     …of whether you have control over it or not.
But either way,
     it doesn't deserve the negative treatment that it gets.
There was another student actually I was really close to,

…part of care student study team where you can help,
…meet with the parents,
…and as a collective team,
…find other sort of resources.
And with that student,
the next quarter she started getting A's and B's.
Doing so much.
Sometimes I think you just need that personal investment an adult,
…time went really fast,
…she found out I was gay,
…she was really inappropriate,
…yelling at me,
…blah, blah, blah dyke.
I think more than anything else,
I was hurt by it,
…that's so sad.
Certainly they're young,
they're growing,
they don't know everything.

I called the mother and I said,
…your daughter is being rude and inappropriate.
I asked my administration,
…they suggested calling the mother up.
They also said we'd support you in anything,
…this might be a situation where we're going to just separate the two of you,
…maybe if it was something else,
…maybe it would have been dedicated work done and processed through.

The parent said she just has a difficult time with this,
…I really personally don't.
 …No, she should not be rude to you,
…or disrespectful to you, I'm sorry for that.
But she was very busy working, she couldn't come in and,
…we couldn't all sit down,
… it was very hard.

You could make roadblocks for yourself,
or be the pioneer.
Be the advocate,
…but you'll probably have to be prepared for the backlash.
…of course it sucks that the backlash is there,

…it's just our current climate that we're working with.
To go back there, sure I was upset.
There's a constant awareness.

Jill

Jill is a white female administrator in her early forties, with over 18 years of

public school experience. She feels strongly about supporting LGBT youth, teachers, and

parents in her role as an ally. Jill played this role for another participant, Evan, during his

high school years as his English teacher stopping bullying in her classroom and around

her. She draws upon her experiences and learnings from her gay teacher brother, and

Evan is only one of many students she has continued to support. Jill is warm, honest, and

even I felt like I had an ally when I left the room.

It Begins with Richard Kent Rice

Speaking as an administrator,
        there's a very practical aspect to it
        even though certainly there are civil rights,
        laws and policies in place that don't allow discrimination,
        if you're in your first 3 years of teaching
        proving discrimination just from a practical standpoint
There is this layer in working with kids
        that adds a dimension, particularly when it comes to sexuality
        to a degree,
        that's true with single, straight people as well
        to a degree.
But I've found is there's another level,
        I'd say it's scrutiny
        And I should say
        …I come at this whole thing with a very like really left-wing bias.
 I just say that to people,

when I'm talking about politics
or social issues
because it's just easier to say I know what I am
and I'm not going to change what I am.

My goal would be that in education,
we get to a point where kids can know
without any concern one way or the other
and I have to say
I think the concern is much more on the part of the parents
than it is on the kids for the most part.
There's this whole thing that we talked about
in my professional development
over the last 3 years about being
culturally responsive.
What that usually means,
I think it's a little too narrow.
Usually means is we have in its gross generalization,
middle class white women directing the education of everyone.
Middle class,
Straight,
White women directing the education of everyone.
There is a need for modeling.
Things like this that needs to happen,
having more males in school,
more teachers of color.
I would extend that
an understanding with kids
that some people partner with people of the opposite sex,
some people partner with people of the same sex.
I think that we need to get there as a country.
Kids need models for all kinds of lives.
They need role models for how it is to have good,
strong relationships
with people of all races and all sexual orientations.
For me, there's that other layer there, because my brother didn't have that.

There was this series of kids
that I've mentored through that time in their lives.
I taught in "Mayberry" for 2 years.
The other students that I would reference
that have come out to me either during their high school years or during college

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those kids that I have such a close contact with
those kids were all Mayberry. They were in my theater class.
And we had a really close bond,
mainly because I lost my husband while I was there,
which is another part of this.
I had a brother who was gay and my husband
…Mark and I were married for 9 years.
I'm sad to say, unfortunately, I guess I would probably identify Mark as bi-sexual.
The sad thing is he didn't live long enough for us to really be able to discern it.
He's been gone 18 years.
But both of them were also AIDS patients.
I nursed them through that,
Both of them
one right after another.
When Evan talks about being a first-year teacher
and you mentioned whether a teacher is out or not,
there was a period of time in my life
that I was in a different kind of closet.
I didn't let the people of Mayberry know what my husband was sick with
because there were people I knew I couldn't trust.
I was pretty sure I would have lost my job.
Maybe I'm selling them short,
but I could not take that chance.
I was our only income at that time.
And so all of that being said,
those kids from that period in my life,
when I did lose my husband,
there was this interesting lifesaving for me,
camaraderie with those particular kids
they helped me.
Kids are interesting in that way.
They will let you be what you need to be.
They understood my first year of widowhood in a way that my family,
Tim's family or none of the adults ever
…they didn't get it.
And the kids would let me be what I needed to be.
If I needed to laugh, that was okay.
They didn't think it was terrible because I'd lost my husband.
About a year after I left that town,
I went back to those kids
in my mind, I was coming clean to them
saying you need to understand that this was what was going on,

but I could not tell you while it was happening
because that was terrible.
I don't like being disingenuous.
People can tell when I'm being disingenuous.
People can tell. I don't do it well.
I think that those circumstances
    …telling my Mayberry kids
    then watching what my brother went through
    'cause I don't think he ever came to terms with who he was,
    certainly not who he was as an educator.

Older. He was 13 years older than I;
    lifelong teacher.
Oh, I couldn't…you couldn't really meet my brother and not know.
I think that he was in the closet with the people with whom he had to be.
People in his school knew.
My brother was very vivacious.
He didn't do drag, but he loved to be campy.
And so he was real appropriate with that.
He was campy with adults, not with kids.
But if you knew him very well,
     if you were his friend,
    and he was friends with people that he worked with
    he was out to them.
But what I got from him across the years
    was that he always had to make that judgment.
Can I trust or not?
Is this an environment where I can be more open about who I am or not, or no?
I think too that as he got older,
    he was less and less inclined to hide who he was,
    for which I'm thankful.
And so watching his experiences,
    then certainly seeing what my husband went though
    because my husband was in the military,
    just became more and more hardened about the prejudices.
It's one of the last acceptable prejudices.
And for me, it's not an acceptable prejudice.
By that I mean, it's not even acknowledged
    as a god damn prejudice
    or a bias or whatever.
And that does seem to be changing.
But it just needs to change faster.

These series of experiences
        came to help me to see.

I remember feeling that during my first couple years of teaching.
I remember kind of intuiting with a couple of those kids and
        And thinking you know, huh,
        sure enough, over their college years.
Just when I was starting to teach out here
        and about the time I had Evan,
        one of them came out to me before any of his other friends.
The kids came out to me.
I was this significant other in their lives I appreciate being that role.
I had Evan as a freshman and a sophomore at Roosevelt.
And he probably told you this but
        …or maybe he didn't.
I mean, he doesn't know it from my standpoint.
You don't have favorites,
        but there are just some kids that you connect with.
I think we wouldn't be good educators if that weren't true.
You have to be in tune with that sort of stuff.
So I had a connection with him.
The kid could write like the wind in ninth grade.
I had a really hard time coaching his writing,
        he was already so damn articulate.
I funneled him towards honors classes.
He was so literate and had a flare for the dramatic.
You can't really know him for more than five minutes without seeing that.

…I'm trying to think how I found this out.
You talk to kids,
        kind of get a feel and for their family backgrounds.
When he talked to me about where he went to church
        and his faith and his family,
        there was that point,
        for me,
        a conscious decision
        that really hasn't been that way with any other kid.
But Evan was different.
I had met his mother and loved his mother.
She is such a gracious woman; she's lovely,
        we just connected.
But in my head with Evan I did make a conscious choice,

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I just remember saying to myself
  that kid, at some point, is going to need me.
I just knew it. And it's strange.
I kind of choke up when I think about
  because the other kids were such blessings to me,
  my Mayberry kids
  but with Evan, it was
  …I think that I had a message from a source.
I define God in a pretty broad way.
But I think I had a message from a source because I knew without a doubt,
  I considered it my responsibility
  that when he needed me
  …'cause he left after his sophomore year.
I encouraged that because Roosevelt was not the place for him.
There were kids that were knocking him around and whatnot
I had come down on a couple of them.
When he went to Adams, and I encouraged that
  even though I hated to see him go.

… I would loved to have had him as a student.

I just kept in touch with him.
I was pretty sure there was going to come a point
  where he needed to come out to somebody
  and it wasn't going to be able to be his mom first.
It wasn't going to be able to be his mom.
I never, ever had a doubt that she would embrace him and love him.
I never had a doubt.
But because of their religion,
  I had that background,
  he was raised much the same way I was,
  much the same way.
And I knew from what had happened to my brother,
  he was going to need a safe person to talk him through that.
I had told him,
I think, pretty clearly,
  "I'm always only a phone call away."
I didn't tell him why I was saying that.
I just said, "I'm always only a phone call away."
And I remember getting the phone call and thinking
Okay, we're on.

I've never come out myself and I'm not gay.
Although, when I started identifying so strongly with all of these people,
      I have a lot of gay friends,
      I certainly did go through that process myself
      Thinking… have I just repressed this?
'cause I would feel fine about being gay.
I laugh at it now because I would take myself through a process of things.
I just never got attracted to women.
And I would think …am I repressing
      'cause you know the way you were raised?
And I would imagine being with a woman and think…yeah, no.

I have really good gaydar.
I do consciously keep an eye for that
      find a way to let them know that I am an ally.
I love that word because it's so much better
      than sympathetic or empathetic.
I had a teacher come out to me,
      this was a defining thing for me.
She came to me.
She and her partner were wanting to have children.
She was not out to the school.
She came to me and said what would happen if I, as a single woman, was pregnant.
And I said I remember
      …I mean, my God, I was first-year principal,
I said, "Well, I mean, that's a civil right. I can't tell you whether or not to be pregnant."
She asked, "Well, what do you think in terms of the community?"
I knew what she was getting at,
      then she must have felt safe enough
      she said, "My partner and I want to have children."
And I said, "Oh, that's great."
I could see sort of this physical relief from her.
But she said you know, in terms of this community.
And I said, "Well, I'll be honest with you. I don't know."
      I said, "There are some prejudices, I know, in this community and in the school
      community. But I'll tell you what, I will back you because that's a civil liberty.
      You don't have to ask somebody to get pregnant. I don't care whether you're
      married or not and it's none of their god damn business."
I do remember saying that.
I said, "It's none of their god damn business whether you're partnered with a woman or a
man.

So, I will back you. And as for the school district, I don't really know what they
would do but I will tell you that any lawyer would be able to back you and I
would back you."
It was a defining moment for me.
I remember thinking there's still something to fight for here
        because I would die on that hill.
I mean, I would quit.
And I thought well, you know, fuck, I've got a job.
And the school district would not have a leg to stand on,
        not a leg to stand on.
But it's sad that people have to ask that.
That's what pisses me off.
And I don't know that they're always getting the same answers.
They probably aren't.
So I think it's important.
Although, I've seen shift in schools,
        absolutely in my 11 years as an administrator.

I remember being very positive with Evan about what he could bring to kids
        in terms of his intellect and his passion.
That young man.
He's among the top 5% of my students across the years,
        in terms of his passion for learning and understanding other people,
        content and people.
So I remember my first reaction to him being
        …for him being really happy that you're going to do this.
I asked him why
        because he had been pursuing his own art.
I wanted to be sure that he wasn't going into it
        because he thought it was all he could do.
Because one, I knew he'd be a hell of a teacher
        two, he will make it in his art
        then about the gay piece.
We've had conversations about
        what you have to do to gain your standing.
I offered to be his sounding board
        his mentor sort of through that.
And when he was applying in Saturn,
        I asked him about Mercury
So we talked about that
I just said you need to be able to be who you are
        but I can traverse for you, at least in Mercury.

I can traverse for you what might be safe and what might not.
And yet, I have to say
     until he's passed his first 3 years,
     and frankly, by that point,
     he may be in New York,
     I would wish that for him; that's fine.
But until he's passed his first 3 years,
     he probably shouldn't work for me
     there's a conflict of interest there
     and that I can't deny he's my kid.
So I mean, I didn't give birth to him but
     there is no way.
People would know.
You can't be around us and not know that there's a relationship there.

     Evan

     Evan is a gay white male in his early thirties, whose boyish, blond good looks did

not prevent him from being bullied during his high school years because of his sexual

orientation. A native of Colorado, he is entering his second year as a fifth grade teacher in

a large district. Prior to entering the teaching profession, Evan pursued his passion for

music in Los Angeles and even produced a record. He is incredibly insightful and gifted

with a unique connection to another participant in the study, Jill, who intervened during

the bullying in high school and has remained a consistent presence in his life as an ally.

You know, like Jill did

By the end of the year,
     there was this sort of simpatico relationship,
     that I developed with the boys.
There is a boy in my class who,
     if I had to make a guess, I think he is gay.
He was picked on ridiculously.
It was hard watching him go through it;
     I couldn't protect him every moment of the day.
 One of the last couple of days of the school Derek came up to me,

… he was the kid who was the ringleader of all the boys,
        gave me the worst time at the beginning of the year.
He came up to me;
        he was like,
        "You know, Abraham is telling everyone that you're gay."
I said, "Well, do you think that's true?"
"I dunno."
And I said, "Well, then, what difference does it make?"
I kept trying to show them that people are always going to make fun of you.
You'll always encounter someone,
        who says something about you that you don't like.
But are you going to throw it back in their face every time?
Are you going to cause fights,
        or you going to get into more trouble?
 "If it isn't true, then why do I need to waste my time thinking about it?"
"I don't know."
"Well, I don't know either."
Just trying to get them to think
That was the only time that I really ever was posed with that question by a student.

One of the things that was so funny this year,
        is that the boys got together,
        decided that I needed to start dating the girl who works in the office,
        who's about my age.
She's attractive.
So they would conspire this scheme.
Derek would be like, "Let me give you some advice."
Like, "I'm Mr. Cool. I'm going to show you how to do this
        because you're a loser, Mr. B."
We kind of played along with it.
… when she had a message,
        she wouldn't call me or e-mail me,
        she would walk down to my room,
        hand me a piece of paper,
        touch me on the shoulder.
It was one of those things that helped me sort of cultivate the relationships.
They really saw me as a person,
        not just like Mr. Random Teacher.
I think they saw me as their champion.
Someone who was actually trying to help them,
        which was actually really amazing to watch,
        that transformation from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

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What's so funny about Jess,
        first week of school
        I went and had a beer,
        one of my teammates and one of the social workers and Jess.
Jess just looked at me and she said, "Evan, I have a question for you."
She just asked me, and I said, "Yes."
That group of people knew.
I just flat out said to them,
"I don't know if this is information that I want circulating in the building,
        given the fact that I don't have any professional relationships in place with
anyone."
I asked them, "Do you think this is an area of concern?"
And they said, "No."
I was wondering if it was ever going to circulate.
I have a feeling that more people know.
My last couple of months at school,
        the librarian was talking to me.
"You know, you totally remind me of my brother."
"Really?"
Told me that her brother,
        came out at the age of 40-something.
She was sharing a little bit about that journey.
I think I might have said something like,
        "It can be difficult, or it is difficult, taking that journey with your family."
        then she just looked, and she goes, "You're gay?"
        And I said, "Yes."

Those are not the only experiences that I had.
It would kind of annoy me,
        my teammate would come in.
She's just one of those people who always wants to gossip,
        have information.
She always has a crisis going on in her life.
Every Monday morning,
        tell me about the crisis that occurred over the weekend.
I needed to focus and so it was kind of annoying.
Then she would make these comments.
She would always whisper it,
        like it was some secret,
        "Are you seeing anyone?"
        or, "Are there any men in your life?"
She would just whisper it.

I think she was trying to be respectful,
  but,
  thought that was annoying,
  way she treated it.
She's trying to get it,
  but just proving to you that she doesn't get it.

In a lot of ways,
  I don't know if I'll ever want to be in a school,
  where I am really personally close to a group of people in my school building.
I think that there's something to be said,
  for it just being my place where I work,
  and I don't really get into the stuff of my life.
 In a lot of ways,
  especially when this year was really hard,
  it was really nice to have a place to go that was separate,
  that wasn't a reminder;
  that wasn't a place where I had to talk about it or be asked about it.
And I never got to a place,
  where I felt like I was lying with anyone in my building,
  because whenever I was asked, I was always honest.
I have a feeling that they might know, but I really don't honestly care.
I'll never know, until I get into a serious relationship.

The beginning of the year was really interesting.
I didn't feel like I was teaching at the beginning of the year.
I wasn't even babysitting.
I was drowning. That was I was doing.
These kids
  … it was like *Dangerous Minds*,
  ….things being constantly thrown across the room.
It was ridiculous.
I left in tears every single day.
Nobody got it.
When I think about it,
  I'm so proud of what I was able to accomplish.
I don't know what it would have been like,
   to have had a serious relationship in a new school.
A new profession.
I probably would have kept my mouth shut.
But to begin with, it was more about survival.
Not drowning.

Everything else was secondary.

It will be interesting,
        to kind of relax into teaching a little bit.
Everything is such uncharted territory.
Every day is something you've never done before.
The first year is so indescribable.
I was nuts for teaching those kids,
        it got to be a little ridiculous.
As an actor and as a stage performer;
        I'd looked at my job in a lot of ways as that.
And I was doing whatever I could to just,
        engage and motivate,
        often entertain this group of kids,
        who I don't think ever have trusted a teacher before.
I know that they trusted me by the end.
Maybe it will be different,
        as I relax into teaching.

The students came into my classroom.
They were all calling each other gay.
They just thought that was a really funny word.
I made them look it up in the dictionary.
Made Derek come up and deliver the definition.
We talked about it.
I found that humor,
        was the best way for me to attack a lot of those things.
They stopped using the word.
They just got so annoyed with me saying, "You're right."
Someone called someone a bisexual.
And I was like, "Really?"
"What does that mean?"
And Derek looks at me and he goes,
        "That means you like both."
And I said, "Both what?
        Like ketchup and mustard?
        I use both ketchup and mustard on my hamburgers.
        I like both peanut butter and jelly."
He was like, "No, it means you like both girls and boys."
I didn't want to embarrass him,
        so I said,
        "Okay, well, I'm a man;

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I've friends that are men;
I've friends that are women.
Your definition here's still not really making much sense to me. I'm just trying to
understand why you use this particular word,
because if you're going to use it I feel like we should be able to talk about what it
means, especially if you're going to do it in my presence.
You want to go do it on the playground when I'm not around,
that might be something you want to think about."
 "Hmm…" I just kept, "So you like – what does that mean?"
He's like, "You know."
And I said,
"No, I don't, and even if I did know,
it does not matter what I know because it only matters what you know,
because I'm not the student here. I'm the teacher."
And I just found that pushing them like that 'til like,
"Well, then really, tell me what it means.
Like if they could have said a bisexual person is,
someone who is attracted to people of the opposite and the same sex,
then I would have looked at it,
and I would have been, "Okay."
But it didn't get to that point.
"Well, let's make sure that when we use that word,
we're actually using it with someone,
who's comfortable with that definition as well."
That's where I was headed.
That was the goal in my head.
If you can say that,
then, great.
Use the word,
write about it.
Whatever. I'm not afraid.

With my family,
as painful as it has been,
it has been really awesome,
to sit back,
try and be gracious,
allow them the opportunity to have their own journey with it.
I'm almost 30 years old.
Since I felt this way since I was 4,
I've had 26 years,
to process,

think,
and cope.
I've been out for almost 10 years now.

I knew.
I didn't know what it was.
I didn't know what to call it,
but I knew that I was different.
I knew that there was something about men,
that was a lot more interesting to me than women.
I just knew.
To look back on it in retrospect,
because memories are deceiving,
what I remember was I was home-schooled,
in Christian private schools until third grade,
home-schooled fourth, fifth, and sixth.
My mother was going to divorce my father,
there was concern that my father would react violently.
There were crazy things going on.
And so my mom just decided to keep us all close.
I didn't enter the public school system until seventh grade.

I was an early bloomer.
I was really tall and really skinny.
I stood out.
I just remember how horrible it was,
going to school every day;
being just persecuted.
Being thrown against lockers,
sitting in class and having some kids say,
"I'm going to beat you up after school,"
or, "You better not go to the bathroom during this period,
because I'll follow you and, you know."
Constantly being on the edge.
Not to mention all the other stuff.
When I talk to my mom about this now,
she is like,
"You know, I really failed. I should have done something else."
I remember going into the principal.
Talking to him about it,
very adult-like,
saying, "Well, this is what's happening;

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what are you going to do about it?”
A fair question.
He basically looked at me,
        and he said, “Well, you might want to stop dressing so well.
        You dress very well.”
That was his advice to me:
        Don’t dress so well.
“Really?”
I just started hanging out in the choir loft at lunch.
I really got into music.
I started dating this eighth grade girl,
        then people started getting out of my way.
Once I got to high school,
        it all just started up again.
I remember that Jill’s classroom was the only place,
        where I felt safe.

I shared with her some of my writing.
I was writing song lyrics and poetry,
        she encouraged me to write some short stories.
She would give me great, positive feedback.
I think those years of being home-schooled,
        set me up for success as a student.
My mom really challenged me.
I was able to be really independent,
        study things that I really wanted to study.
I can remember research projects that I did in those years,
        because I cared about them.
Jill was the only teacher,
        that really supported me,
        challenged me.
Jill will tell you,
        she believes that it is her purpose on this earth,
        is to find or to come into contact,
        with young people,
        who were struggling with their sexuality.
Be as a safe haven for them.
Because I’m not first.
She feels that was her role that she needed to play in my life,
        and in other people’s lives.
We talk about it now.
She’s like…

"I knew. I thought.
    You didn't know it,
    and that's what pissed me off."
She said,
     "Because all these kids were screaming 'faggot' to you.
    You didn't even know what that meant."
I kept in touch with Jill.
I left that high school,
    and went to a different one,
    where I was like a superstar.
I was singing in that school,
    that meant something.

I remember there was a guy,
    who came out in our senior year.
He actually came out when Ellen came out.
He threw a party,
    it was in the newspaper.
During a stage performance,
    someone had taken,
    … I don't know if it was shaving cream,
    or whipped cream or something
    … and written "faggot" all over his car multiple times.
A bunch of us saw it,
    we kept him distracted inside,
    and went and hosed his car off.
I remember thinking,
    because it wasn't even my idea that
    … it was this girl's idea.
I just remember thinking,
    "Wow, that's really interesting."
People could actually be supportive.

I meet Todd,
    … first day of college,
    … choir audition.
We just became best friends.
St. Patrick's Day rolls around,
    and basically, it came down to drinking.
I was 19 and they found a bar,
    we got wasted.
I remember I was sitting there next to Todd.

There was so much sexual energy between us,
        it was ridiculous.
I woke up the next morning.
There was a naked man on my bed,
        and I was like,
        "Well, here we go."
That was all I remember thinking.
"Everything's different."

My mom found out by accident.
Todd and I got an apartment together,
        but it wasn't going to be ready until July.
I went home.
He calls me,
        and we're just having this normal conversation,
        then, at the end of it, he says,
        "I love you,"
        and said, "I love you too,"
        and I hung up.
I put the phone down.
I look up,
        and there's my mother,
        and she's just looking at me.
My mom with her rubber gloves from doing dishes.
She just looked at me,
         and she goes,
        "You love him?
        What do you mean, you love him?"
I remember I started laughing,
        I didn't know what else to do.
It was horrible, so horrible.
She just kept saying it,
        "What do you mean?"
And I said,
        "Well,"
        "I am in love with him."
"I don't know what that means as far as a statement that it's making,
        but I have fallen in love with another human being and he happens to be male."
"I don't understand."
She just kept saying,
        "I don't understand.
        I don't get it.

What are you telling me?
What are you telling?
Are you telling me that you're gay?"
The way I justified it to myself,
as a Christian,
it wasn't that I was gay,
it was that I happened to fall in love with someone who was male.
Because I had been with women before.
It was just that I had met Todd,
and it had blown it all out of the water.
My mom – I remember her dropping the glass on the floor.
I remember her just sinking to her knees.
She just started wailing,
"I failed – I failed as a mother."
I just remember thinking in my head,
"This is not about you."
That's all I remember thinking.
I was thinking in my head,
that is preposterous;
there's no failure here.

 "Jill, I think I'm gay and I think I'm in love with Todd,
and I don't know what to do."
And she said,
"You don't have to do anything."
She said,
"All you have to do is put one foot in front of the other,"
I'm here;
 I'm here.
She told me things, comforting things.
I don't really remember much about that conversation.
But I remember thinking,
Jill is the only person that feels safe to me right now.
That was really hard.
I trusted Todd,
but Jill was the safe one.

Samantha will come to me with like insightful questions,
"What's this like for you?"
… like student teaching,
… when I was trying to navigate with whether or not I was going to talk about it,
I just remember Samantha,

… saying something to me like,
       "I would be terrified.
       I would be terrified if I were you."
"Well, if I lose my job, I lose my job."
There are only so many things I could control;
       I'm not going to compromise,
       … I'm not going to lie.
I don't know if everyone in my building is a safe place,
       but at the other hand,
       TJ's is not a safe place, either.
Just because I'm in a gay place,
       that doesn't mean I'm in a safe place necessarily.
I sort of look at school that way,
       just because it's not a gay place,
       that doesn't mean that it isn't a safe place.

Jill tells me that that,
       the thing that angered her the most,
       that kid called me a faggot in her room.
I recall that story,
       and she goes, "That was the worst possible way to handle that situation.
       And if I went back…"
She's like,
       "I could have gotten fired for what I said,
       and how close I got to that kid."
But I remember thinking,
       "Oh, I love her."
Because nobody had ever stood up for me like that before.
She didn't even really know me.
Jill will tell you that the thing that pissed her off the most,
       is that she knew that I didn't even know that about myself.
I knew something was different,
       but I didn't know that that's what it was.
I feel like it will be one student at a time.

I could laugh about it now.
It was because it helped me.
My therapist said something to me that I will never forget,
       I remember the first time in his office.
What he said to me was,
       "I know that this might not make sense to you."
       But he said, "I believe that God has allowed you to experience the pain…

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through all these different degrees of pain,
because you'll be able to connect and speak into the lives of other people,
and especially children, more than anybody else."
Going back to an ideal world,
when someone is called a "faggot,"
or gets called "gay" in my classroom,
I would love to be able to stand up and say,
"You know what, that's really offensive and this is why,
… because this is my life,
and those words were used against me.
And "You will not do that in my room."
You know, like Jill did.

Rachel

Rachel is an active, white female in her mid-forties who has taught for 14 years, with the majority of her time being spent at an alternative high school program. She is a talented artist and has a way of expressing complex ideas through her media. Rachel currently identifies as "straight but open." For a large portion of her adult life she identified as a lesbian; however she has most recently found herself re-examining her sexual orientation and fluidity. One of the main points she discussed in her interview, is how dress and overall looks determine a person's perception of you and your sexuality. This is a theme that emerged in many others' interviews, but in a different way. People perceive her as a lesbian, whereas she wants to be perceived, at this point in her life, as straight.

Oh, yeah, still crazy people

It kind of is funny.
I was doing my undergraduate degree.
First, I went to Colorado Christian College.

Then, I went and joined my brother at Oral Roberts University.
I came back and finished up with Metro
I was doing PE K-12.
At the time I was lifeguarding
        and young kids were driving me nuts; I hated them.
I wanted to strangle them.
My mom actually said to me
 "I don't know if you would be a very good teacher."
 I thought about it,
        "You know, as much as I hate these kids, the day care kids, maybe I'll change my
        degree from PE K-12 to Exercise Physiology,"
        which I loved.
I love the science in Exercise Phys.
I kind of just quit everything and went on a trip to Boston,
        ran into a guy from the club that I worked at.
He said, "What are you doing?"
I said, "I just kind of graduated, jobs are hard to come by."
Because in Exercise Phys,
        … Bally's had just come into play.
They were hiring idiots off the street for $5.00 an hour
        to do what I did for four years.
So, he said, "Well, what are you doing?"
"Well, nothing really."
He says, "Do you want to come and try some teaching with me at this alternative high
school?"
I got hired as a teacher's aide.
I taught a few classes at Carter, which was the alternative.
Really liked it.
But as a 24-year old,
        I was horribly insecure about myself,
        my skills and I didn't get enough from them,
        "You're doing a good job."
So, I thought I'll interview.
I moved over to Nixon, still as a TA.

Two years passed.
I'm started to mini case.
I thought,
        well … making $5.15 an hour
        maybe I should go and get my license.
I checked into the DU, got my Special Ed license.
I really wanted to stay at Nixon, but they hired someone else.

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I interviewed at Washington High School.
Mary called up the lady,
        because, still at 27,
        I'm very insecure, very shy,
        "Rachel, doesn't interview well, but she's great,"
I team taught science.
I was considered all Special Ed.
Had a case load of 40 kids,
        with crazy, crazy parents,
        with advocates,
        and lawyers,
        but I loved being up in the science department.
When I interviewed for the Hamilton position,
        it was one of the hardest decisions I had to make.
When I first got over to Hamilton,
        it was like, "Oh, my God, what did I sign up for?"
I think I've been there 9 or 10 years.

I use my classroom as a vehicle to help kids,
        to connect kids,
        to get them into their next step.
I'll teach genetics.
I'll teach this and I'll teach that.
They'll get some stuff out of it,
        but I think I look at my teaching a little bit differently
        maybe than some teachers might look at their teaching.
And, I think it took me a while to get there,
        because you know, you always hear about these people saying,
        "Oh, my God, I had this teacher. This teacher really teaches this well."
And, it's like I'm not a master teacher.
I'm not going to be teaching you Algebra
        and you're going to be like the star Calculus person of the world.
But, I can get kids through,
        Graduated,
        and have great relationships.
So, that's kind of teaching for me.
Teaching for me wasn't really about how well I teach,
        but how the relationships I have with kids
I love to teach.
I love to work with people; kids and young adults.

Let's see, tomboy, the best quarterback you've ever seen.

Grew up in Colorado,
  in a very fundamentalist Christian home.
We grew up going to Jesus Rocky Mountain.
My brothers and sisters,
  we talk about it.
We really don't have much cultural context.
In the 70's and 80's because we weren't allowed to watch television,
  we were so sheltered.
We didn't listen to secular music.
We watched the Walton's on Sunday nights.
We were allowed to watch the Love Boat,
  but we weren't allowed to watch Fantasy Island because it was satanic.
We were allowed to watch Happy Days,
  Laverne and Shirley,
  but we couldn't watch Three's Company
  because the guy lived with two girls.
A tremendous loss of cultural context,
  as well as what goes with that.
I think it was a tremendous loss of sociability.
We graduated high school socially inept.

I went to public school up through Middle School.
Then I was moved.
I was pretty at risk.
I didn't like school.
I had a horrible self esteem.
I was starting to smoke cigarettes
  and so I was pulled over to the Christian Academy.
It was good for me not to be in the public school setting,
  I probably would have been lost in the cracks.
In high school, I was incredibly homophobic.
We were taught to hate, basically.
We were taught that homosexual people
  were horrible, horrible people
They did really disgusting things.
It's really scary and unfortunately
  that whole gospel style is, in my mind,
  is really about enculturating.
Some brainwashing…
  making things really scary.
We were really scared of lots of things in the secular world.
Also, very hateful of things in the secular world.

So, I was extremely homophobic which is a great sign.
I would say things.
I hated our dog because it would chew up my underwear
        so I would call it homosexual.
I graduated in a class of two.
I had also started being fairly sexual,
        thinking about sex at the age of like 10 and 11.
So somewhat early.
It was heterosexual, very heterosexual,
        drawing stuff,
        trying to sneak in and look at the Joy of Sex books.
I think a little bit early sexual stuff going on
        and I don't know why.
So, all that and then also lovely self esteem issues,
        never really had a boyfriend in high school.
I was just always like the ugly duckling.
        didn't feel like I was very attractive,
        thought I was fat.
All those lovely things that go along with that.

At Colorado Christian College.
I got a roommate and kind of had my first lesbian experience,
        but not sexually.
Became really close, close, close emotionally.
You know how at 18, you just get these
        immensely close friendships.
I would go to her house on the weekend,
        we would even hold hands.
We would sleep in the same bed together.
Nothing really sexual ever happened,
        but she was emotionally probably my first girlfriend.
And, she'd probably freak out to know that, so we don't discuss that.
But…
        came back to Metro and started doing the K-12,
        eventually the Exercise Phys.
Of course, there's lots of lesbians around then.

I think she saw …
I mean, I had a mullet and I was a big old dyke.
I had the shaved sides and long mullet.
Like my tattoos,
        was just really wanting to get to that edge.

How much could I shave off the sides of my head?
So, there's some of that in there, too, very testing.
A lot of kids test at 14,
        I was testing at 21, 22, 23.
So she really kind of pushed me into
        "Well, you might be gay."
Things started to kind of come together,
        started to see girls in the locker room,
        kind of be attracted.
I was horribly scared.
In fact, I went through a couple of relationships thinking,
        "Okay, I'll just do this and then I'll ask for forgiveness and I'll be straight again
        and everything will be okay."
 Because, that's the way it worked;
        you asked Jesus for forgiveness
        and everything's okay.
So, literally I would go through these first couple of relationships
        "Okay, when this is over, I'll just go back and then I won't go to hell."
I eventually came out to my mother,
        which was crazy,
        going to hell.
Send me shit in the mail about going to these camps.
Going to something like that to get yourself fixed.
Finally, I said, "Mom, you've got to stop this."
That hampered my mother and I's relationship.
It still does.
In the end she was halfway accepting of girlfriends.
I'd had a partner for 10 years.
She would invite her places,
        but there was never really a discussion
        like she would have with my brother or sister
        about their wife or their husband.

I didn't like the word "lesbian"
        so I wouldn't have said lesbian; maybe gay,
        but it was very uncomfortable for me,
        let alone for anybody else
        because of all the stuff that I was dealing with inside.
I always hated the word "lesbian."
I don't know why I did. I liked the word "gay."
But, I was lesbian.
I just couldn't stand that word, I don't know why.

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I never liked the word;
        I would much rather say "gay woman" than anything.
I think that was what was hard for me
        about being a lesbian
        is I didn't fit great in the lesbian community.
 I didn't see women on TV and just be like,
        "Ooh, she's hot." I hated that.
To me, a lesbian relationship was more about the connection,
        the friendship I had and all that kind of stuff
Okay, but I just never felt like I fit.
There was always that question in my mind
        whether it was religious or whatever
        that I always was attracted to men;
        always had that physical attraction.

And then, had the opportunity and it was through hockey.
I'd always,
        even though I shaved my head
        and had tattoos on my head,
        …I always felt like I was somewhat feminine.
If I didn't show it on the outside,
        I was definitely feminine on the inside.
That super dyke thing was really hard for me.
There came a point where this guy on my team
        that I was really attracted to,
        …things developed.
So that was my first sexual experience with a man.
That was at 38 years old.
He was a cool guy and he knew that it was my first time,
        we had fun.

I've lived my life in the gay world.
To be honest with you,
        I didn't really get the nuances.
The ins and the differences between men and women,
        how they communicate until I started doing this and seeing him.
And so then, I started kind of hanging out with Jake who lives here.
We've kind of been hanging out together for about 2 years.
We don't call each other boyfriend and girlfriend.
My mother thinks her prayers have been answered
        because myself and my youngest sister
        both kind of switched teams around the same time.

My mother thinks that her prayers have been answered
          and Jesus has performed a miracle.
I've always been really open,
          even when I was with women.
I always said, "You know, anything is possible. I could get married one day."
I was thinking more of a man
I guess what I would say is right now I'm not feeling strongly inclined,
          but I would have to say that my whole view of sexuality,
 …is that continuum
          that everybody talks about and you've heard a thousand times,
          where we're all kind of here and I'm kind of really here.
I got to say, "You don't have to call yourself anything.
          You don't have to call yourself a bisexual.
          You don't have to call yourself a lesbian."
This pressure.
I probably would not label myself as a bisexual.
Straight, but open.
Because, I don't know.
I guess what's hard,
          I really don't have the inclination right now
          that I have felt before
          to really go out and meet women.
Really, right now I
          have this inclination more to go out and meet men.
I'm thinking about, "How do you meet men?"
Coming from my lesbian background,
          trying to go to the straight world has been,
          I can't even tell people how crazy it is.

I kind of lost that community, that root.
That was pretty tightly woven
          after nine years with my partner,
          16 years in the gay community.
I had nice, good friends.
They all had wonderful barbecues and parties,
          But, I have to tell you that for its own reasons
          the gay community is extremely separate.
There is a definite separation.
Nobody was ever like "You're so horrible,"
I think that we retained our genuine likeability for each other.
But, with culture comes culture.
If I'm going to participate in the straight culture

they don't intermix well.
They don't intermix really at all.

I was never out to students.
At the Mercury district,
        it felt impossible;
        not even at my alternative school.
Felt like it was too much of a risk.
Now, did the kids know?
Fuck, yes. They knew.
And, some kids would even talk to me.
I don't think I'm as good at being a safe person anymore.
I was a very safe person for kids to come to.
Getting kids connected to the center,
        getting kids services,
        making sure they were safe,
        stopping the fag and the gay.
I had some transgender kids.
I'd call Planned Parenthood about the hormones,

I was only truly asked once or twice.
I had finally generated a good answer to that question.
And, that was, "I think you know the answer to that question and I can't really talk about it with
        you."
I came out to the staff in the first quarter; they knew.
Have just been nothing but wonderful.
Making sure that I'm included,
        really using my insight and my knowledge in dealing with gay kids.
How we can make it a safer place?
I feel like I got to be really utilized.
It was also really difficult to not be out.
I think one of the hardest things I struggled with every year
        and it made me so angry,
        this stupid, fucking guy could never get it and probably never will.
It's his heterosexual privilege.
Every year we would introduce ourselves to the kids,
        introduce ourselves at Back to School Night.
 "Well, my wife, and my kids, and then my family and then…"
It's all about his privilege.
And then, "I'm Rachel. I have a dog."
It was difficult.

I really never could be personal with the kids about my life.
You can't really tell stories,
        you can't really tell experiences,
        which seems to get in the way of my educational philosophy,
        which is about the relationships,
        but there are other ways and I learned to do it.
I learned to focus on them.
I think the great thing is that they knew
        and so there wasn't really ever any need to be more explicit.
They knew.
I always felt like the kids deserved better;
        the kids deserve a role model.
The kids deserve to have something to strive for
        throughout the year.

I met this wonderful lady that moved in here last summer.
She was the beauty queen.
She married the millionaire
        and she's gorgeous and feminine and girly.
I broke down with her a couple of times.
"I still look like a lesbian;
        everybody still thinks I'm a lesbian."
How am I going to get what I want to get when I look like the old dyke?
I would even get to the point of crying.
We would go shopping.
She helped me get some new clothes.
This year, I've gone through this huge evolution.
The kids that knew me well for a really long time,
        "What's up with this girly crap?"
There's always the comments.
        "What's going on?
        What are you doing?
        Why are you wearing those shoes?
        Why are you wearing that shirt?"
It's been confusing for everyone involved.
Right, and that's some of the things that the kids would say is they'd be like,
 "Well, as long as you're still crazy."
Oh, yeah, still crazy, people.
Let's get that one straight.

I wish that I had had better words to talk to kids
        about the changes.

That people can change,
  go through different evolutions in their life.
It's a hard context for them.
How many people do this in their lives?
I'm trying to wrap my head around it myself.
Still crazy Rachel with the tattoos.
So, even though I'm not shaving my head,
  I did have a student call me,
  that I really worked with,
  because she was really struggling with whether she was gay.
Lost track for about 5 or 6 years where she went.
She called me up and, "Oh, Gay Pride,"
  and I was like, "I have to tell you something."
And, she was like, "Eh!"
It's like coming out all over again.
Here's the thing that was so hard and I talked to my friend Cindy about it,
  my little beauty queen.
My kids were "We like the way you dress, we like your hair, we like your big, baggy clothes."
I've always been a tomboy.
I've always worn big, baggy clothes and big baggy t-shirts,
  that was a way of me hiding from my femininity.
It was hard because at first
"Well, boys don't like that."
But really, it's not about boys.
It's really about my process and me making me lovely
  I want to look the best I can.
It's really sad,
  the culture that we're in now in.
If I was to talk to kids,
  in a more straight position
  about having been with women,
  I feel like that would be much more comfortable for me now.
Even in the last year or two I had been asked maybe and I'm like, "Yeah."
Because now, I'm on that other side and there is that privilege.
It's an extremely emotional, difficult struggle.
You know? No matter whether you're educated or not.
Oh, god. I voted for Reagan when I was 18.

Sean

Sean is a gay white male high school math teacher, who has been teaching for over 30 years in the high school he graduated from. He has been a strong activist all of his life and is intolerant of situations involving discrimination of students, parents, and teachers. Sean is a leader, media contact, listening ear, and role model. He holds leadership positions in national LGBT organizations and it is clear that none of his positions pull him away from the core of his teaching role, which are the students. His "outness" and how he uses it in an activist way in the school system would seem like a dream to most young lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers; however, it has not been without its risks and fears.

Returning to the Scene of a Crime

I teach at Jefferson High School.
I teach actually Applied Mathematics
     all with high tech equipment in the computer classroom.
I am openly gay to students,
     staff,
     faculty,
     parents,
     community,
     even on my school website.
I graduated from Jefferson High School in 1976.
So I'm teaching at the school I graduated from.
I started off as a geophysical engineer.
I was either going in that after high school,
     going into the ministry,
     the theater,
     or engineering.
And after 30 years,
     I decided that that's what teaching is –

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it's a little ministry, it's a little theater, and it's a little engineering.
I also come from a family of teachers,
        that's why I said I would never be a teacher.
But I do think you're also born to be teaching.
There is something in the way your family is created.
I do think, in some ways,
        teachers are bred and born.
Education just helps some.
I started off as an engineer
        and I hated it.
Mines was very traditional,
        it was not ready for an openly gay student back in 1977.
I was actually openly gay to my friends in high school.
So I've been openly out since '75.
I actually ended up suing Colorado School of Mines
        and the State of Colorado,
        for discrimination based on my sexual orientation.
I started a gay and lesbian support group on the Mines campus.
They discriminated against me
        – tried to change my grades on my transcripts and everything.
After 3 years in the court system,
        the ACLU handled my court case,
        free.
And so, I started out as an activist right out of high school.

I started off as an engineer;
        hated it;
        worked for a year;
        made lots of money;
        loved the money;
        miss the money.
Jack of all trades back in my youth.
Then I decided, "Well, maybe I should be a teacher."
I went back and got my teaching license
        and another degree in Math in Metro.
I did my student teaching in Saturn.
Nobody was asking – gay?
Sexual orientation wasn't an issue,
        during student teaching.
While at Metro,
        I was very involved with their GLBT student group.
I helped start that.

Got sexual orientation into the non-discrimination clause for the students at Metro.
So like I said,
      I've been an activist all of my life.
I think a lot of it has to deal with being the baby of the family.
I was picked on a lot.
Three older brothers and one older sister.
I was very extroverted,
      very up and out.
I'm very extroverted, so I don't mind being in front.
I think that helps with being an activist,
      is being an extrovert.
But I also do think people like Gandhi,
      who were not extroverts.
Can still be an activist,
      it's just in a different.
Because we have a lot of people who support us,
      but they're not extroverted.

During one of my job interviews for teaching,
      one of my first ones,
      "Doesn't your hand gestures get in the way of your teaching?
      Doesn't your voice get in the way of your teaching?"
Implying, "Being gay does it not get in the way of your teaching?"
I filed a grievance against that principal.
He retired after that year.
I finally got a job here in Saturn.
Working for a middle school principal,
      that actually always said he "had the balls to hire me,"
      because it's on my resume, and in it said
      I am member of, at that time,
      it was called a gay and lesbian teachers group, it was a teachers group –
      Gay and Lesbian Educators of Colorado.
I had that on my resume.
He luckily had a college roommate that was gay,
      so he had no problems with that.
And that was middle school.
I was openly gay there.
In middle school,
      students,
      staff,
      parents all knew.

I remember one of my students,
    I sent out to my car to go get stuff.
He went out to my car and found the CD where I had gay music on it.
And he said, "Mr. P, I know you're gay because I found your CD,"
    and the kids went, "We already knew that! Who cares?"
He said he had proof now.
So that was kind of interesting.
I had a student,
    when I was teaching at the middle school,
    accused me.
I asked her if she was a virgin
    if she wanted to remain so,
    the principal basically laughed her out of the office.
She didn't understand that I was really gay.
She never bothered asking or finding out.
So the principal knew the truth,
    then finally after the investigations were all done,
    it turns out that person at 7-11 asked her the exact same question.
She just wanted to blame me to raise her grade.
Man, she did not do her research.

So I've had issues being a teacher.
But I will say that is unusual.
I was literally probably the only openly gay teacher
    … there was one other teacher in Denver.
He was the openly gay teacher in Denver.
I was the openly gay teacher at Saturn.
When I did go to Lincoln,
    one of the teachers thought she had to leave because she was a lesbian,
    felt she needed to leave because I was there,
    because people would start asking about her now.
I was in the same building.
She felt like there was more danger from being associated with me.
Then after she retired from the district,
    she called me up and said,
    "Sean, what can I do to help your organization?"
So yes,
    she was just in fear of losing her job in the community.
I'm not sure if she could handle the stress.

Stress – you have to be careful.
I'm also a licensed counselor.

I make sure that I follow all of the counseling rules.
I also make sure I don't put myself in situations where I could get in trouble,
        leaving doors open, things like that.
Conversations that are getting too personal,
        I will tell the students, "You need to be careful.
        I do have to report certain things."
It also comes with teachers
        because they too seek me out,
        like when Amendment 2 got passed.
All the gay and lesbian teachers in the area were calling me for support
        and yet here I am, needing support.
So that was really rough.
A lot of teachers wanted to leave the business right then.

The stress dealing with parents.
In one situation,
        had a parent who didn't want them being taught by a gay teacher.
And one other student removed.
I had to deal with that saying,
        "No, you can't do that. We have a P.E. teacher who's differently-abled. You want
        him not taught by a differently-abled P.E. teacher because you don't think he's
        going to work him hard enough because he's differently-abled?" What if a white
        supremacist didn't want their children being taught by an African-American? We
        wouldn't change it."
I ended up suing,
        giving a grievance
        over my district on that one too.
They finally did allow the student out.
I did file a grievance and I did win the grievance.
All administrators in my school district
        had to be trained on GLBT issues because of it.
I'm not sure it's a choice.
In the fact, that I won't allow it to be discriminatory
        I choose that route because I know in the long run,
        it would actually help the student who was actually removed.
And it will actually help our society.
I do a lot more for societal reasons,
        in the future
        than I do for me, myself.
Activists, they used to say
        you have to have great pain.
To be a great artist,

I think you also have to have great pain.
To be a great activist,
        if you don't have the pain,
        the difficult conversations don't happen.

Before things should get to a lawsuit or a grievance,
        you have to have lay people,
        like an ombudsman.
Trying to get the conflicts worked out,
        before they'll go to lawsuits.
Like in one case,
        I had an English teacher,
        who told the students to write an autobiographical article.
The student wrote about coming out to her mother.
The teacher gave her an F,,
        said that it was an inappropriate topic for public schools.
The parent and the student were not happy with that,
        they went to the principal.
The principal said, "Well, the teacher can give her the grade and, no, I am not going to change
        it."
After I met with the principal,
        and the teacher,
        they did change the grade.
They need to understand,
        we have a non-discrimination policy.
They are going to get sued.
I've been working in the district for some 20 years.
It's taken 20 years to get it backed up.
We've also had a superintendent who had a lesbian daughter
        involved with PFLAG and everything.
He and I actually did it from 2 different directions.
He started from the top changing policies.
I started at the bottom changing policies.
Then once we've met together,
        we started getting it in all our policies.
An example,
        how interesting our policies are.
We have a policy for school mascots.
Cannot discriminate based on sexual orientation.
Including all the rest of them, but sexual orientation's in there.
The idea is just to make sure that training continues,

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that the policies are changed forth.
That's more of what I do,
        I make sure the policies are enforced
        applied equitably.
It is a daily grind.

I've been working on GLBT issues
        and education for over 30 years.
I am getting tired.
I am trying to teach some young people to take over the helms.
I am also getting old.
I'm getting forgetful and I can't do it all.
I used to juggle a thousand balls at once.
Now, I can only juggle five hundred.
I have thought about it,
        but activism doesn't pay.
It doesn't pay the bills.
I stay in the profession.
I know I'm making a difference.
If I didn't see I'm making a difference,
        I'd probably get out quicker.
I still got things that I would like to do,
        that I want to see happen.
Being gay has helped me a lot in some areas.
I do have to see a different perspective than a lot of people do.
It helps me see in different light,
        know different questions to ask.
My students get used to me.
I will say this, some students just can't get used to it,
        I think that's fine.
I'll be your first gay teacher.
Sometimes I'm the first male teacher they've ever had.
I'm definitely the first gay teacher
        a lot of them have ever had.
Once they've had me,
        they start wondering about others,
        bring them into different perspectives
Getting to know the students more on a personal level.
I think all the good teachers
        … it's not the content;
        it's the teacher that improves teachers
        their knowing me on a more personal level.

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It's a humanistic approach,
    which is not what our society's about right now.
Which I think is why we lose a lot of our students
    because they're not doing the personal identification that they need.
It's just providing students a safe place.
They know I'm a safe person.
I will provide them a safe place to be themselves.
And it doesn't matter who they are.
It's not just modeling,
    it's creating it in my classroom,
    making sure that I'm stopping everything that I can.
A lot of teachers never even see some of the things.
They don't notice it,
     that's what makes the difference.
GLBT educators will notice it.
Now they don't always act on that notice.
That's hard. It's a level of risk.

What is your level of risk?
Even reading a book for yourself
    as a low-risk activity is still better than nothing.
 Reading a GLBT book while at work on your way
    into and from work in the bus.
That's a fairly low risk.
Medium risk would be talking at a restaurant
    about the book you're reading, with your friends.
That will be a medium risk.
Doing a presentation,
    or having your students read the GLBT book
    and do a report on, that's a high risk.
And that also depends.
Like your low risk and my high risk and low risk are 2 different things.
My low risk right now is challenging the superintendent of the Board of Directors
     – that's a low risk for me.
Everybody's risk is different.
The youth are also going through the same risk: low, medium, high.
It's not just something that only adults do; everybody does it.
The idea is you got to keep moving up a little more risk.
Educators, unfortunately,
    have a tendency also to go back down below this risk.
The idea is not to make it cyclic because cyclic really,
    I think, does hurt the individuals.

As educators,
> there's a certain level that we expect
> as a minimum requirement.

Even if you hate GLBT issues,
> there are a certain minimum levels
> as an educator you're required to do,
> because of our policies.

That's hard to distinguish for some teachers,
> because when it becomes discrimination, that's non-negotiable.

And understanding –
> having the difficult conversation of what is active and occurring;
> not the fluff, not everything else, but what actually is occurring.

It's also learning how to have those difficult conversations,
> with anybody, be it a student, a parent, or administrator.

Just having a difficult conversation, most people aren't willing to do, anyway.

It's skill-building.

Faith.

It will change one mind, at least, and
> whether or not that risk is worth that one mind, that one student.

For me,
> if you're not changing it for everybody else;
> you might be changing it for yourself,
> but you're not changing it for everybody else in the future and in the past.

But do you really need to change if you're an introvert?

I'm saying, no.

What you need to do is learn to use the skills,
> so that you can make change in your own way.

I do remember, when I first started teaching, we had silent reading
> in my own bookcase in my room,
> I took our school statistics
> – I'm a Math person, remember –
> so I made sure that 10% of the books were on gay and lesbians,
> 12% are on Hispanic, Latinos/as books
> 4% African-American books
> it matched our community.

So if a parent ever complained,
> "Why does he have these gay and lesbian books on his shelf,"
> "Well it matches our community and here are the statistics."

That's part of the hoops I jumped through when I was first starting out teaching.

I was trying to be the best teacher,

but I always had documentation to back myself up,
professional support,
to make sure that if anybody complained,
I could defend myself.

The hardest case scenario,
I would say,
is a teacher who was walking the fence.
A teacher who would not say that he was gay,
but also would not say that he was straight.
"Well, I don't need to tell the students who I am, or what I am, or anything."
But the fact that he wouldn't say yes or no to either got him a lot more harassment.
If he would have said "yes", things would have died down,
he would have been fine.
He would have said "no", things would have blown over even quicker.
But he chose to walk the fence.
Walking on top of the picket fence is never advised.
He stuck in it for about two years and left,
I tried to get them to understand,
either go one way or the other,
or you don't mention it all.
You stay in the closet or you can come out and,
probably, things wouldn't be very bad.
But he chose to do it that way.
I think he unintentionally made it harder for himself.
I saw more personal damage done to that young man
than I have seen in a long time.
Self-inflicted… because if the damage is self-inflicted,
I think that's the worst kind of damage.
If it's a silent discrimination,
harassment,
intimidation, all that,
that's external.
There's not much you can do about it.
You can try.
But the self-hatred is devastating to observe.

You fight the good fight, but the change may be slow.
If you look women's suffrage;
it's been over a hundred years with women's suffrage;
we're still not there.
We're still not there and it may take several hundred years.

And when you look at it from a timeframe,
        we're making pretty good progress.
The range of change is still wonderful.
Even though everybody wants it now,
        the rate of change as a Math teacher would put it
        moving on a much faster clip than all the other issues are.

Privilege,
        plus power
        used positively
        will help change the world.
Our public schools have got to be dealing
        with the privileged,
        with power.
Unfortunately, a lot of our public schools still use the isms.
Unless we're combating all the isms at once;
        one ism is not going to suffice combating it.
You got to be multi-prong fork.
Into all the isms all at once because if you're just doing racism,
        you're not going to be successful.
You're just doing heterosexism
        you're not going to be successful.
It's much easier to change the system you're a part of,
        than to be an outsider trying to change.
 Lot of people don't believe that; they say,
        "If you have more people working on the subject, you got to be doing better."
And I go, "No, not necessarily."
It's easier for me as a GLBT teacher to work within my school community,
        my school district,
        to create policies and change
        than it is for an outside organization to make recommendations.
I'm a great systems analyst;
        I can see issues.
I may not always know how to solve them, but I see the issues.
I don't ask anybody what do I want to do.
What needs to be done?
I find what I want to do and then do it.
But that is unfortunate.
We have people coming up always wanting to know.
"What do you want me to do? I'll do it."
That's not what I can do. I need you to think of the jobs by yourself.
I have no way of teaching how to do that

because everybody is so different.
Gandhi – how he would make the bridge,
        being an introvert, would be a lot different
        from the way I would build the through the bridge being an extrovert.
And I think that is some of the issues that we got to figure out,
        how do you create agents of change, no matter who they are?
I think, even with teachers, no matter what level of risk you're at,
        you have to be familiar with your own stopping point for your own self-
preservation.
They used to say a teacher
        an GLBT teacher –
        is returning to the scene of the crime,
        where they were hurt.
For me, going to work every day is returning to the scene of a crime against me.
And that's very powerful.
To change the better for society because
        we are not only reliving the crime,
        we are now involved with the crime.
We are trying to solve the crime;
        we are trying to alter the outcomes of that crime.
We're going to stop the crime before it hurts.

        Carissa

        Carissa is white female lesbian in her late forties, who began her teaching career

married to a man, but within 3 years identified as a lesbian and was subsequently fired

from her high school English position. She was teaching in an area of Colorado that is

known for its conservative, religious roots. Carissa is incredibly reflective about her

experiences that led up to her dismissal and has found a way to reconcile with this very

painful experience. Her passion for teaching has never wavered. She found another

venue for her skills as a college instructor. Her story is our worst nightmare. However

from her story all that emits is strength and hope.

It Was That Fricking Sticker

Well, the story probably begins when I started teaching,

I was married to a man.
I had all the privileges of being a married person.
I could talk about married life.
But I didn't really ever talk that much about my personal life
      because when I first started teaching,
      I had a long term subbing position for a woman.
The kids would tell me,
      …she would just sit around
      …and talk about herself
      …they never learned anything.
I learned early on that just wasn't appropriate.
Kids were always asking me stuff about my life,
      but I never really talked about it.
But then early on in my teaching career,
      I decided to leave my husband
      …because I liked girls.
I loved my husband. He's wonderful.
He's still my best friend; one of my very best friends.

I got hired on at Wilson High School.
A lesbian friend of mine, her partner worked there.
They worked very hard there;
      ...they put a good word in for me.
I went up there and lucked into this job.
It was the easiest process in the world.
I loved that job. I just loved it
I loved that drive up the hill every day,
      up through the canyon.
I was going to retire from there.
I had a great assignment because
      taught sophomore honors,
      some junior classes and some senior electives, which was fun.
This is my calling.
I mean it was so energizing.
It was like this is what I was born to do
      …teach.
One of the assistant principals was exceptional,
      was incredibly supportive and very bright.
I learned so much from her.
Improved in my teaching under her and I felt like,
      "Well I'm on my way. This is great.
      You know I'm going to have one more year in my probationary period."

The third year a whole new administration came in,
        principal and two vice-principals, all new.
We lost everyone.
One of the vice-principals was a former teacher at the school.
She was really quite staid and proper
        her ways of thinking about things.
She was just not very creative.
She looked like a classic school teacher.
It turned out to be the worse than that.
The principal was like a squeaky clean Christian man,
        …that you know is just a letch at heart.
I really tried to kiss some ass.
I would just do anything.
I had always gotten good evaluations;
        for 2 years I had really good evaluations.
I was never out.
But I was out to some of my colleagues mostly the last year.
I really shouldn't have had my girlfriend pick me up for lunch,
        so we could go make out.
I should not have done that and then come back to school.
I think what happened was that people would see me getting in a car
        drive off with a chick,
        then coming back not too long after that.
I tried not to be disheveled but…

I never talked about my life.
I think that the kids just started noticing that I was a lesbian.
It was that first year that the new administration;
        it was after Christmas break that year.
I came back to school,
        worked out in one of the portables out back.
Written all over the window and the walls were
        "Carpet muncher," those types of epithets.
My friend Stacy, who was the one who put the word in for me,
        who was also lesbian,
        she was out there helping me clean it up.
I was just pretty shaken up.
Because I never talked about my life.
I don't know if administration knew.
I never brought it up.
We just took care of it.
I don't know who saw it.

Lots of the teachers probably should have seen it because
        I saw it when I went to the faculty meeting
I kept trying to think, "Who would do this?"
Kept thinking about the kids I'd had before.

The first semester, I had gotten great evaluations.
Everything was wonderful,
        …fine…no problem.
Then the vice-principal came in,
        gave me an evaluation.
It was the second evaluation of the second semester.
There were not only "needs improvements" on that
        but there were "unsatisfactory."
I was just like,
        "What the fuck? I mean the three evaluations I had gotten from you before were
        glowing"
We always had a great relationship,
        …I thought
I mean I can be a pill, but I was never a pill to her.
I was so pissed off.
I walked into her office and I threw the evaluations at her
        said, "What are you doing to my career?
        What are you doing? What is this?"
I was mad.
I was hot.
And she was like, "It's just an evaluation."
She just did all that little nonsense stupid speak.
I was just like, "Okay, I'm sunk. I'm just sunk."
I just didn't know what the hell was happening.

They had to inform everybody by April 17th
        whether they were going to renew your contract or not.
We had a snow day that day.
Generally, we have a snow chain,
        the principal called me.
…. the principal, Mr. Letch
 …he called me and said, "There's no school today."
The chain had already gone around,
        I knew there was no school.
We went back to school the next day.
Those of us who were being called,
        …and there were a bunch of people who were not renewed.

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We all just had the little pink slip of paper,
        "See me after class."
They don't have to give you a reason when you're probationary.
They do not have to give you any reason whatsoever.
Just, "You are not re-hired."
That day that I was called into the meeting,
        the culling meeting.
I met another gal who was very…active.
I was "out" to her
Denise and I walked into the meeting and he said,
        "Well, Denise can stay but it won't go well for you."
And I said, "Well, I'm kind of getting the feeling that it's not going to go well for me anyway"
I also now realize they're probably just going to tell me to go home right now.
One bad evaluation,
        over 3 years.

It's unimaginable.
I was so pissed.
"How can you people live with yourselves?
How can you do that?"
I'm thinking,
        "What am I going to do? Why? Why are they doing this?"
I had to live out the rest of the year.
I'm just going, "What? Why? Why?"
I mean it was all just very, very strange
        school gets out.
"What the hell am I going to do?
But I did apply to a few schools
        …Adams was one of them.
Showed the department chair my resume,
        "I am exhausted reading this resume"
And she said, "I'll talk to the principal."
She called me back and said, "Well, I talked to the principal and he said that we can't hire you."
I just was shocked because she was totally ready.
"Let me go talk to the principal." "No, he made a phone call to your school
        and said that we will not be hiring you."
I was just like, "What am I going to do?"
When I went a couple of places and had that same experience I was just like, "What
        is going on?"
I'm not going to be able to teach anymore.

They've killed my career as a teacher.
I don't know what the hell to do.
I don't know what a person does in a situation like that.
I don't think I handled my career very well anyway.
I didn't know what to do because
        I couldn't figure out why the hell I'd gotten fired.
I was depressed,
        What do you tell your mom?
She said, "Well I think they fired…I think you weren't rehired… because you're too vocal."

I drove my little truck.
It had a rainbow.
Some friends of mine were trying to do stickers,
        so I went ahead and in support
        put one of their rainbow stickers on my car.
I pulled up and the principal was standing,
        out at bus duty,
        he got a really funny look on his face when I pulled up.
And I was like, "What's up?"
I'm not thinking about a sticker.
I went away, but you know,
        2 years later I realized
        that day it was that fricking sticker.
Because then came the evaluation.
Then came getting called.
I saw it.
I remember the look on his face.
I mean it was just like a revelation one day
        …that event came back to mind and
        I went, "You're so fucking stupid."
It was because I was gay.
It was because he knew then, for sure, that all the rumors were true.
I mean that year was just really strange in all ways.
        …so I don't really know
        …I still don't know
        …I can't know what was going on in other people's minds
        …nobody knows what happened.
Nobody knows.
The only reason they gave me,
        they thought they could find somebody with better experience
Then the teacher from Adams says,

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"I am exhausted by your resume."

I think it was because I was vulnerable.
Well, anyway, yes, it was the perfect job.
I got to teach and I loved it.
I loved waking up everyday thinking I get to go to work.
Then it happened. I just don't know
        …I was so devastated for so many years.

Keep your mouth shut.
Keep your mouth shut.
Why aren't you teaching anymore?
I couldn't answer that question for a long time,
        I was like I can't.
I probably could now.
I could do anything I want right now.
But it really wasn't until I believed my story,
        that I realized that look,
        this did happen.
And there's not another explanation, really.
It was in one of my professor's classes
        and I told the story to the class,
        very briefly,
        it doesn't take two hours to tell.
I told the story and then I could let it go.
That's what made it so I could let it go.
I didn't have to be a victim anymore.
Just…this is what happened.
I don't feel the shame.
I don't feel like I'm defending myself anymore.
I'm not a victim anymore.
This thing just happened. Okay.
That's why it ends up being a really great thing that happened,
        now I've got so much fun ahead of me,
        that kind of stuff,
        that I would never have been able to experience.
It was the shame that kept me in that other place for so long.
Now I've gotten the closure.
But no, I've never been ashamed,
        ever, ever
        of being a lesbian.
Ever.

Never been ashamed of it – just cautious about revealing it
I think it comes down to
     incredible relationships in my life.
I have friends that I've had since I was in first grade.
I've got an incredible relationship with all of my family members.
I don't need you, if you don't like me.
You don't have to like me.
I don't have anything to prove. I'm just who I am.
If that works for you, great.
You know I don't ever really think about identity,
     I think of just like it's so amalgamated
     the roles that I play in life are the things.
I like girls,
     I like teaching,
     I like my family and I love my friends too.
     I have all these pets.
I never think about myself; I never compartmentalize it.
I just can't separate it all out.
It's just who I am.
I constantly feel like I'm evolving and trying to do new things.
I kind of felt like my 20's I was just asleep, totally asleep,
     just doing it; just going through it.
I look back and that's just a totally different person.
I don't even know that person
     and I don't know whether I would have liked that person very much.
Now I look back and I don't like that person that I knew then.
It just kind of bothers me that it was me.
All of it's good.
Even when I screw up it still works out
     and I get a lesson out of it.
It changes something that I needed to change …makes it that way…Look where I get to live!

    Ava

    Ava is an eighth grade Spanish teacher. She is a white female in an interracial,

intercultural marriage that adds to her deep understanding of the role of an ally. She is

very cognizant of how powerful her voice can be in her role as ally. For example, she is

currently in her second year at a racially diverse charter school where she has pushed the

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agenda of LGBT issues because she knows the voice of one of her gay colleagues cannot

be heard. Ava has an empathetic nature and constantly asks herself "what would my 30

days be?" to walk in someone else's shoes.

Two versus Twenty-Eight

I teach ESL and Spanish.
      working with the whole population.
K-8 for ESL upper level.
Eighth-graders for Spanish.
Hamilton is interesting.
I am friends with the teachers at our school,
      that identified as gay or lesbian, or bi-
      …whatever the case may be.
And they don't tell everybody
      …you just kind of find out
      …being friends with them.
They're definitely not out in any way at school.

We had one of our more vocal eighth-graders,
      publicly come out to her class.
It was totally accepted.
There wasn't any issue
      …that anyone heard about at least.
It was really cool because it was like,
      "Wow! This is eighth-grade,"
      …talk about guts… an eighth-grader.
People just embraced her.

It still feels like in this environment,
      with everybody being so with it
      and up to date,
      progressive as a community
      …even if we're in Colorado.
What is it that we're doing that still makes people feel like,
      "Well, I'm not going to merge identities at school"?

I'm watching one teacher,

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that I'm also friends with, that is even more closed,
--talks about it even less.
Yet has still been open and comfortable with me,
but feels – I think feels—
more of a need to protect it at school.
I don't know.
I've just been like
"Wow, that really still exists,"

We do see there's a lot of education that still needs to happen.
Around racial equity issues, for one,
so it's kind of-- we're going to have some backlash,
if we try and push forward on something else,
but,
at the same time.
What we're doing now is not talking about it –
at all.
So I would say it's tough.
I see that they're making that decision.
They do see a need,
to be more who they are
but they don't; they are privately,
they aren't as much publicly.
Kids seek them out.
Come to them to talk about identity issues.

Equity Team.
Trying to move this whole impetus forward about
Equity,
Access.
We talk about race,
but we don't talk about gender issues.
Identity issues.
There's this missing piece,
everybody's afraid to talk about.
I mean I don't know what – like you said, in the school –
I don't know what my role is other than to say
"Hey! I noticed we're not talking about these things.
Maybe we could start to do that here."

It's safer for me.
It's safer for me to push things,

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      …it protects
And I don't have anything to lose.
If somebody like, "Oh my gosh! There's this huge GBLT ally."
Oh, wow! Well, so what?
I'm not afraid to be that person in this society.
It's easier than being GLBT.
You have less to risk or lose, or worry about.

I want to be seen as,
      somebody that's willing to stand up and be counted for.
Supportive behaviors instead of the opposite.
…leading those conversations.
And if there are stereotypes and discriminations,
      problems within the Equity Team as things open up more,
      being willing to both
      help protect those people that are feeling that they can't come out as much
      and being a buffer.
Just not have it be two versus twenty-eight.
Have it be seen that it's not that black and white.

But there are a few people that probably aren't there yet.
In a very practical sense,
      "Well, if we're going to talk about this, why isn't this one on the table?"
And it's the same,
      whether it's this piece or the whole piece of the equity.
I really feel like we're trying to go somewhere with this.

We haven't done the in-staff
      …making sure we're all getting it.
Parents are going to come to us,
      so we're the ones that need to have it first.
But there's also this urgency,
      get it going and get it out into the parents.
So where is the space and how am I going to be creative for this to happen here?

There are a lot of families with same sex parents.
And I would feel like with the girls
      -- I coached for this running program --
      they definitely see that I treat them the same as any other set of parents,
      enjoy being with them,
      chatting with them,
      …and know I would want to be just as close to them as anyone else.

As it comes up,
    people definitely will hear where I stand on things.
How I support.
I don't think I have a ton of experience showing that I'm an ally
    …outside of some of the stuff that happened at the end of the year.

Making sure that in my class,
    there are no derogatory comments;
    being gay is not joked about.
It's just that there's respectful link that is happening around there.
Just having more conversations.
More already built-in
    …about what families look like
    …what can be a family.
That's probably the least threatening for people
    because we already have diversity in families.
We already have tons of non-traditional families.
Families in every way, shape, and form
    …so why aren't we making sure that…
Everybody knows.
That it is totally okay.
It's part of who we are.
And it's got to be okay.
If they're not okay with it,
    I don't think they really belong here
    …but maybe they do
They just need some training.

I'm really sensitive to,
    and aware of,
    it's that person's journey.
What they reveal when and what makes sense,
    it's not like you have to be like,
    "Oh, hi! I'm Ava. I'm gay,"
    everywhere you go.
It doesn't work that way.

To see other teachers.
Other school leaders including it would be a huge statement.
I don't know if our parents are ready,
    I think that's where the problem's going to be
    …not the kids as much,

but the parents.

Putting that on the table,
        making it something you can discuss safely.
And then enforcing.
Getting rid of anything that's not supportive to the conversation.
        …that's where we come in more as a team.

I think even if we just kept opening it up,
        inviting different groups of people,
        have those conversations where people could ask the questions that they have,
        express their concerns that they have,
        and we could speak to that in an open way.
I think that is the first step,
        …having the space for the conversation.

I've always been someone who's aware.
Your eyes just get opened at different levels.
It's exciting that important change
        can happen in short periods.
Sometimes I think we get
        overwhelmed,
        thinking it's going to take forever.

I think recently,
        …this is what I was telling my husband,
        …why am I coming to volunteer and do this
        is because we have an interracial
        …intercultural marriage.
Every now and then,
        you'll read something.
Fifty years ago or a hundred years ago,
        you would have been lynched for being in this marriage.

I feel like being an ally,
        …for any minority group,
        …especially because I have these close ties with friends,
        …and I know there's no difference.
You see it with your own eyes.

I was always so interested in being an ally
        …at times questioned "Am I really gay?

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Why is this important to me?
Why is this *so* important to me?

And I think it's just a basic human rights thing,
        to be treated well.
I see the parallel with my family,
        …some of the struggles that we're going through.
And I can also see how it's very different.
Because you can see everything about us,
        …just by looking at us.
I am definitely aware.

        Alec

Alec is a gay Hispanic male in his mid-fifties. He has been teaching high school English for over 25 years. When he was involved in editing a local gay magazine, he realized the absence of articles and resources for LGBT youth, which has spawned his passion for supporting youth. Alec has been trained by the National Education Association and has conducted workshops in the area to current and prospective teachers about issues of diversity. He spent the first portion of his teaching career "in the closet" and offers an interesting view on the decision making process one goes through when coming "out of the closet" in the teaching profession.

The Unspoken Gets To Me

I teach at Clinton High School
        up in the mountains,
        just barely into the mountains.
I've been there for 15 years.
I teach mostly junior and senior English,
        have taught year book
        and newspaper
        and every other grade level.
I've done everything, but theater in fact.
I was going to be an engineer.

I was going to go to MIT or CalTech.
I was being recruited for that,
        certainly had the test scores for it.
I graduated from Lincoln High School
        and then taught there for 10 years.
And when I graduated,
        I held together with somebody else,
        the record for SAT and ACT scores.
I had all kinds of interest from good schools.
But half way through my senior year,
        …which wasn't too late in 1977, '78 to change your mind.
But halfway through my senior year,
        I realized I do the math and science,
        but I'm not really enjoying it anymore.
All along I had been taking languages,
        Spanish and Latin for 2 years and then…
        …French for two years.
And I was taking all the English classes.
I was really having a lot of fun.
So I told my parents,
        I wanted to look at a liberal arts school instead.
And they already knew that.
They had figured it out before I had.
Somewhere in there I got something:
        a scholarship.
And my guidance counselor realized, that she didn't have a clue who I was
        and she better, you know, call me in and talk to me.
And so she told me that I should go to the out of town college night.
And she named three schools that had nothing to do with anything,
        it was just her superficial perception of what I was interested in.
One of them ended up being the one I really liked.
And I knew I wanted to stay out west.
I was very active in my church and the Catholic school sounded good.
I did not want to stay in the state,
        I knew if I didn't go somewhere I wouldn't really feel independent.
But that turned out to be a good match.
Except for the whole coming out thing.
That didn't go so, you know, that didn't happen at a Catholic school.

I mostly applied around the Denver area.
My application for Saturn was delayed,
        …my transcripts didn't arrive,

       …they wanted to interview me
       …finally in July I got the screening interview.
I actually got a contract on my birthday, which was the end of July.
I had an interview at a middle school.
It was clear they didn't want me
       …and I didn't want that job.
I went home kind of depressed and there's a phone message.
My mom said, so and so,
       they're from Lincoln High School,
       wants you to call.
I got an interview the next day.
I was hired when they finished the interview.

So it was a fluke.
I was back at my old school.
And I did not know another gay adult at that school,
       except for a lesbian gym teacher who left.
I fit right in and everything worked.
But I was not out to them.
I wasn't out, obviously not at church,
       I was still going to the church then that I had gone to as a kid.
But the first year I lived with my parents,
       that was the deal that we made.
My salary was 12,500.

But at any rate,
       we got a new principal.
He and I did not hit it off well.
I just felt like it was my tenth year and it was time to leave.
And ended up at Clinton.

Pirates of Penzance,
       came up with the idea that
       we should actually get our ears pierced and wear the gold hoop.
But you know, clip-ons, look like clip-ons
       when you're trying to look like pirates.
And so I go up to Clinton
       I have a gold hoop in my ear.
I didn't want the piercing to close up.
And from what I understand on day one of school
       the other teachers started wondering,
       I wonder if he is…

Then I quickly discovered that there were a number of out gay teachers;
    at least out in the faculty,
    some out to everybody.
Social studies teacher, there was a music director, there a math teacher.
50 staff, and 5 or 6 were gay.

So that first year I started coming out.
The actual mechanism was I have a lesbian sister.
She was singing in this gay and lesbian chorus.
I went to the concert.
There was our music teacher in the lobby at intermission.
And he said he's wondered about my earring.
    …so he said, "Alec, you aren't gay are you?"
For the first time ever,
    to another teacher I blurted out "yes"
    …faster than I could stop myself from saying it
    because I was totally closeted.

I went to a couple of like very small dark bars.
I never had a good relationship or anything.
So that winter and into the spring,
    he took me to,
    …we weren't romantically interested in each other,
    but he took me to every single bar, no closed minds.
…we just literally went everywhere.
And the other gay teachers on the faculty,
    they were sort of this little club.
And even the most closeted of them was out to other faculty.
So, that turned out,
    I would say almost a lifesaver.

Right, and then I more slowly ended up coming out to students.
Part of that being probably putting a rainbow sticker on a car.
I got set up by my straight yearbook editor,
    we hit it off right away.
And he ended up moving in before the summer was over.
I was dating somebody in the community.
He had also been thinking about education,
    and we had an opening in our computer lab.
He applied for it, he got it.
We were partners.
We were both teachers at the school.

Kids knew who we were,
    …the kids saw us come to school together,
    …we would go home together.
And it was obvious we were a couple.
Really from that point on there was no question of my orientation.
And so the only place that I was still closeted was the church.
And I even got the paying jobs through music at my very little parish.
Very little, down the hill.
And so I could be out to the other musicians,
    the pastor didn't care.
Nobody else knew because I wasn't from their neighborhood,
    so I was still Catholic, but I'm still semi-closeted there.

Well I have known since I was 5 or 6.
If I had words for it, you know.
I absolutely know when I was like 5 or 6 years old.
For example, playing doctor with the neighbor kids.
I wasn't interested in the girls, not at all.
I can remember going to the chapel,
    told us because we'd be getting our first communion at the end of the year
    that we should watch how the older kids go up to the communion.
And I can remember noticing that the sixth grade boys were tall enough to see their butts
…over
    the top of the pews you know,
    looking at the sixth grade boys and seeing,
    wow, and having no interest at all in the girls,
    …you know, that was first grade.
And then one crush after another with friends…
My parents had a copy of *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know*
    About Sex But Were Afraid to Ask.
And there's this paperback in there,
    and I know, from talking to them years later,
    that they left it there so that we would see it
    and find it,
    and read and then if we had questions.
That would be a way of us asking questions.
Well, I read the chapters on homosexuality.
And then I got words for it, those chapters were scary.
And so, it was, you know, this is pretty grim.
So there was all that you know, confusion,
    I have to hide this.
I can't say anything about it.

I did have girl friends, you know.
I was teased.
Really, girls loved straight acting gay boys.
So 3 near misses in college.

My sister and I.
And we said all right.
While we were doing dishes while mom and dad were here,
    we came out to them.
So we come out to them, and my mother looks at us,
    my sister and I both agreed that this is pretty close to a direct quote.
We remember it the same way.
My mother looked at both of us.
She was getting all teary,
    and she said,
    "Let me see if I've got this right.
You're raising your sister's children.
Your brother is a heroin addict
    and you two think we'd be unhappy with you because…"
And that was that.
They said, you know, we've always known
    from as early as we could figure these things out.
We were pretty sure.
We always wondered when you would tell us.
But you know, we just respected it,
    everything's always been fine.
My sister and I have always been welcome to bring a partner to my parents' house.
You know we didn't really have a big spoken coming out.
It just sort of evolved naturally.
She was 26 and I was 30.

And a friend of mine,
    who is a trust fund baby,
    had just bought the local gay biweekly.
 It was kind of dying, and he decided it was going to be his project
    and the editor,
    as soon as he realized someone competent was on board
    quit.
And so I took over.
It was every other weekend,
    I had to work my ass off,
    but it was still less than the time it took me to do yearbook and newspaper

it forced me to dive into Denver's GLBT community in every way.
The bi-weekly was a trashy bar rag,
      a gossip mag.
A column by the drag emperor and empress,
      a column for the leather crowd
      all of a sudden, we're like… we could be doing cover stories that are heavy duty.
That was sort of when I started getting more political
      more, "Wait a minute, yes, we did change the world…"
And I'm not going say naively I feel idealistic,
      but yeah, there are things I could be doing.
Then I started thinking in terms of,
      "Well, why am I not doing more at school?
      Why am I not looking for more of these kinds of opportunities?"

One of the things that we do in trainings is to say,
      "What are all the non-official, the hidden curriculum things that tell your kids that
      this is the one thing that you're not allowed to talk about?"
You can only buy prom tickets as a couple in a lot of schools.
A lot of those kinds of things,
      where this is the one thing we don't talk about,
      so it must be really horrible
      because we talk about all these other diversity things
      we're letting you know by what we include
      that this is the one that is still not acceptable.
You can't give that message.
This year we did some stuff at no name-calling week,
      then we did the Day of Silence;
      we had this small core group of 6 or 8 kids that come every week.
So, I figure okay, we need materials for …
      I'll make enough for 30 or 36 kids to participate.
And we ran out in no time.
We had to go Xerox more little cards for them to hand out.
And we made pink triangles and said,
      "If you just want to express your support, stop by the table and grab a pink
      triangle and we'll just pin one on you."
But we had buttons for the kids who were actually taking the Vow of Silence.
We ran out of buttons,
      we ran out of pink triangles,
      we ran out of cards.
We don't even really know how many of them participated;
      but it turned out to be a big deal.
So, we had the interim principal this year, he was very supportive.

Found a program called No Place for Hate.
Went online, talked to my GSA,
      "Look at this program, you have to do three projects in the course of a year;
      you have to declare at the start of the year,
      that you are going to become a No Place for Hate School."
We're already doing some of these things
      and you make it public that you are doing them as part of your being a school that
      is No Place for Hate.
At the end of the year, you get a big banner to hang up in the main hall,
      suddenly, now, the GSA is starting to become kind of main stream.
So I'm really excited by that.

I'm pretty sure that every now and then,
      when a kid disappears from my class list,
      that it wasn't a schedule conflict.
It was a kid who absolutely,
      "I just can't believe he's gay; I can't do this."
And that's not a legitimate reason for changing classes,
      but I have a feeling it happens.
The most obvious case was I had a kid
      that was hateful,
      he was just obnoxious, nasty, and he was flunking.
The assistant principal told me at the very end of the day,
      "So-and-so's dad called me, he wants to have a conference tomorrow."
We get to the meeting,
      the dad is saying all this stuff.
 I'm showing them, "Here are the things that he didn't do well on,
      here's why he didn't do well, when I do this kind of assignment,
      and he has to complete it in class, he always does okay with it."
 Just that kind of conversation.
And at one point the dad said,
      "If the school board knew what was going on in your classroom,
      then there would be Hell to pay."
And blah, blah, blah.
And you know, all of this …
       just chalking up to this guy's just completely irrational…
After the meeting the assistant principal said,
      let me tell you what's really going on.
The dad wants the son out of your class,
      not because he's failing,
      but because you're gay.

And he insisted that's why his son is failing
	because he shouldn't have to learn from a gay teacher.
If I had realized that was what he meant,
	I would have just told him flat out,
	"Ten years ago the school board voted 5- zero to protect teachers and students
	from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation."
Go ahead.
Tell them I'm gay, and guess what?
They know.
I do workshops for them.
It's not a secret.
Go ahead and tell the school board.
Okay, our meeting is over.
This isn't about what's going on in my classroom.
This is about you.
You take it up with the school board.
Of course that would have gone nowhere,
	and it would have been over.
And so I said, "From now on, Richard
you have my permission not to protect me from this"
When we have new administrators,
	I'll find a chance at the start of the year
	to just make sure that he understands that,
	I don't need to be shielded or protected.
I don't have any problem with having those kinds of conversations.

Being the editor of that magazine made me work.
Any time something would cross my desk,
	from them it absolutely went into the magazine.
The Gay and Lesbian Fund for Colorado,
	the Gill Foundation,
	the Center,
	the Rainbow Alley and Youth Support stuff.
 And if I couldn't find a way to put it into the news section,
	then I worked it into my column just to make sure.
I knew kids were picking this up, leafing through it.
And the gay magazines at the time,
	wasn't really appropriate for high school kids.
You know, they're looking at all the bar ads, and the bar scene,
	and there's nothing in there that's more positive for them.
Nor would it be appropriate for a magazine,
	that was given away free in bars,

to have a youth section.
There's not always a lot of support that is age appropriate
and developmentally appropriate.
So I just started seeing that there is a big need there.
And, of course,
I keep running into my students all the time.
And I went to TJ's onetime years ago,
the flashlight went from my ID to my face
"Mr. C."
But, I always try to get at least a little bit of a conversation;
even if it's kind of eerie.
"So what was it like to be at Clinton, or Lincoln?
And what do you wish was different?"
Try to get a little sense of that,
try to communicate that back to administrators.

Obviously you don't come out in an interview,
but absolutely I would not be back in the closet.
With 25 years under my belt, four more years and I could retire.
Just the idea that when you are in the closet,
you are always second guessing what you are saying.
Always having to think really hard about how you should word something,
what you should say.
First of all, you've got to feel secure in your job.
This is PFLAG's message,
the same thing you tell to a kid in GSA.
"Don't come out to your parents if you're going to get kicked out of the house.
And you make a decision. Is Dad paying for four years of college important
enough that I'm going to stay quiet to my dad and just suffer for four years with
that relationship to still be able to go to college and be able to do these things, and
then finally be independent and on my own? Or is it so acute that I just have to
throw off the family and strike out on my own?"
And I've had both extremes.
Yeah. And it is.
This is your job,
this is your career,
this is your healthcare,
this is your pension;
and you can't throw it away.
So, you have to feel secure in what you're doing.
But again, if it's so painful to be closeted,
that it gets in the way of developing that career anyway,

then you've got some heavy thinking to do.
So I know, I feel protected.

For example, with the No Name Calling,
  we get three parents calls,
  excusing their students for the day,
  so that they didn't have to hear all that gay propaganda.
And one parent demanded a conference with the principal.
Our interim principal, he said
  "You may want to protect your children from having to hear about this, and to
  know that some of their peers are gay or lesbian. But my job is to prepare your
  kid to live and succeed in this world. And that does not mean protecting them
  from hearing things like this, and from learning how to sit in the next desk with
  someone that they can't agree with and don't like; but still both be able to learn.
  And not just your kid learns, but that other kid has a right to learn and sit in that
  classroom, and be treated the same way by the teachers."
So he handled that really well.

The year that I had that issue with a parent,
  Dave and I got in the car after school.
 I started,
  I had not yet put it in reverse,
  but I had taken the parking brake off,
  which let it roll back a little bit;
  and we heard "pop" and a hiss.
Went out to look,
  and there were two inch concrete nails in my tires,
  that had clearly been propped up against it.
And I'm cussing and swearing,
  changing the tire,
  taking it in to be fixed.
I realized, I just knew that kid.
I just know that he believed that he had permission to do that.
It was clear that he could not challenge me in class,
  but it was always clear that the father had given him permission,
  but only secretly.
And I don't know it's just strong hunch.
So that unspoken gets me.

When we had 25 kids at one of our meetings,
  we took a poll and said,
  "How many of you have heard something like this in one of your classrooms?

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How many of you have heard it and the teacher said nothing?"
Every single hand went up.
"How many of you have heard a teacher say something derogatory about being gay?"
And every hand went up.
To can see every hand going up because a teacher has said something derogatory is just astounding.

Darcy

Darcy is a lesbian white female in her mid-thirties. She has been a middle school teacher

in a charter school for about 7 years. She recently had a child and her partner also works

at the same school. She makes sure to include the component of choice when discussing

sexual orientation with students. It was this very point of choice that motivated her to

participate in my study to ensure that the perspective was shared. Another component

that emerged during the interview, was how powerful the role of community can be when

offering support to lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers. Something which she strives to

work with her students and model for them is resiliency. This idea gave me a lot to

ponder and later emerged in the data analysis step of this study.

I Chose It

I'm one of those people who I think was born to be a teacher
I know that that has the potential to sound slightly arrogant
            but
I used to line my stuffed animals up and teach them
            beg my teachers for photocopied handouts that I could use at home.
My mom really encouraged me
I grew up in Maine
            she really encouraged me to go to the college there to get my teaching license
            and I was like no, I can't do what my mom says I should do.
I got a B.A. in AIDS education and sociology
            then I moved out here.
            have been out here ever since.

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That's like 13, 14 years.
Did what people do after college like worked in coffee shops and things like that,
Be perplexed.
Then finally decided that I should go back to school and get my license to teach
I think after college it's such a…
I don't know if you experienced this but it was really
…it was topsy turvy for me.
You leave this sort of idyllic world of all these 18 to 22 year olds who share your
ideology and then
…you struggle.
    You struggle to find your community again.
    You struggle to find work that's meaningful.
    You're kind of in that limbo stage where you don't really have a lot of experience.
For me, I lost a lot of pretense.
I lost a lot of arrogance.
And I was like, "Oh, she was right about a lot, not just that but she was right about a lot."
    it's humbling.
I think in the back of my mind that I just didn't want to be so done with the search of who
I wanted to be yet.
But I always sort of knew that that's what I wanted to do, you know what I mean?

This will be my eighth year of teaching.
And I've all the time taught at Ford
Come to be known as the sort of the school of last chances.
    …we have a lot of kids who have been expelled
    …or just kind of fallen out of regular public schools.
I teach primarily middle school.
Teach a few high school classes.
Ford is small enough that we can kind of do that.
    …social studies, some language arts and advisement.

Lesbian.
That's an interesting progression because
You're probably familiar with Hampshire.
I tell people often that it
    …felt like being in a same sex relationship was a prerequisite for graduation at
    Hampshire.
Sort of seeing what your options were.
And I just never…it was never really my thing.
    …then my senior year
Taking a Queer Theory classes
I met somebody in a class like that who I just was really into.

it kind of opened the door a little bit
but I would say that even then for me,
it wasn't like, "oh, now I can explore."
I mean, it was just
This one particular woman
This one particular setting
This one particular relationship.
Then I moved out here and met my current partner, Karen.
And again, not really looking for that
per se but met this person that really just seemed to fit in all the right ways.
Karen and I have been together for 13 years.
we got married in Maine, 5 summers ago.
And we just had a daughter. She'll be a year in July.

I think that my big thing
that I'm really conscious of
in terms of talking about sexual orientation is that,
For me, it absolutely was a choice.
I'm sensitive to the rhetoric in the gay community
…that it's not and it couldn't possibly be because why would we choose such an abysmal
…and I think that that's a whole host of things going on there but I think mostly it's
Internalized homophobia.
It's always been important to me
…part of the reason that I was drawn to your research
Because I think it's important to have that narrative be a part of the stories that you hear.
I think that in the field of teaching,
I think that it's especially perilous
I have to be careful how I'm saying this
…because I don't have any judgment about how people speak about how they
come to terms with their sexual orientation
But I think that it would be safer maybe to say, "Oh no. Not a choice."
but how I present myself to my kids is that I chose it.
I try to have that narrative out there for them
I think that it's sometimes even more powerful in the classroom
To maneuver that in ways that it reveals itself in different ways all the time
I've been really blessed to work in a community that's really accepting.
The 2 principals that I've worked under are both lesbian.
The first was definitely more out than the second
but regardless
It created a community and a culture at our school
that made it pretty clear that it was okay
I would say that

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even in the first week of professional development
I was out to my colleagues.
To the kids is a different story.
My partner actually works at Ford as well.
She's worked there for about 6 years
I've worked there for 8.

In terms of with the kids,
      my first year really didn't talk about it at all.
I actually had some students
…I had an A student who knew me through Karen.
I had this philosophy
      that if the kids knew that was cool
      it could happen organically but I wasn't going to use my position in the classroom
      to talk about that.
I was pretty intentional about it.
I was just a little bit green as a first-year teacher
A little bit nervous and I didn't want to alienate any of my kids.
…and I think I didn't give them enough credit is a huge piece of it.
Everyone on the staff knew that Karen was my partner.
And we were pretty,
      …I don't know if open is the right word
But if kids asked, we would always be really honest about it.
      pictures on the bulletin board
      always in each other's classrooms,
      really familiar in a way that I think gave the kids at least a heads up or a notion.

And then I think it was my third year.
It might have been my fourth year.
Karen works in this program called the Bridge Program
      serves kids that have been truant or just have really had a hard time.
She had a student who had suffered a traumatic brain injury
Had some emotional imbalance as a result of his injury.
Karen was confronting him on some behaviors one day
      he cut out
      walked out really angry at her
I walked out to my car that afternoon
      he had written with sharpie all over our car,
 "Fuck You" "Fuckin' Lezzy" and stuff like that.
The first time that I'd ever experienced a hate crime
…I went inside to my then principal weeping and she…
And she did not fuck around.

The next day she called an all-school assembly
She talked about the nature of what had happened
	…defined what a hate crime is for the kids.
In the 4 years that I had been there, I'd built some strong relationships with kids
Kids were genuinely upset about it.
That experience, was this catalyst into being,
	…much more out and much more visible.
I just remember for 2 days after that,
Basically all of my classes were just teaching around my identity,
	being really explicit about it.
	with the middle schoolers really opening it up for questions.
They were so happy because then they could talk about it.
What I kind of realized was that they were being
	…silenced is too strong of a word but
They were made to feel uncomfortable
They weren't sure exactly what the protocol was with me
Whether I was okay with them asking me questions.
	my lack of explicitness, I think,
	made them sort of tip toe around it a little bit.
	some of them would drop hints.
"What are you and Karen doing for Christmas?"
Things like that to sort of allow me to note they were a safe person.
But I think that I realized that I needed to be their safe person
	maybe even more than I needed them to be.
That really kind of opened the door, and there was lots of open dialogue.

And this past year being pregnant…
I told the kids I was pregnant a year ago January
I just was really honest about it
	…told them that we had had a donor
Then just opened it up for questions
I think that that had pushed a level of outness too as well.
I think there are certain things that it's pretty important to not be very didactic about.
	to let things get processed in a more organic fashion.
	as a middle school teacher
	that's not philosophically overall where I'm
I think there's lots of things in my classroom that are really straightforward
	really transparent and pretty didactic.
But I think that issues of identity or that kind of stuff
	is a little bit more fuzzy
	and should be and is okay.
It's a fine balance between creating space in your classroom

where kids can ask really honest questions
You can have a really honest dialogue with them about how you come to certain aspects
        of your identity.
Then also maintaining, norms around what's appropriate and what's comfortable for
        people.
It gets kind of tricky sometimes to talk about
The kids have a notion of sexual identity
That's supercharged with the sexual piece
They're really at that developmental stage
        but I'm super conscious of it as a teacher in the classroom
Without a lesson of this kind of charged sexual atmosphere around sexual orientation.
I have a lot of young girls who identify as bi-sexual
I feel like pretty strongly that it's their notion of what turns a guy on.
I'm super conscious of trying to keep that balance
        of appropriate classroom conversation
        with honesty about who I am.
        when I talk about choice
I always start the conversation by saying that
I feel like people come to their sexual orientation in a multitude of ways,
        …that some people really feel like from such a young age they just had this set of
        attractions
        …that for some people, it's more about exploring different people
Not really looking at their gender or their sex per se.
I try to present to them a myriad of different options
I think that they all know somebody
        or some of them are even going through it themselves.
They can see that it doesn't have to just be one way.
I ask them a lot of questions
        "Why it would be scary for somebody to come to terms with the fact that maybe
        they're gay"
Have that be the bridge into conversations
        about discrimination or different treatment of people who are gay.
Then talk about my own path
Use it as an example, of how things are changing.

I realize that there are real issues that people contend with in public school.
I'm not trying to be dismissive of that.
But I think we,
        as teachers,
We let ourselves get so isolated and divided
We forget that we have voice
        that we're powerful and that we need to unify

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around philosophies or around just taking our classrooms back
having voice in the curriculum that we use in our classrooms
I think with all our best intentions to really create school cultures
that accept those kids and protect those kids
and dialogue about that stuff in their classroom and have safe schools,
I think we paint this bleak portrait of what it's like to be a queer kid.
And I think that's unfortunate
I think, especially challenging if you're in an environment
…where you don't feel safe but you know you have kids grappling with stuff
You want to be a safe person for them.
I think that we may be the first generation that's kind of more out,
…teachers in the classroom and how we manage that
I think initially
not really having trepidation.
Revealing those personal parts of myself.
But then I think,
a little bit of trepidation is healthy regardless of how you identify.
I'm not all that interested in straight folks who
right off the bat tell you about marriage,
personal life, and relationships,
I guess family is something a little bit different.
But you know professionally,
…I think there's certain steps that you take before you leap into that stuff.
People who use their personal narrative so much
I'm a little bit wary of that.
But, having said that, I feel like there could be far less trepidation.
…my parents knowing and being supportive in addition to their kids.
I think those would be best case scenario things.

Worst case scenario
if I did shift to some public school,
Having a homophobic colleagues.
Because I think allies are really important.
I actually think that allies are meant to do the work,
…sometimes more than we are.
At least in this environment,
Just like I think that men have to combat sexism more than we do.
And white folks have to fight racism more than people of color do.
allies play a really important role.
To be in a school without any, or to be in a school with not very many
would be pretty nightmarish.
I would feel like I would be constantly trying to distinguish

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what was criticism of my teaching practices in the classroom
versus what's personal.
I think having an administration that that silences me, would be pretty terrible.
Allies in action, challenge and confront things when they hear and see them.
…primarily language.
Allies recognize that they have heterosexual privilege,
how that plays out, and how they teach about it,
how they make their students aware of it.
how they educate their straight brothers and sisters on how they handle
themselves
…and the language that they use.
And then how they check them.
Those are the big roles of allies I think for me.
I think it's really cool when other teachers have ambiguity
around their own personal relationships.
They push kids, "Well, so what, what if I were, what would be your issue--what would
you struggle with? "
Or they use the term partner…
In sort of solidarity with us.
that takes an incredible amount of bravery.

I suppose that I have a certain amount of insularity at my school
…around disclosure
That makes me perceive that I don't have a whole lot of risk involved.
But I think that's relatively naïve.
I think that in the larger realm
should it come out that I'm a lesbian
and I want to advance in some way in my career,
or I want to work in a different setting.
And somehow there's been talk of that preceding me,
then that's one potential area.
I think about risk in the alternative way
Which is: what is the risk for me in not disclosing?
I think what is the risk in carrying around that information
…not using it in teachable moments
or not using it to create a culture in my school that's safe for diversity
To be a voice?
That would play out as risk for me,
I think that that kind of weight is icky.
I move better when that's sort of freed up
next steps might be for me in taking risk,
I think being more of a voice

pushing my school to have some kind of curriculum.
I think the kids would really like it.
And they now wonder if there's some way
…a some class on diversity? check
So I can get some kids in there who really need the information,
But wouldn't sign up for a class that they perceived as being a class about gay history
I think being more of an ally to the other queer teachers in my school.
There's one particular teacher in my school
Visible, really out, really butch. And really vocal
        …sometimes I don't have her back as much as I could.

We have these weekly convocations at our school,
        these weekly assemblies.
Sometimes there's open mike stuff.
        there was an open mike that a group of African American boys did
        centered around making fun of Michael Jackson.
        …alluding to Michael Jackson's sexuality
Confusing pedophilia with homosexuality.
At our staff meeting that afternoon,
This teacher really vocalized her discomfort with that whole thing.
Why our principal didn't step to the microphone and shut it down.
Or redirect them in some way,
        when previous things that have happened in open mike,
        sexist things, or racist things
        she has done that.
The following week,
        as a community
We decided to tackle like what's appropriate in open mike and in a school venue.
        the context given to the student body was,
There were people that were uncomfortable by some things that happened last week
        all of the kids immediately like fingered this teacher.
        they were mumbling,
        I'm sure some hate language
And we do this thing called a fish bowl.
It's pretty free flowing.
        kids getting up there in this fish bowl
        calling her out
She got in there a few times, felt compelled to defend herself a little bit,
        felt compelled to give a little more information.
But, I was really not an active participant in that fish bowl that day.
I think I was aware in that moment.
I knew how uncomfortable she was

I knew how fucked up it was that she was being put in this position.
School has some of the best intentions.
But we put our students in positions where we expect them to have dialogue.
And we haven't constructed the boundaries around safety for that dialogue to happen.
And I think we do that all the time as adults.

It sort of came down to, "Take a fucking joke, like why can't you take a joke."
It was so hard for this teacher
        there were a lot of straight folks who got up there and were allies.
I didn't take as vocal a role.
So that's probably risks that I need to take…

The whole notion
        that I think many teachers have
That teaching
You can't personalize it.
That it's a really challenging thing for me
Not to personalize.
Partly because of the philosophy of this school
It is so relationship based, that it is really personal.
My work in my last years of teaching,
I've been teaching is to work to depersonalize some things.
I'm not here to be their friend,
        …it's not a popularity contest.
I think that that can sometimes prevent people from making moves and feeling things,
        and having some teachable moments that really need to happen.

I can't remember if I mentioned this last time that we talked.
But I've been stewing a lot over resilience.
I just feel like,
        by and large the kids I teach at Ford have very little resilience
I want to know what that's about.
I also want to know what you can actively do as a teacher
        in a classroom to teach it.
How do you teach it?

We did these personal learning plan goals around building resilience.
        we read this in class together.
The Incredibly True Diary of a Part Time Indian.
 It's about this kid named Junior who grows up in Spokane on the reservation.
        enters high school, his freshman year of high school
        on his first day of school

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He gets this geometry book.
     it's the book that his mother had.
Out of this fit of like rage and frustration and humiliation,
He throws the book, and he accidentally hits his teacher in the face with it.
     …he gets suspended and then his teacher
Who's a white man, comes to his house.
     basically says to him,
     that he and the other teachers on the reservation
     as well intentioned as they are,
Have really done nothing, but beat the Indian right out of them
If Junior wants anything different than his family,
He needs to get off the reservation and go to school.
So he does.
He goes to the all white high school that's like 20 miles away,
     where the only other Indian there is the mascot.
What's brilliant about this book is that it's also part comic strips, part text.
Junior's big ticket out,
     his big source of support for himself is that he draws constantly.
He is incredibly thoughtful and reflective.
He confronts all this stuff.
He has all these terrible things happen to him.
And he survives.
And I was talking to my kids a lot about "What is that?
     Why is it that somebody, like for example Junior's father who's had all those
     same experiences is an alcoholic and abandons the family for weeks on end?
What does Junior have that maybe his dad didn't?"
Trying to name it
And try to figure it out.
     not really knowing myself.
I don't think any of us really knows what is "that thing"
Because we would be bottling it and selling it.
     there would be text books written on it.
How do you build resilience?
Especially at such a fragile age as middle schoolers are.
Because I think if they're done in enough times in middle school,
Then they're done in for good, you know.
And I think about that with Alison
What foundations do I lay with my daughter
     that build resilience in her;
     that allow her to see hypocrisy;
     that allow her to be a really good friend
     be brave and have, have people's backs?

I think to build on what she naturally comes in with,
        …with what all kids naturally come in with;
Just that profound sense of social justice, inequity
        try to model it as much as I can for her.
Keep building that foundation.

        Returning to the scene of a crime
That's so unbelievably courageous when you look at it like that.
That's a massive resilience
I mean to be able to turn your shit into something
        where you're actually, you're putting yourself in between
        that and another person.
Coming out.
        knowing that that potentially reopens for you
        some unresolved, painful things
It's incredible.
I guess at the end of the day
        the only thing you can really hope is that,
Those kinds of challenges make us all a little bit more well-rounded
        a little bit more compassionate,
        a little bit more emphatic.

        Molly

        Molly is an outgoing, bisexual white female in her early thirties who has been a

teacher for the past 3 years in both a traditional high school and non-traditional adult

learning programs. She is the perpetual bohemian; she has explored various academic

programs, had her own digital picture book company, and even traveled abroad to teach

during her summers. Her classroom is built around flexibility, which mirrors her

definition of bisexuality. Molly is very aware of her ability to navigate in between circles

and recognizes her role as an ally too.

Out of Boxes

When I was graduating high school,
      talking with my parents about my future
      what I might possibly do for work.
My mom has always said, "Oh, I think you'd be a great teacher."
And I was always like, "No, I can't do that.
      You know I'm way too immature and all over the place."
I think after coming out of 18 years of high school,
      the thought you know of being around teachers was not an appealing one.
Particularly since so many of my teachers weren't great.
The idea was has kind of always been lingering around in my psyche.

Got a degree in humanities and French.
After college I still just wasn't really career minded at all.
I was still just thinking,
      I'm only just 21-years-old.
I want to go out and do some of everything,
      travel and live life and do lots of different things.
I was continuing on with my education,
      just outside of the classroom.
I ended up taking a job in Summit County as a live-in Nanny,
      work as a part-time snow board instructor.
Loved living up there.
Took classes through Colorado Community College,
      that were interesting to me,
      hadn't taken as an undergraduate like physics and Spanish and religion.
So I was taking a bunch of classes,
      was working a bunch of jobs.
I was live-in Nanny,
      supervisor of a bakery café,
      snow-board instructor,
      and computer lab monitor for Colorado College in Silverthorne.
Having a great time.
But after a couple of years of living in Summit County,
      I just started to think about, what else could I do with myself?
Maybe I'll get a master's in teaching.
And I'd applied at CU Boulder…
      …I got denied.
I don't know exactly why it was that I got denied.
But I did.
Then I looked into a master's in English program at Fort Collins.
I ended up dropping out on the third day.

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All of these people were like very heavy literature based,
        had really good memories for it.
They were name dropping.
They were quote dropping.
So I just had a bit of a nervous break-down.
Realized this wasn't the right fit for me, dropped out.
And then, decided I really wanted to pursue a dream that I had
        with an interactive children's book company.
I moved back to Minnesota.
Worked on that for a few years.
Got really far with that idea,
        but ultimately boiled down to people decided
        that it wasn't financially feasible at this time,
        I was using a new kind of technology with these books.
I was all over the place for a number of years.
I was like "I gotta get out of the corporate world."
And so again I turned back to this idea of getting a master's in teaching
        my boss said I should look into DU's teacher education program
So how many years did it take from when you graduated from high school, and mom said you
        should be teacher, until your first day in the classroom?
Eleven.
I was 29.
I started at Reagan August of 2006.
Now I am teaching adult ESL courses.
I teach at 2 different language schools.
I taught in China last summer.
When I got back mid-August,
        it was kind of like late in the game for trying
        to work in a high school environment.
And I didn't really know if I'd wanted to.
I was disenchanted with a whole lot of things
        working in the public school system, particularly Reagan.
I do like the adults.
Not having classroom management issues is pretty huge.

I grew up in Minnesota.
I grew up in a pretty homophobic environment.
I remember being a kid and my brother and his friends,
        everybody's talking about,
        "You're so gay. You're a fag. Oh those faggots."
You know all that stuff is huge growing up.

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And I just didn't think twice about it.
And then one of my best friends growing up,
      she was definitely bi-sexual.
We're talking eighth grade.
This woman was sexually active at an early age.
She had some of anybody and everybody.
I think that started me to get out of my homophobic one track mind.
Out of boxes.
Then in college, I had lots of friends who were gay, bi, straight, whatever.
My mind was open to all sorts of everything then,
      once I was in that environment,
      and then I'm not sure at what point exactly,
      but somewhere in my twenties,
      I told myself that I definitely had to have sex with a woman
      before I got married to a man.
And so that was always kind of in the back of my mind,
      then I ended up meeting a woman online.
She and I were connected at the hip,
      24-hours a day, 7 days a weeks for 3 or 4 months.
She treated me better than any man ever has, that's for sure.
She was super romantic.
I was showered with gifts.
After four months she was a self-fulfilling prophesy.
She was like "I know you're going to decide you like men.
      I know that you're not going to like me."
There's nothing less sexy than someone saying, "I know you don't like me.
I know that I'm not good enough for you."
Well, then you're not.
Then shortly after I dated her, I met my boyfriend.
I say once a bi-sexual, always a bi-sexual.
He's like, "Oh, people in college they just do that once and never do it again."
I'm like, "Well, even those who do it once and never do it again,
      I still would consider them bi-sexual too, so."
I encountered some of Abby's friends to be a little less tolerant.
But most of the people I hang out with right now are more tolerant.
Part of it is my personality.
I love everybody.
And I'm a spaz and blah-blah.
And people just understand that.
And I don't have a problem identifying as such.

Parents.

When I was dating Abby they actually ended up coming up for a visit.
Before they had come out here,
      when I first started dating her,
      I'd called them up.
I was like I met this awesome person who is blah-blah-blah-blah,
      was listing off characteristics,
      then I kind of ended it with
      and she's a woman.
I think it was deadpan on the other end of the phone.
They certainly weren't overjoyed,
      they were less accepting,
      more critical than I thought they would be.
It was definitely a teary, disappointing interaction that first phone call.
Just because I'm like, how could they be so close minded.
I thought they were more open minded than this.
I think their biggest concern is they didn't want me to be dealing with any conflicts.
And I did have conflicts,
      there were issues when you'd be walking out in public hand-in-hand.
And I'd have people walk by,
      be like that's disgusting.
And that's just like the worst feeling.
I just hated it.
It made me want to cry.
I still just couldn't believe like it happened in places like downtown.
I'm sure my parents probably think it was a one-time deal.
I didn't want to hide anything.
She was a very important person in my life,
      I wanted them to meet her.
And actually part of the reason I feel so head over heels in love with this woman
      is she reminded of that high school girl.
And that was me kind of like fulfilling something that had never been fulfilled with her.
      Because
      was something about her mouth,
      her laugh,
      her similarities in her personalities.

When I started Reagan, I already had my girlfriend.
And after having a girlfriend,
      I must say that my gaydar was turned up a few notches.
When you first mentioned this project,
      my brain started thinking about sexuality and teaching.
For me this larger umbrella opens up,

of just the idea of how our sexual repressiveness as a society affects everything.
I mean everything.
And it's not just the sexual repression in talking about spiritual matters and drugs and age.
And you know everything that we just don't talk about.
Right there's so many things that we just don't still talk about and understand
       and absolutely that affects the classroom.
And who we are as teachers.

Curriculum.
Students' development in their learning and everything else,
       What does it mean to be a bi-sexual educator?
Well it means that sexuality is a bit more on the forefront of my brain,
       than it is someone who is just falling into the mainstream.
Because it's just something that I thought more about.
So I am more cognizant of sexual matters.
When it comes to social constructions of sexuality,
       within the classroom,
       within texts that I am…
Social constructions in general is something that I'm always trying to bring to my students'
       attention,
       whether it be it the freshman at Reagan High School
       or the students I have now.
Sexuality is something I'm probably a little bit more focused on
       than someone who's straight and doesn't think about it.
I think it just means,
       being a bi-sexual educator,
       little more awareness and attention to sexuality
       than the average
I can more navigate in and out of circles easily.
If you've got an outwardly gay teacher within a school system
       who's trying to do some kind of advocacy
       or after school group
       and maybe receiving some flak for that.
I can covertly step into any conversation
       where negative comments are being made
       and speak from an open minded point of view
       without a closed minded straight person
       knowing exactly what I'm doing.
Because they don't know.

Brian

Brian is a native Coloradoan, gay white male, in his mid-thirties who has taught both middle and high school math for 8 years. Although introverted upon first meeting, it is clear from his conversations about the classroom that he has a passion for bad jokes and humor to engage his students. He is partnered with another teacher, with whom he is going through the adoption process. One of the internal struggles he expressed in the interview series was around the adoption and utilization of the daycare center on his high school's campus.

Kid or Not

I grow up in suburban Colorado.
I went to Lincoln High School,
        then I went to college in Boulder,
        and I've been teaching for 8 years.
When I got to college,
        I was majoring in chemistry.
I thought I wanted to be a science teacher,
        …then I didn't like chemistry,
        so I got my math degree.
Through college,
        taking the pre-med track,
        keeping that option open.
I took anatomy.
Worked on cadavers,
        and after a couple of weeks…
        …changed to pass/fail.
I couldn't do it.
That really solidified things.
I did education courses as my electives.
So I finished in 4 years,
        and then student taught.
It just kind of all worked together.

My parents.
…I did really well in high school;
       they wanted me to be an engineer,
       or a doctor.
Now they love that I'm a teacher.
…my mom now works in the school.
She really has a new understanding of what goes on.

I identify as gay.
…ever since I was in middle school,
       since I've started having any sort of feelings,
       drawing out that kind of stuff,
       but grew up in a very religious home.
I've had a lot of fear of coming to terms.
Denied it,
       but it just got stronger and stronger as I grew up.
I had a first relationship when I was 17,
       and then still was fighting it.
When I went to college,
       I realized that it's not just a bad or scary thing that I should be afraid of.
My freshman year in college,
       I came out.
That was very difficult for my parents.
They would try and persuade me to do therapy.
I was then very confident,
       that I was fine.
Didn't have these guilty feelings,
       and came to terms with my spirituality and sexuality.

Seven years ago,
       I met my partner.
After we were together about a year,
       I said to my family,
       Mark does not get to come,
       and if it were one of my brothers had a girlfriend,
       they would be invited.
It was Mother's Day.
My mom and I are really close,
       and I said,
       "I can't come, if Mark can't come".
After that, everything changed.
They really got to know him.

He's part of the family.
So, everything has completely turned around with my family.

When I was getting my license,
 so much about it was about helping kids,
 creating a safe place for students,
 who may be gay or dealing with that,
 … how to deal with kids calling each other names.
It was a very accepting place.
I had a lot of gay teachers in the school of education.
They would talk…
 not a lot – a couple…
 they would talk about it,
 … that wasn't of concern,
 … going into teaching
I don't recall that it was bothering me.
I think I was more worried just about doing a good job,
 that's why I taught middle school at first.
I graduated at 22.
I looked young,
 didn't know that I would be ready to work with high school kids.
I didn't feel there was a big-enough age difference at that time,
 that's why I did middle school for 5 years.

In middle school,
 I had more encounters negatively with kids.
It was usually a kid,
 who I didn't even have in class who'd say,
 "Mr. M's gay or something like that."
Then I would have to go and sit with him and the counselor.
In high school,
 I've never dealt with any of that.

Well, everyone knows,
 in terms of who I work with,
 … my principal,
 …all the teachers who know me.
But the kids don't know,
 I balance that.
I'm in an office with four other teachers.
I don't talk about it when there are kids in our office.
Sometimes,

actually,
      some of my office mates might say,
      "Are you guys doing this or this weekend or something?"
They'll talk about me.
That's kind of weird if there are kids in the office.

When it comes up in class,
      kids will just ask if I'm married.
That's what's kind of weird to me.
You know,
      you can't teach unless you build relationships with the kids,
      you build relationships with the kids,
      by talking about yourself,
      asking about them.
And so,
      that's frustrating.
I have to pretend that this part in my life doesn't exist.
If kids ask me about it,
      I just kind of ignore it.
I don't say, you know,
      "My personal life is none of your business."
Most kids in high school,
      they just don't ask.

I'm not comfortable telling kids,
      …because they're going to react differently.
Part of it is also that,
      my ultimate job is to teach them.
Some kids are going to be fine with it.
Some kids may have a real problem with it.
That affects my purpose for being with them in the first place,
      if it's going to make them uncomfortable.
It doesn't mean that it's not also necessary.

I'm getting nervous.
In November, we started pursuing open adoption.
I don't know what I'm going to do.
As much I don't like to pretend Mark doesn't exist, I can't.
They're going to be really, number one.
It's not something I can pretend,
      …that they don't exist.
I'll be seeing the little kid.

I'll be taking time off.
I don't know how that will turn out.
I don't know what I'll say,
       I'm not going to say,
       I'm just by myself adopting.
They're going to want to know,
       especially in my AVID class.
Especially if it happens,
       this year,
       and I leave for 6 weeks while they're seniors.

Day care is at my school.
I've called them to see how it works,
       said we're adopting,
       and so we don't know when it happens,
       but once it happens
       six weeks later we will need to plan somewhere to go.
She's like,
       "Oh, well, you know, you and your wife can just come in and visit,"
       and I'm just like, "Okay."
Then something else happened.
I need to talk to them,
       and she said the same thing again.
I said, "I didn't say, I don't have a wife".
My partner and I blah, blah, blah"
       and I think that kind of got it across.

In terms of how to make it better,
       it just seems like more time is needed.
Things are so much better since I started teaching.
I don't hear the kids in the halls using homophobic comments,
       …maybe now and then,
       but I don't know that I did once this year.
There's a long way to go,
       but society is moving forward with this,
       … there's more gay people on TV,
       … there is marriage in California.
In middle school, I heard much more.
That was one of the first things I noticed.
I think that's the maturity piece.

A good friend of mine,

she's gay,
and she doesn't talk about it.
She says the same kind of things happen,
we just kind of brush it off when kids ask questions;
it's almost like you're ignoring them.
What's tough is other teachers can talk about their husband,
and their wife,
and their kids,
and what they did on their weekend,
and what they did in the summer,
and tell funny stories about their families,
and some good things.
I have to pretend mine doesn't exist.
That's frustrating.
It's not fair.
It bothered me when kids,
told the whole class Mr. M's gay.
Then I heard about it.
I didn't know what to do,
and it freaked me out really bad.
I was brand new.
I had just finished student teaching,
I went and told the principal.
I don't know what I should do,
…how I was going to handle this.
They just suspended the kid for several days,
which told the kid you can't really do that.
I don't know if that's the best way to handle it.
At the time I was like,
"whew!"
At least I know I'm not in trouble.
Later, when I was at Taft,
the counselor talked to him.
Just handled it in a much different way.
Rather than just suspending the kid,
she talked to them about why did you say this.
He said,
"It makes me afraid.
What if he would like me."
Then she said,
"Well, you know,
I'm a straight woman,

and you're not afraid that I'm going to like you."
She turned it into a teaching point.
Then three of us,
  and I never had to confirm what he said about me,
  "You know, Mr. M's a nice teacher,
  and you made this kind of comments about him,
  you know, that you don't know, actually, of what you said."
Helped him think it through rather than just,
  "You can't say that to a teacher; you're out,"

I've read about.
About gay teachers.
Some teachers were like,
  "I don't think that I could really do my job,
  because I wasn't out. That's who I am."
The things that they were saying,
  I completely agreed with,
  but I just can't do it yet.
And maybe someday I will.
There may be kids who,
  … it would be easier if they knew that there's a gay teacher.
I know that there's a club,
  but that's not very private.
I don't know what goes on in the club.
I'm sure they talk about confidentiality,
  but they are teenagers.

The ideal situation is bigger than the school.
I don't know that there are things that we could do,
  at my school,
  to make it a completely "okay" place for me to be "out,"
  just within the building.
It's a community.
We have kids from all over.
Parents who,
  I'm sure some would be supportive,
  but some definitely would not.
In an ideal situation,
  society would have moved forward.
It would be okay to be myself there.
I wouldn't have to talk about it all the time,
  but I could not pretend that I'm single.

Not pretend that I don't have someone.
I mean ideally it would just be like any other thing,
        just like I'm male,
        and I'm white
        …that's what an ideal situation would be,
        ... that it's not something so different.

Except the only thing that this had made me think about,
        there are kids who are probably struggling with things.
They could use a teacher that they could talk to;
        …that they could see a happy, successful gay person.
What message does it send,
        if everybody can tell,
        and you hide it?
Then it's something you should be ashamed;
        it's something you should hide.
That's not the message that we want to send to kids,
        or anybody.
Because I'm not ashamed.
I don't really want to hide it, but I do.
So, why is that?
I mean does it send the message that really it's not okay?
Do kids sit there and think, you know,
        "If it was okay then they would just say, 'yes, and I'm in a relationship.
        I have been for many years and it's great.'"
But you don't do that, you know.

The worst situation would be,
        if I were to come "out,"
        and have it completely ruin my relationship with kids.
I'm already "out" to teachers and its fine.
And teachers,
        who do have a problem with it,
        might say things behind my back.
I could really care less.
But if it made it so that kids no longer trusted me,
        or liked me,
        or didn't want to get help from me,
        if I made them uncomfortable,
        that would be not okay.
They should feel comfortable at school.
If a gay teacher makes them feel uncomfortable,

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right or wrong,
        that's not what we're supposed to be doing.
Maybe that's why I don't come "out" too.
I don't know.

And that's the biggest thing,
        in my opinion.
I don't think that good teaching,
        …yes, you need to have good lessons,
        …but I don't think it's a big pony dance.
It's about showing kids that you care.
You want to see them do well.
Then you're helping them;
        giving them the tools to get there.

It might come to some point,
        kid or not,
        where a question comes up,
        that's when I decide,
        Okay, I'm not avoiding this.
I think we'll have more "out" teachers coming.
And that will help me feel more comfortable I think.
I don't want to be the first.
But somebody needs to be, you know.

Yes, I would like to feel perfectly confident about not hiding anything that I'm not
ashamed of.
        That would be great.
        That would be ideal to be able to just not…
        not that I'd be like,
      "Yes, this is all about my life" on the first day of school.
But if a kid asks,
        to just be able to be honest,
        and not be afraid and not lie to them.
Because I do and that's,
        …I'm not a liar,
        but I lie to kids about my personal life.
You know,
        or not.
I mean I don't lie to them,
        but I don't tell them.

Marissa

Marissa is a white female lesbian in her mid-fifties. She spent 12 years in a private practice as a chiropractor and also Chaired the Chiropractic Department at a local college before entering the charter school classroom. She is a high school science teacher, who holds two bachelor's degrees and her master's degree. One of the challenges Marissa expressed in her interviews when she first started in the charter school was essentially making the choice to go "back into the closet." Her navigations back "out of the closet" after entering the PK-12 teaching profession was a helpful addition to the overall story. Marissa self described herself as "feisty" and recently participated in the California AIDS cycle, which is a 540 mile bike ride.

The Question Box

I am the high school life sciences teacher,
        at a public charter school
        in the Saturn School District.
I have had this job for 2 years.
I'm starting my third academic year in August.
I came to this job because we moved from Los Angeles.
I had been an educator of post-secondary education.
I was professor at Southern California University of Health Sciences.
I'm also a chiropractor.
I taught in the Chiropractor College
        and chaired the department there.
When we moved here,
        I knew that there are no chiropractic colleges in Colorado
        and that I would have to retool to be employed.
I was surprised when the Colorado Department of Education said,
        that I needed to go back to school.
I have my D.C. master's degree and 2 bachelor's degrees.
That I had to go back and take, 2 geology classes and physics,
        so that I could be eligible for alternative credentials.
But, since I was hired by this charter school,

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I don't need to do that because all I need to do is
 be qualified under No Child Left Behind,
 and as my principal said,
 I am way more qualified than I need to be.
So that's what I've been doing for the last 2 years.
Now I'm in a classroom all by myself.
That's been a very different experience,
 to do that all the time, just me.
As opposed to having other friends and colleagues
 to help to do it;
 having a good time with them as well.
So it's different.
And it's a very different subject matter.
From being a clinician, teaching a health science,
 to teaching just basic sciences.
But I actually like it.

I also had been in private practice for a dozen years in Los Angeles.
And in teaching, through some of that.
And one of the things that I realized,
 when I went back to college level teaching full-time in 1994,
 is that I really preferred being an educator.
I'm very good as a chiropractor,
 but I really love being a teacher.
When we moved here,
 it was very clear to me that what I wanted to do was teach.
I identify myself as an educator.
I think it's the thing that I'm really the best at.
I'm good at a lot of things,
 and very good at a lot of things.
But I really love being a teacher.

It's a public charter
I hadn't been around teenagers like this.
I had to learn about teenagers,
 and there's a huge difference between ninth grade and tenth grade.
Now I just realized that ninth graders are just ridiculous,
 and that by tenth grade they've calmed down a little bit.
And I also think that I just learned not to sweat the small stuff.
What I can't get over at this school
 is that many of these kids have no drive to achieve.
They are total under achievers.

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They're not stupid,
        but they don't really give a crap about learning anything.
I don't understand that.
Because from the time I was a little kid,
        I love learning things.
I learned how to spell my last name;
        I needed to know how to spell it at age 6
        to go to the library and get a book for my own.
I have been a reader since I learned to read.
Every day I want to learn something new.
And so for me the strive to learn stuff,
        just be so excited by learning,
        has just colored my whole life.

One of the things that has come up,
        is that these kids love me,
        even though I'm tough with them.
Because they know I'm tough with a heart.
I also tell them,
        that in this day and age where everybody has email
        I don't want to hear from their parents,
        I want to hear from them.
It's between them and me.
I think this is a huge piece for these kids at this school;
        nobody makes them take responsibility
        and their parents are very interfering.
Very little diversity.
And I find that very troublesome because
        I'm always getting in to it
        with some of my Anglo kids
        because they are so ridiculously stupid about the things,
        that they say unwittingly in front of,
        the maybe three kids in the class of 25 who are
        either half Hispanic, or Hispanic, or multi-racial, or African American.
And they have no conscience and they'll say,
        "Well so and so doesn't care I say this all the time."
And I say to them,
        "How do you know so and so doesn't care?"
"How do you know?
Has it ever occurred to you that maybe
        so and so is afraid to say something
        because you're just so stupid

in the way you say things, and insensitive?"
And they're like, "whoa."
You know, I mean I just let them have it.
And if they say something like, "Oh that's so gay,"
I look at them and I say,
        "Are you saying something is extremely happy or homosexual, which is it?"
Because if it's not happy, you're engaging in hate speech.
Nobody's ever talked to these kids before like this.
But I think this whole picture of being responsible
        about what you're saying and thinking about it.
And I'm not afraid to say this to them.
Parents send their kids here because the school
        is now proving a very safe place.
And so I think a lot of parents make the choice for that.
I think the other reason is most of
        the families are very conservative Christians.
And I think that and most of the board members are.
I think if they could afford to,
They would send their kids to a religious high school,
        but they can't,
        so they think at least they'll be among kids
        who come from similar family backgrounds.

Being the biology teacher,
        having the joy of teaching evolution
        is always a treat for me.
The class I teach in ninth grade, it isn't called a health class,
        the parents would object to a health class.
But they call it teen choices.
And I always say to them,
        if the kids ask me a question
I'm going to answer it.
I'm not going to be evasive.
I will answer to the best of my knowledge.
I'm out to all of my colleagues,
        many of them come from a similar kind of background.
I'm close to two.
One is the high school physical science teacher
        and the other is the librarian.
Laurie sort of got it, and asked me about Michelle.
As different as they are, very evangelical and all of that,
        Laurie has made it very clear to me,

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she's so happy that both of her daughters are going to have me as a teacher,
and she wished her son Steven had not graduated before I was teaching here.
I think that's great.

Now with the kids,
I'm not out at all.
Because first of all,
I don't think it's appropriate.
You know one of the things I don't like about this school
is that the kids don't have boundaries.
They really think that their teachers are their friends.
And I have said to them,
I am not your friend,
I am your teacher.
I like you,
you're wonderful kids,
but I'm not your friend.
I am your teacher and that is a very different thing.
Now when you graduate from college,
and you've made something of yourself,
and you come back,
then we can renegotiate this relationship,
and we might be friends.

On some level, I've had to be circumspect my whole teaching career.
Not so much in California as here.
But I also just am a private person by nature.
And it's not your business what I do.
They just assume I'm married.
I talk about my stepdaughter and stepson and my grandchildren.
They just put it together any way they want.
I send around a box,
where they can put in anonymous questions,
ask questions about sexuality of any sort.
One of the things that has struck me,
they are incredibly ignorant about sex,
sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy.
They know nothing.
It's scary.
You know by the time I was 12,
I knew more than these kids know about sexuality.

I have one kid act as the moderator,
        sits up front and he or she will read the questions
        as they come out of the box.
This one class,
        someone said, " There are rumors that Dr. G is gay, is it true?"
And the boy, it was very interesting.
The boy who was reading them,
        "Oh, this is trash."
Okay.
 I said what is it, show it to me.
And I just said, "yeah."
And I tell them my life is not pertinent to this,
        I think they thought they could embarrass me.
I think that a lot of this, that kind of thing that came out then
        is really about trying to embarrass me.
 I'm just not flappable that way.
And I think after a while they get it,
        then they just ask the questions
        once they've tried.
I set up boundaries.
At first, when I first started teaching here,
        I said to Michelle,
        one of the things that troubles me the most
        is that I feel like I'm back in the closet here,
        after being so out of the closet for so long.
And I didn't stay that way for very long.
I came out to my colleague, a science teacher.
And I came out to a few other people.
It is no big deal, everybody knew and I was glad.

Big change came over the Christmas break my first year,
        I hate to drive in snow.
I needed to do something in the classroom,
        so Michelle came with me.
As we were coming down the stairs,
        we ran in to my principal.
And so I said, Becky I want you to meet my partner Michelle.
The semester started.
Becky saw me and she said,
        Marissa, I just want to say how nice it was to meet Michelle,
        I hope you will bring her to stuff where spouses are included.
It's easy to be out with my colleagues,

they've been very welcoming in that way. And that's nice.

I can't live my life being paranoid about it.
I've had a lot of the board members' kids in my class,
        and all of the board members have come and told me
        how much their kids love the class.
How much they love me.
So I'm not too worried.
But I think I still have to be discreet and circumspect.
I just feel like my private life, is my private life.
At lunch in a little place in Louisville,
        I saw a woman whose kids I had in class.
I waved to her.
I said, "This is my granddaughter Amber."
And if I had been eating lunch with Michelle,
        I probably would have said, "and Cindy this is my partner Michelle."
It's summer vacation.
You're in my home town.
Deal with it or get out of my life.
If they want to fire me for that, I'll sue them.
I just will.
I have no problems with that.
I have said to the guidance counselor at one point, last year.
I said I would imagine it would be very hard to be a gay student in this school.
And she said, yes it was.

There was a boy the year before I started.
And he was miserable,
        because the kids were horrible to him.
And of course, other people let them be horrible to him.
Mary Beth said Marissa, it's so funny,
        because she keeps saying she doesn't know anybody who's gay.
And I just started to laugh.
Because this kid loves me.
I would just love to say,
        "well, yes you do."
Let me introduce you to this person you already know who's gay,
        then have me walk in.
And I just laughed.
" Oh my God that would be the most fun thing ever."
So I'm a little more comfortable now that I can even joke about that.
But I wasn't so much the first semester,

as I was getting used to everything;
the culture of being in a high school
the culture of being in this kind of a school.
Part of why I lived in California for so long,
was because it was very easy to be a lesbian there
in Los Angeles.
There were lots of them there.
There's a very public and accepted gay and lesbian population there.
I had been on the board of directors for 4 years
of the LA Gay and Lesbian Community Centers.
I just lived my life that way when I was in private practice as a chiropractor,
I just assumed everybody knew who I was.
If they didn't, they didn't.
That was hard.
In the very beginning, the first month or so,
and I came home to Michelle and I said,
you know, I hate being back in the closet again.
But I think, I didn't want to stay there very long.
So I didn't.
I just felt that I wasn't very happy,
I wasn't being who I am when I first started there.

After I got hired in like the middle of May,
I had to go in June to a benefits meeting at the Saturn Board of Ed
and I'm sitting there and they are going over your options,
they bring up the same sex domestic partnership option.
And I'm like shocked,
so shocked I don't immediately leap on it.
I leave at a break and I call Michelle,
"You won't believe this.
But, hey are you interested in this?"

They don't have any other supports.
They have lack of allies,
and they don't even know how to approach colleagues.
Well, you know, and I think, and I see this, you know.
And,
I think that for me,
maybe because I am a lesbian teacher and I often have felt isolated,
or the potential is there.
I make it a point to reach out to every new teacher who comes to the school,
and meet them and talk with them.

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And just like I do with every one of my students,
	find out a little bit about them.
I think in a perfect world I wish I could be even more forthright about who I am.
But I don't think I ever will be able to at this school.
And yet I don't feel like I'm in the closet,
	the way I was,
	because at least I'm out to all of my colleagues
	and people I have relationships with.
I think the students,
	who got close to me, sort of knew.
They figured it out.
Counselor told me about this kid who was just persecuted on a daily basis.
I don't think I would have been able to stand by and watch that.
I would have gone completely nuts,
	if something like that came out.
I'm sure I would come out on a much bigger level.
Probably take more personal risk than I have because
	I just can't stand to watch that stuff.
So that hasn't happened,
	yet, but I could see me coming way out of the closet if it did.
Like completely.
	And saying, "Well, why are you being that way to so and so who's gay and you're
	not that way with me and I'm gay?"
I can just see this happening.
The kids being dumbfounded.
But that's the way that it would be.

I think it really has to do with,
	how comfortable you are in your own skin.
And I'm pretty comfortable you know.
I think it really it comes down to personal comfort.
There are so many crucibles in our lives.
We're thrown in it,
	ground up and we come up reconfigured.
I think stronger for it, if you survive the process.
And I think that we also,
	many of us,
	look for things to help us get through that.

Andi

Andi is a white male in his late twenties, who recently finished a teacher preparation program and at the time of the interviews was seeking a full-time position in the elementary school classroom. Andi and I focused a portion of our interviews on how teacher preparation programs prepare a gay teacher as they enter the field. He is both an artist and a scientist, with a silent and calculated charm. Throughout the interviews, he discussed control and his years in the military, which helps him better perform traditional male gender roles. Andi's favorite TV channel is HGTV or what he refers to as "highly gay TV," which subtly interjects gay themes and issues in its shows such as, on a mutual favorite house hunters show, when gay couples are portrayed as mainstream house hunters alongside their heterosexual counterparts.

My Independence Day

This is my third career actually.
I started out at Texas A&M,
      a very homophobic university.
Where they don't care about diversity,
      nor do they have to worry about it apparently.

I went to the Navy for a while; I was an officer.
      then I got out of that.
      special ops training.
I didn't want to do that anymore
      didn't like being tortured that much.

From there I got my EMT license,
      went into the medical field.
Worked in surgery,

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processing red blood cells.
Kind of using my science background.
My undergrad is in Wildlife Biology.
I was thinking about nursing
      or becoming a physician's assistant
      or doctor.
And of course,
Those gender role jobs,
 "A nurse, it's a woman."
Or if you're a guy,
 "*Oh*, it's a male nurse."
That turned me off a bit,
      not exclusively 100%,
      but it was still in the back of my mind.

Then I thought about teaching.
Worked at a Special Education school.
My first job there was as a teacher's assistant.
It turned out,
      I liked the teaching aspect
      a lot.
It brought out a different feeling.
A sense of this feels right,
      of completing.
This is the right path I'm going on,
      whereas the other one,
      there's always that gray area
      I wasn't certain.

I was able to get a Head Special Ed teacher job;
      long-term sub job for about 5 or 6 months
      actually supervised people,
      wrote out IEP plans and tri-annual,
      held meetings.
There is so much more to teaching
      then just knowing the content.
There's a whole social aspect.
      the psychological aspect.
Everyone needs a teacher.
It seems like a cliché,
      but it's something that everyone requires
      at one-time or another.

I get really, really excited when I teach science.
Something bubbles up inside me.
But at the same time,
        with my attention span
        I have to be doing a million different things
        all at once.
Elementary teaching provides the opportunity
        to teach science, math, social studies, literacy
        you're just constantly going and going.

Why is a man teaching elementary?
Men aren't nurturing
        because that's what everyone has learned,
        guys included.
They are told that men can't be nurturing,
        they can't comfort
        or they can't teach
        or if they're patting someone on the back for a good job
        that's probably wrong.
He's probably up to something.
That's been a struggle for me.
Always been in the back of my mind.

In my student teaching,
I never fully disclosed anything
I was worried about how teachers would act.
It's just based purely on superficial instances
        or it may be conversations had
        or if I saw they had a cross on their keychain,
        one of them had that and faith written on it.
 I was just worried how they would react,
        maybe they would treat me differently.

At the Special Ed school I worked at as a TA.
Everyone was very cool about it.
I'd talk about my partner.
"We're going to do this and this weekend"
Had people come over, especially
        when I got into a lead position as the Head Special Ed teacher.
I took it upon myself to try to create a positive role model of gay people,
        males in particular.

I had picnics;
        I invited people over to our house
        just so they could get to know me.
It's not like I'm some weirdo creep.
Everyone was very cool with it.
Very understanding,
        but it was more the environment,
        you can feel if people are open-minded and liberal.
Within the public school realm,
        it seems very,
        not necessarily formal,
        but it seems more conservative and narrow-minded.
So I kept very much to myself.

I didn't really talk about what I did over the weekend.
They, "Oh, how was your weekend?"
"Great. How was yours?"
That might have made me come across
        maybe as snobbish
        probably not in a good way,
        but I just wanted to avoid that whole
        "So, do you have a girlfriend?"
Because it an inevitable,
        that question always comes up.
"Not exactly."
"Oh."
Then they change the subject
        real quick.
So in order to avoid that,
        the whole conflict of interest.
I just kept it real simple with my cooperative teachers.

I fully knew what I was when I was little,
        probably 10 or 12,
        but denial is a great thing
        when you're growing up in Houston, Texas
        in a white,
        conservative,
        less than 5% minority representative
        town
        of middle to rich, upper-class people.
I knew what I was.

I kept that to myself,
  once I had gotten out of the Navy
  I just can't live like that anymore.
I never dated any woman or anything,
  but, at the same time,
  never allowed myself
To even entertain
  the idea of dating a guy
  or being viewed as
  that.

Then I moved to Colorado.
I have to be who I am,
  I went on Match.com
  that's how I met my first partner.
He was very good
  helping me work through that process
  discovering myself.
I've changed so much from when I got here to now
it's just insane.
I never would've thought
  I would like theater
  or certain things
  or going out to certain places.
 A complete 180.

On the Fourth of July,
My Independence Day,
  I wanted it to be symbolic.
I was talking to my mom on the phone
Just looking for an opportunity to disclose to her.
I was talking about how sometimes I get lonely
  or bored.
"You'll find the right girl."
"What if I don't like girls like that?
Big silence.
"What do you mean you don't like girls?"

So every Fourth of July,
  three years now coming up here
  It's a little personal anniversary for me.
The day I started really becoming who I am

Allowing myself; giving myself permission
        to be who I am.
Not living by someone else's expectations,
        like my parents
        a Christian wouldn't do that.

Churches are big in Texas,
        literally and figuratively.
If you're not a part of the church,
        then it's like, "What's wrong with them?"
It's almost a trendy sort of thing to do.
In most circles outside of Texas it would be rude to ask,
        "What church are you a part of?"
But that's a common question.
Through college, I went to church off and on.
I had a lot of Christian buddies
        who every now and then would bring up gay subjects.
"If they knew a gay was here they'd beat them up or kill them."
Just their whole homophobic fear mentality would come out,
        especially in conversations.
I would try to change the subject or avoid.
The whole Christianity thing was just very hard.
I had felt, growing up
        that I needed to be a part of the church
        then slowly
        "Why would I want to be a part of something
        that hates me around something I can't really control,
        at least willingly?"
They think we can force it,
        but that's another conversation altogether.
They all have the common theme of fear,
        hatred and lack of understanding.
They just do it in different ways, in different mediums.

In the classroom,
Seeking a comfort level on my part first
        if I was not comfortable with it
        it would be very hard to do that
        because there is a whole teacher-student rapport.
If you're in a very conservative community,
        your students know that you're gay
        then there might be some behavioral issues.

Their parents might even be like,
    "You don't have to listen to that teacher because he's like this or that."
So, it really just depends on how I feel the climate is
    and at the same time I don't necessarily feel
    I would want to share my personal life with parents.
I know how parents can talk.
I think it would just have to depend on the situation.
Being a new teacher,
    I'd be very concerned with keeping a new job,
    maintaining good relations.

After watching that *It's Elementary* video,
    which was real eye-opening,
    it actually gave me a little more confidence
    that there are people that are stepping out of their comfort zone
    whether they're straight or gay.
I thought it was cool that there were some straight people teaching that.
It should be presented in a way that.
Allows parents to feel assured,
    that they're not pressing some sort of agenda on them.
"Here's something you may not know about."
Understand this is how it is.
"This is what they look like and gay people are just like you."

That's what the video kind of stressed,
    these kids, when they were talking with them afterwards
    "I thought only white people were gay."
For me I think that would have to come a couple years down the line
    when I feel more comfortable with my teaching.
Then adding that in just here and there.
And just from my little experience,
    I know the whole being out thing,
    for some reason,
    with some people
    there's a bit of a snobbery
    in a way saying
    "You're not out yet?"
Some people don't have that privilege
    or they just don't have the support
If you want to be out at work,
    you have to have
    or feel like you have

that support at work too.
That's something I guess that needs to be established.
After coming out to my parents,
           it made things a lot easier.
That's a big step.
After that, I just felt like I could be myself.
If people accept it fine.
If they don't, screw them.
I never came up to any real resistance
           or negative comments
           or actions
           or people didn't really seem to treat me different.
I think,
           more or less,
           as I've gotten older,
           or used to it
           it's been a little bit easier.
It's been a long journey.
Again, I've only been out for 3 years,
           so I'm still going along that path and journey
           trying to really get to
           who I am and be who I am.

One thing I've thought about teaching
           and any profession that I've done,
           is what I'm doing as a profession changes me.
These professions are life altering and changing.
You can't just be one way,
           then come home and act completely different.
It changes you.
And that's kind of why teaching,
           to me,
           it's going to be real interesting.
I guess that's my biggest fear,
           to be out of control of things.
My way of controlling my environment,
           is not exposing all my little secrets.
Being vulnerable in front of those people.
And, as a teacher,
           it sucks
           because in a way
           you have to be vulnerable.

Put yourself out there.
It's okay to look silly,
       trying to pull out creativity of your kids.
But if you can't do it yourself,
       then it's hard.
A double-edged sword,
       for me, just giving up that control.

You can't really have control over kids to begin with.
You have this illusion,
       of control.
Just putting on that whole image,
       having the teacher voice,
       that teacher look and the walk,
       that presence in the classroom.
I think it's just really interesting,
       how different teachers approach that.

There are so many contingency plans,
       that I think out in my head.
If you have choice A and choice B,
       visualize in your head,
       you being in choice A and seeing what happens
       then choice B, visualize what happens.
Especially with this sort of thing
       where I'm giving control to someone. And it's like
       "Okay."
       I hope you don't use this information against me.
I'm trusting you.
       fear that it'll come back to haunt.
So I imagine,
       if I did come out to my principal,
       or a colleague, because that would probably be more realistic.
I'd talk about my partner, "We did this or that."
"So what is her name?"
"Oh, his name is."
They become silent
       carry on with their business.
       that tells me something's wrong.
Then the next day I feel,
       uncomfortable silence,
       just not being validated.

Then that going all the way up.
Having that one-on-one talk,
        with the principal,
        "I don't think that you fit in to our educational philosophy. I don't think you
        belong at this school. And you're on probation."
That's my absolute worst fear.
On the flip side is what I experience at that Special Ed school.
Being open.
Inviting people over to my house.
Interacting with me and my partner
Asking how **we** are doing instead of how **I'm** doing,
        like my parents do.
Continuing along that path of figuring out
        my comfort zone,
        and also being able to do the risk taking
I'm comfortable with who I am.
I'm comfortable if other people around me accept me.
I think it's more of the fear of rejection right now.
I guess I don't feel strong enough right now,
        in the solid position,
        to take that rejection.

I think the arts is a good way to bridge build
        for this kind of stuff.
Interpreting,
        talking about experiences.
Having that aesthetic experience,
        while also building in other people's perspectives and
        how they look at the same thing
        you get all these different viewpoints.
How literal and figuratively you can think of bridge building.
It's been getting me thinking,
        if I'm crazy enough to do a PhD.

        Chapter 4's purpose was to present the 14 participants' personal narratives

through the medium of Poetic Transcription. In Chapter 5, more detailed descriptions of

the seven themes will be articulated. Specific examples from the poems and original

transcripts will provide the reader with a textual understanding of how the individual

participant stories connect to the larger understanding of the experiences of lesbian, gay,

and bisexual educators and the seven identified themes.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

Chapter 5 focuses on the details of data analysis, but should still be seen as a close companion to the creative synthesis presentations of Chapter 4. Each chapter is better understood, and deeper connections can be made, when each is read in conjunction with the other. Chapter 5 will describe the development of the seven themes coded in the data, as well as provide the reader with a stronger understanding of how these themes address the primary research question. For each theme, the reader will be presented with the origin, definition of, and examples highlighting the theme. After the presentation of these themes, the two sub-questions will be addressed, together with the key understandings from each. The chapter concludes with a reflection on Queer Theory and how it was utilized throughout the data analysis process.

Presentation of the Themes

The objective of heuristic research is not "to prove or disprove the influence of one thing or another, but rather to discover the nature of the problem or phenomena itself and to explicate it as it exists in human experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). My primary research question, "What are the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 educators as they manage their sexual orientation identities within a teaching role?" was designed specifically to match with heuristic philosophy. This philosophy dictates that the researcher's exploration be deeply grounded in her own

personal journey, while also striving to illuminate for others a deeper understanding of the experience under examination. Therefore, this chapter is not designed to prove to the reader what was learned from this study. Instead "…the question of validity is one of meaning: Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meaning and essences of the experience?" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). In order to convey this meaning, the chapter will describe in detail the seven themes that emerged to convey the experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators.

The seven themes were not created unemotionally or without deep thought; they were carefully constructed as a means of communicating the intricacies and nuances of the primary research question. It was only after extensive immersion, explication, and indwelling that these themes were illuminated to me. I spent hours referring to my journals and my own experiences, as well as listening to and reexamining the experiences of my participants. It was at this point that the depth of my research pool became evident. My original scope of six participants would not have given this research study the depth and breadth that it has now. Nor would six participants have allowed me to state confidently, what I now can: that these themes capture my participants' experiences, as well as my own. After the data analysis was completed on all 14 participants, I was able to cross-analyze and see the emergence of themes that were only available to me during this heuristics process.

Themes evolved from hunches, from repetitive statements, and from the willingness to look at data at a microscopic level as well as it in its entirety, at the macroscopic level. Many of the themes contain aspects of both the micro and macro, and both viewpoints added to a deeper understanding of the discoveries and implications. To understand a theme the reader needs to understand its origin and how it is defined by the researcher, and see examples from the data that highlight that theme. Additionally to assist the reader, next to each participant is the page number that marks the beginning of their poem from Chapter 4 for those wishing to review the theme within the larger narrative context.

Experience

Experience captures the specific events, moments, and time periods that collectively shaped the personal and professional life of each participant. For some individuals, this was their first "coming out" experience or achievement of tenure in the public school system. This theme's origin was in the writing of my own "coming out" story. This personal writing journey was my initial engagement, or stage 1 of heuristics, to draw out my own story and try to understand it for the first time in its entirety. Although I have relived and analyzed moments for years, the creation of this document provided me with testimony of my experience. When forced to choose specific words to capture an emotion or event, the magnitude of what I had long set aside resurfaced. In the design of my research protocol, I tried to mimic the questions that I had asked myself. What did I need to answer to know my story? What did I want the participants to answer,

so that I could understand the larger story, the story of others, the story of those whose journeys resembled mine, potentially only in draft form and not in details, for everyone's story is unique.

The *Experience* theme was explicit to me first at a microscopic level. I quickly realized the importance of looking at the "who" behind the story. Sample questions I asked myself when I coded for this theme at the micro level were:

1. Did gender shape the participant's experience in a significant way?

2. Did sexual orientation identification (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or ally) shape the participant's experience in a significant way?

3. Did the number of years that a person has been teaching shape the participant's experience in a significant way?

4. Did the content area or grade level shape the participant's experience in a significant way?

5. Did the time period shape the participant's experience in a significant way?

It is important to note that I was looking for ways in which these aspects were significant. I define "significant" as those factors (micro and macro) that were both noteworthy and crucial determinants in the individual's lives. While all factors influence a person's story, some were more salient and were therefore coded for this theme. A specific example of this salience from the data is that all three elementary male teachers talked about gender roles and the process by which they were seen as a male in their elementary schools. These descriptions were all coded for *Experience* in the data. However, at the

high school level, content area was not significant to the participants. The high school teachers had other common concerns about teaching at their level, but the content in which they work was not significant, and therefore not coded under *Experience*.

After examination of the data at the micro level, I turned to the macro level to understand how that would provide a deeper understanding of the theme. Sample questions I asked myself when coding at the macro level were:

1. Did the initial "coming out" process shape the participant's experience in a significant way?

2. What role did other individuals play in the "coming out" process and shape the participant's experience in a significant way?

3. Did religion shape the participant's experience in a significant way?

Carissa's (p.138) story is a very prominent example of the *Experience* theme. Her experience of getting fired for being perceived as a lesbian shaped and defined her. It impacted her choice of career and guided her down a different path from one that she described as "a calling." In her words:

> But I did apply to a few schools…I showed the department chair my resume and she said, "I am exhausted reading this resume," because of all the stuff I had done. She called me back and said, "Well, I talked to the principal and he said he made a phone call to your school and said that we will not be hiring you." I was just like, "What am I going to do?" …when I went a couple of places and had that same experience I was just like, "What is going on?" I didn't know what the hell to do. I don't know what a person does in a situation like that.

Carissa looked at herself differently due to these experiences and this moment stood out among all the other aspects she shared with me around her "coming out" process and her upbringing.

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Her narrative also resonates with others regarding how one regroups from what others described as their worst nightmare. Her experiences enrich the understanding of what it means to be both a teacher and lesbian, gay, or bisexual. What could have been a tale of caution, resulted in a tale of hope for others to draw from.

Religion was a relevant *Experience* that was coded for 10 of the 14 participants. For Carissa, Rachel, and Andi, religion was a place of hate. Carissa explains,

> I had to figure out how to not send myself to hell… it was huge and especially growing up in evangelical Christianity. I mean it was like what am I gonna do with everything I've been believing for the last 15 years. How am I going to not send myself to hell? And so I had to totally reconfigure my whole belief system, because of this, you know.

Rachel (p.116) discussed coming from a fundamentalist Christian home where she and her siblings were isolated from much of mainstream culture. She attended Christian private schools, which made their views on homosexuality very clear to students.

> We were taught to hate, basically. We were taught that homosexual people were horrible, horrible people…I'll always remember hearing the story about the boy that they hung upside down on a bar and they like pinched his testicles and did crazy shit to him, these homosexual people.

Part of this school experience, transitioned to her first relationships and how she dealt with her own conflicting views of religion and sexuality. She shared her inner dialogue as being:

> I'll just do this and then I'll ask for forgiveness and I'll be straight again and everything will be okay. Because, that's the way it worked; you asked Jesus for forgiveness and everything's okay…when this is over, I'll just go back and then I won't go to hell.

In contrast to Carissa and Rachel's experiences, Andi (p.197) articulated his fear of hatred from his religious peers, not towards himself.

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…churches are big in Texas, literally and figuratively speaking…I had a lot of Christian buddies who...every now and then would bring up gay subjects like, if I knew a gay was here I'd beat them up or kill them or etc. Just their whole homophobic fear mentality would come out especially in conversations, which I would try to change the subject or avoid.

Other individuals talked about religion as a source of conflict and something that was important to resolve. Andi's statement "why would I want to be a part of something that hates me and something I can't really control, at least willingly," was repeated by many participants. The religious aspect of the theme *Experience* was about understanding some of the complexities of decision-making processes as well as their personal motivators.

Jill (p.96) and Evan's (pg.104) cross-narratives speak to the importance of life events that shape our future. Jill's brother and husband played an important role in helping her to embrace her identity as an ally.

I had a brother who was gay and my husband…Mark and I were married for nine years...I would probably identify Mark as bisexual. He may have been gay. The sad thing is he didn't long enough for us to really be able to discern it. But both of them were also AIDS patients at a time when, and I nursed them through that, both of them, one right after that. And it was at a time when that also…I mean, it's still a stigma. But it was much more of a stigma. The point is that those experiences…that experience did play into my passion about this because I saw them discriminated against.

Jill's support of Evan through his "coming out" experience has become an impetus for him to examine how he will offer support to youth in the future. Evan's narrative was coded for *Experience* because his story was better understood after examining the role that other individuals played in his life, especially Jill.

[She] was the only teacher that really supported me and challenged me, and I think Jill will tell you that she believes that it is her purpose on this earth to find or to come into contact with young people who were struggling with their sexuality and be as a safe haven for them.

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The theme of *Experience* played an important role in addressing the research questions. Although there is texture to everyone's story, aspects could easily be identified as significant when looking how one thing influenced another, and where that influence remained present. Varying greatly in some individual stories, but also sounding remarkably similar in other stories, the theme of *Experience* illustrates how the whole of a person's experience as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual educator was shaped.

Personality

Personality, the second theme, is the elusive but defining aspects of personality that supported navigations for each participant personally and professionally. Participants self-identified as introverted or extroverted in interviews or described themselves using such words as "goofy" or "genuine." Referencing back to my journals, this theme started to emerge after my fourth interview, and from that point forward I made intentional observations of participant personality, while also asking probing questions around this theme. As a theme, *Personality* was evident in the ways which participants shared stories and as they discussed their classroom practices.

In early interviews, I wondered whether an individual's degree of introversion or extroversion contributed to how "out" they were in schools or would like to be in schools. Several individuals seemed very extroverted and their stories seemed to be incongruent to my own. At this time I was struggling to recruit a diverse and representative data pool and I could not locate a lesbian elementary school teacher. In pondering my own experiences, I wondered if there were personality differences in elementary school

teachers versus middle and high school teachers. Additionally, I wondered whether the

reason I could not locate a lesbian elementary school teacher because we have more

reserved personalities and would therefore be unlikely to take the risk and participate in

this study. I eventually rejected this theory, but did come to realize that when I looked

closely at the data set, there were significant aspects to personality that contributed to the

experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators. I determined that my original theory

was too stereotypical to have merit, but it led me to better understand the role of

personality.

Personality was one method utilized by some participants to navigate their

lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities in the classroom and in their personal lives. Sean's

(p.127) identity as an activist is connected to his view of himself as extroverted. He

draws upon these extroverted tendencies when he has difficult conversations or is a

media representative.

> So I am very extroverted, very up and out... I think that helps with being an
> activist, is being an extrovert. But I also do think people like Gandhi who were
> not extroverts, can still be an activist, it's just in a different way…I do a lot more
> for societal reasons in the future than I do for me, myself. I am a masochist in
> some ways, unfortunately. That's sad but it happens. I think you have to have
> great pain to be a great activist. Because if you don't have the pain, the difficult
> conversations don't occur.

This point in Sean's narrative was important on a myriad of levels. First, Sean's

approach is threatening for many individuals; he specifically mentioned the teacher who

left his school out of the fear of being associated with him. Second, it was also important

for introverts (like myself) to know that while approaches and styles may vary, they can

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still address the larger concern of discrimination. Finally, Sean invited others to embrace their own personality tools and utilize these at school and district levels.

In the interview context, Andi's (p.197) introverted nature was readily apparent. In discussing how personality will help him navigate in the classroom, he said:

> … [I] feel a little bit awkward sometimes in social situations, I'm not quite misanthropic but I'm close. I've thought a lot about that, why do I act that way sometimes because I can be really serious sometimes and reverting back to my military discipline and then sometimes I have this whole theatrical side to me where I just want to like act crazy…

This offers a counter narrative to Sean's extroverted nature. I feel it is important to acknowledge both aspects, and at the same time recognize how people move, especially introverts, and struggle to move fluidly between the two circles of personal and professional lives.

Jill (p.96) spoke to the theme of *Personality* as she described her approach in the classroom and as an administrator. She talked about her inability to be insincere. She cited this specific moment when she returned to her school, after losing both her brother and husband:,

> …About a year after I left that town, I went back to those kids and in my mind I was coming clean to them and saying you need to understand that this was what was going on but I could not tell you while it…I don't like being disingenuous. People can tell when I'm being disingenuous. People can tell. I don't do it well.

This portion of the transcript was coded as *Personality* and is a concrete example of how this theme was often best identified by the participants themselves. Participants were cognizant of the many traits they pull on and find strength in.

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The title of Rachel's (p.116) poem, "Oh yeah, still crazy people," is the epitome of the *Personality* theme. Rachel moves through the classroom and her personal life with flair that is indicative of her vibrant personality. She described how her students responded to her transition to a more feminine straight woman.

> So, all throughout the year, it was kind of like, "What's going on? What are you doing? Why are you wearing those shoes? Why are you wearing that shirt?" So, kind of all throughout the year this evolution and then it's really funny because I left last summer...I was still wearing my basketball shorts and my tee-shirts to now skirts and tighter fitting shirts and longer hair and sometimes heels. And, they're like, "What are you doing?" So, it's been confusing for everyone involved…that's some of the things that the kids would say is they'd be like, "Well, as long as you're still crazy." Oh, yeah, still crazy, people. Let's get that one straight.

The importance of personality for Rachel and others is that she maximizes a personal strength to help her, and even as she has experienced extensive personal changes, this *Personality* component has remained a constant. Although most would not struggle in the same progression as Rachel, she remains true to herself, an important reminder for all individuals when navigating a potentially stressful journey.

Philosophy

The theme, *Philosophy*, emerged as a point of intersection of the personal and professional for many participants, where one was often used to help define the other. Participants articulated their stance on their level of "outness" in the classroom and its connection to teaching. On the one hand, an example would be the teacher who does not believe any personal components belong in the classroom, including sexual orientation.

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On the other hand, there is the teacher who feels the heart of teaching is relationship building and how her or his level of "outness" can hinder or support this.

Philosophy developed as a theme as I analyzed the responses I received to two interview questions: What, if any, steps have you taken towards being out or open in your personal life or school life? What have been the motivating factors and effects of each of these steps? Many participants wove in educational philosophical stances as part of their answer. It became clear to me that they felt that this is the point where the personal and philosophical intersected; therefore this surfaced as a unique aspect to this theme. Each participant's educational philosophy appears to be an evolving set of standards, which guides their instruction and decision making process that molds how they present themselves in the classroom as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual educator.

Brian's (p.179) educational philosophy is grounded in the high value he places on positive relationships with students. He expresses concern that being more "out" with the students could result in discomfort. This discomfort is in direct contradiction to the core of his educational philosophy of relationship building. Therefore, this point has to be carefully considered before changing his current situation to be more "out" in the classroom, which could potentially cause students discomfort.

> I'm not comfortable with telling kids because they're going to react differently, and I think, part of it is my ultimate job is to teach them. Some kids are going to be fine with that and some of kids may have a real problem with that and that affects my purpose for being with them in the first place if that's going to make them uncomfortable.

Additionally, Brian's contradiction is evident as he talks about lying to the students even when he recognizes how important trust and openness can be in relationship building.

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> …you can't teach unless you build relationships with the kids. And you build relationships with the kids by talking about yourself, and asking about them…And so, that's frustrating because I have to pretend that this part in my life doesn't exist, and if kids ask me about it, I just kind of ignore it, or something. I don't say, you know, "My personal life is none of your business."

Brian's depiction of *Philosophy* highlights the struggle many lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators experience when their personal philosophy and professional philosophy meet at points of incongruence.

Karly's (p.89) remarks about philosophy provide an interesting comparison to Brian's. She also believes in strong relationships with students, and her educational philosophy was actually part of her decision making process to be "out" in the classroom. She did not want to deceive the students and impede her ability to build relationships. Her goal in teaching is to create better conditions for future lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers, and she defines herself as a "pioneer."

> And I still sometimes visualize myself as a pioneer. I think it's really important for me to be as open as I possibly can so for people behind me it won't be as bad. I encourage people to ask questions and I offer them sometimes probably more information than they want to know. But I think they need to know it.

Thus, she is willing to be "a first" and present herself openly as a lesbian educator, in the hope that this "outness" and openness builds authentic relationships with colleagues and students. Her personal and professional lives reached a point of intersection and choice. She used her personal philosophy to guide her educational philosophy.

Darcy's (p. 162) interview was coded for *Philosophy* at the points where she discussed choice. In Darcy's classroom, the narrative of choice is important for her to communicate. She described her orientation as a choice.

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I think that my big thing that I'm really conscious of in terms of talking about sexual orientation is that, for me, it absolutely was a choice…And so it's always been important to me and I think part of the reason that I was drawn to your research was because I think it's important to have that narrative be a part of the stories that you hear…I have to be careful how I'm saying this because I don't have any judgment about how people speak about how they come to terms with their sexual orientation but I think that it would be safer maybe to say oh no, not a choice. And I think that how I…I might be jumping the gun in terms of what I say now, but how I present myself to my kids is that I chose it. And I try to have that narrative out there for them and so…

The point where these comments became coded as *Philosophy* was when she discussed how this is a vital component she feels needs to be brought into the classroom. Her educational philosophy centers around sharing with students the variety presented in society; the lack of one way to define something as complex as sexual orientation. This personal philosophy intersects with the classroom and therefore each influence the other. Marissa (p.188) is a teacher who draws a strong line between her personal life and her classroom.

Now with the kids, I'm not out at all. Because first of all, I don't think it's appropriate. You know one of the things I don't like about this school is that the kids don't, they have no boundaries. And they really think that their teachers are their friends…And I made it very clear to them. You know, I like you, you're wonderful kids, but I'm not your friend. I am your teacher and that is a very different thing. Okay…Now when you graduate from college, and you've made something of yourself, and you come back, then we can renegotiate this relationship, and we might be friends.

Carissa (p.138) also expressed a similar line drawn with students.

But I didn't really ever talk that much about my personal life because when I first started teaching…I had kind of a long term subbing position for a woman who generally would just sit around. The kids would tell me, she would just sit around and talk about herself and they never learned anything or stuff like that. So I kind of learned early on that just wasn't appropriate and kids were always asking me stuff about my life but I never really talked about it. I just blew it off.

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Both women feel that their personal life does not belong in the classroom and this is one of the reasons why being "out" in the classroom could be described as inappropriate. They both feel that the role of the teacher is to teach and that the personal aspects of their lives get in the way of this larger mission.

Isolation versus Support

The fourth theme, *Isolation versus Support*, is best visualized as a continuum. On one end is *Isolation*, often reflected in words like shame or fear, progressing to the opposite end, *Support*, depicting the highest level of support offered by colleagues, families, friends, communities, and districts. The role and the importance of the ally were often denoted in this portion of the theme.

A theme may not be traditionally constructed as a continuum, but in my data analysis it was impossible to separate these two ideas into individual themes. There was such situational movement back and forth between the two identifiers, depending on the time period being discussed or the individual or group involved. This movement required that both ideas be connected and interpreted together. This was also a theme that was coded on the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, I coded for words present in multiple interviews. Examples of these were shame, fear, risk, comfort, support, and ally. At the macro level, I took in the larger picture of each individual's experiences and compared it to other participants. This macro analysis was attempting to uncover how, when, and why participants moved across this continuum. Specifically, how did entering the classroom trigger movement and what type of movement was it?

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Alec's (p.151) story is one that inspired me to see the theme of *Isolation versus Support* on the macro level. He discusses the movement from a conservative school where he was in the closet, to a more liberal environment where he was not the only "out" teacher.

> When I went to interview…it seemed like a more welcoming place. And I was very frustrated not being out [at my current school]…I quickly discovered that there were a number of out gay teachers. At least out in the faculty. Some out to everybody…and the other gay teachers on the faculty, they were sort of this little club. …that turned out, to be almost, I would say almost a lifesaver.

Woven in his story are examples of how individuals in his personal and professional life helped and offered strong *Support*; he discussed his family and sister, the social network of teachers at school, as well as a significant personal relationship. However, while sharing these points, he also discussed *Isolation* and being "in the closet" at his church.

> And so the only place that I was still closeted was the church. I even got the paying jobs through music at my very little parish. So I could be out to the other musicians and the pastor didn't care. And nobody else knew because I wasn't from their neighborhood and so I was still Catholic, but still semi-closeted there.

His story illustrates how many gay, lesbian, and bisexual teachers feel strong moments of *Support* at the same time as they feel *Isolation.*

Ava (p.145) and Jill (p.96) are two allies who are very aware of the role they play in *Support*. They recognize that support can vary depending on the person and on the situation. Each takes their role of ally seriously and works to make the environments around them better for themselves and their lesbian, gay, and bisexual colleagues, parents, and students. Ava describes her role as an ally in the following way:

> I'd just say somebody that's willing to stand up and be counted for… just supportive behaviors instead of the opposite, and like you said, leading those

conversations. And if there are stereotypes and discriminations, and problems within the team as things open up more, just being willing to both help protect those people that are feeling that they can't come out as much, and just become a buffer. I don't know… just not have it be like two versus twenty-eight.

Jill's support of Evan at points in his life is significant. She describes it in the following manner:

> You can't know for somebody. I should say that. But I was pretty sure there was going to come a point where he [Evan] needed to come out to somebody and it wasn't going to be able to be his mom first…because of their religion and I had that background, He was raised much the same way I was, much the same way. And I knew from what had happened to my brother, he was going to need a safe person to talk him through that. And so with him, and he is the distinct difference, because I really had never done that with any other kid, I just made that connection.

Not only has Jill been an ally for Evan, she also has recognized the similar role that she has played as an administrator to her entire school community of students, teachers, and parents.

> I feel like now that I've moved to the elementary level and that I'm an administrator, I feel like yeah, I can be that ally with same sex parents, but also with teachers…not that anybody has come out to me…which is unfortunate because I'm so ready.

> Carissa's (p.138) narrative is also worth revisiting under the theme of *Isolation*

versus Support. Her story is a macro level example of how an individual can change over a period of time, and her poem depicts moments of *Isolation* and how they can eventually be transformed into *Support.* In her case, she needed to find support in herself to accept her own story in order to balance her experiences of *Isolation* and *Support*.

> I couldn't answer that question for a long time. Why aren't you teaching anymore?...I probably could now. I could do anything I want right now. But it really wasn't until I believed my story that I realized that look, this did happen. And there's not another explanation, really. But now things are coming around

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where I've learned from a lot of experiences…I don't feel the shame so I don't feel like I'm defending myself anymore. I'm not a victim anymore. This thing just happened. That's why it ends up being a really great thing that happened because now I've got so much fun ahead of me, that kind of stuff, that I would never have been able to experience. It was the shame that kept me in that for so long…But now I've gotten the closure. But no, I've never been ashamed ever, ever of being a lesbian ever.

The final point to note under *Isolation versus Support* is the role lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators play for each other. Participants discussed the pressure applied by others in the community to "come out" or be more visible. This pressure was expressed as negative and pushed participants closer to *Isolation* as they felt alone in the process and unsupported by their own communities. Other participants spoke about their need to be more explicit in their support for other lesbian, gay, or bisexual colleagues, who were in different points of "coming out". Additionally, participants often spoke of a previous lesbian, gay, or bisexual teacher or mentor who supported them either in word or in presence. This sub-story of how lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators foster *Isolation versus Support* for each other is an area for further examination.

Non-Negotiables

The theme labeled *Non-Negotiables* represented the point of least flexibility for participants. This theme was often identified by the tone or strength in which the participants conveyed their thinking about the written and unwritten rules that they closely followed. For example, participants precisely described rules of not lying when directly asked if they are gay or that matters *must* be handled if they include any aspect of discrimination, as defined by law.

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Late in the data analysis process, I was re-listening to portions of a few interviews and was surprised by a participant's shift in tone . Although I had worked with the written transcriptions for weeks, this listening session alerted me to this important theme. I realized that there was flexibility in the personal and professional, as well as aspects of inflexibility. It was this inflexibility which I denote in the *Non-Negotiables* theme.

For Sean (p.127) his *Non-Negotiable* is centered on the characteristic of discrimination. Whenever a situation is presented to him that has this characteristic, he is motivated to act. He can never dismiss a student, school, or district seeking his expertise or ignore a situation that is rooted in acts of discrimination.

> In one situation, I had a parent who didn't want [his student] being taught by a gay teacher. I had to deal with that, saying, "No, you can't do that. What if a white supremacist didn't want their children being taught by an African-American? We wouldn't change it." I'm not sure it's a choice in the fact [to raise or confront issues] I won't allow them to be discriminatory. And I think I choose that route because I know in the long run, it would actually help the student who was actually removed…that's more of what I do; I make sure the policies are enforced and applied equitably.

Often Sean gains little from these situations, but they are impossible for him to ignore; they are his *Non-Negotiable.*

The unspoken is how Alec (p.151) described his *Non-Negotiable.* This point emerged for him over his experience and he has come to explain it as the unsaid or that which is not named. Alec's work on the magazine sparked a better understanding of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, which in turn opened his eyes to his school environment. He was able to morph the unspoken into the written word for youth, making his identity more transparent at the same time, and addressing his non-negotiable:

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giving voices to the silent. One example of how he gave such voice is the case of a

popular, closeted former student whose story, Alec thinks, could be an eye opener to the

faculty.

> I would really like to be able to say, Do you remember this kid, do you
> remember? Yeah, he was on the committee to hire our new principals, you
> remember and you had no idea he was gay. And he went through, at the time he
> was just really heavy, and when he started coming out he started losing weight,
> and he is really looking good now. And you had no idea how internalizing all of
> this…you saw a good, good kid. But you just had no idea how difficult it was for
> him, and we just have to make things different for these kinds of kids.

Several participants had specific *Non-Negotiables* for classroom and faculty

spaces, which were the rules they followed when answering personal questions around

their sexual orientations. Brian (p.179) eloquently states his navigation between students'

discomfort and being "out" to his colleagues.

> I'm in an office with four other teachers of… I don't talk about it when there are
> kids in our office. We have kids in all the time getting help in math…So
> sometimes, actually, some of my office mates might say, something like, "Are
> you guys doing this weekend or something?" And they'll talk about me and
> somebody else and that's kind of weird if there are kids in the office. … but I've
> never said, "Please don't talk about my personal life with other kids, either."

My personal unwritten rule is that I have to "come out" to an individual when I

have formed enough of a relationship with that person and we have reached a point where

my omissions become lies and begin to impede our developing relationship. Other

participants have a "no lying rule," which means that when asked directly by colleagues

they will answer honestly. Evan (p.104) states, "I never got to a place where I felt like I

was lying really with anyone in my building because whenever I was asked I was always

honest. I have a feeling that they might know, but I really don't honestly care." In both

cases stated above, these rules applied to colleagues. *Non-Negotiables,* as seen in the data, can be universal or situation specific and often defines what actions are taken by the individual.

Sense of Self

The theme, *Sense of Self*, captures the presence of wholeness and the inner dialogues used by participants as they make decisions or process on both the personal and professional levels. This theme offered the most fluidity and flexibility through a person's life, but progressively showed strength as the narrative worked its way to the present day. Examples of this theme included discussions of internalized homophobia and how that has changed over time, or the depth to which both allies explored their own sexual orientations as part of their progression of identifying as allies.

I personally and professionally feel a strong affinity for the work of Parker Palmer. His definitions of identity, integrity, and wholeness connect for me and have been integrated into my personal reflections and discourse. In an analysis of the data, none of the participants used the exact words of Palmer, but they did express very similar ideas and themes; they were just named in a different way. It is because of this fact that the theme could not be named "wholeness." That word, although accurate in meaning to my participant's thoughts, was not how they identified the concepts connected with wholeness. They discussed growth and a deeper understanding of self.

It is said that wisdom comes with age and this was evident in this study. Participants were able to articulate a greater level of confidence and self-acceptance as

the number of years that they have been "out" increased. In the classroom, this often was manifested as a willingness to be more visible or outspoken. It also resulted in a greater intolerance for being "in the closet" or the ability to more easily dismiss the oppressive practices from others and not seeing these as personal. The *Sense of Self* was evident in either the participants' direct phrases or through a holistic analysis of their narratives.

Sense of Self was also coded in individual transcriptions when participants explained their classrooms and how they viewed themselves as educators. For some participants who have been in the classroom less than three years, the struggles of the classroom often superseded struggles around being a lesbian, gay, or bisexual educator. They were often described as separate entities, because participants had not had to the space to examine how they connect. They were still coming to know the self that teaches. In these cases, *Sense of Self* is not solid in the classroom and in some cases, if the identity of being lesbian, gay, or bisexual is also new, this *Sense of Self* would also be represented as fluid and in early stages of understanding.

For Rachel (p.116), *Sense of Self* has returned to a place of muddiness. She is in the active process of coming to know herself and define herself as a straight woman.

> I try to explain it to people but it's like going to another country kind of and trying to fit in. Coming from my lesbian background and trying to go to the straight world has been … I can't even tell people how crazy it is…But, just the nuances of how like men and women communicate, how men and women get things that they want. And then, just trying to function in this culture that is foreign to me, and trying to learn. And I've had some people that have been really good and all the men have known where I've come from. And, of course, they're all so proud that they have turned me with their wonderful penises. And, I just have to laugh. You're like, "Uh-huh, that's right."

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This process is impacting her classroom, how she interacts with students, and how she understands the world around her. Muddiness is not a negative place, but is better understood as a place where one is seeking clarity. This clarity seeking is a common task or way to represent the theme of *Sense of Self*.

It surprised me that both allies went through moments of personal exploration and questioned their identities as heterosexual women. Jill (p.96) grappled with identifying strongly with lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals to the point of questioning her own conservative, religious upbringing.

> But I've never come out myself and I'm not gay. Although, when I started identifying so strongly with all of these people that…I mean, I have a lot of gay friends. And I certainly did go through that process myself thinking have I just repressed this? I mean, what's really the…'cause I would feel fine about being gay. I'm like and I kind of laugh at it now because I would take myself through a process of things. I just never got attracted to women. And I would think am I repressing 'cause you know the way you were raised? And I would imagine being with a woman and think, yeah, no.

Ava (p.145), on the other hand, asked herself the question, but quickly connected it to larger issues in society instead of her own experiences.

> I was always so interested in being an ally and at many times questions like "Am I really gay? Why is this important to me? What is so… why is this so important to me?" And I think it's just a basic human rights thing. It's like the reason like sexual abuse is super important to me and victim recovery because it's just the basic human right to be treated well.

Thus, in different ways, both sought clarity regarding the question of why they are passionate advocates for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Their *Sense of Self* was deepened after this exploration and better enables them to be active allies.

One of Molly's (p.173) dominant traits is her ability to meta-cognate around her own sexuality and how sexuality is perceived in the world. It is this trait that resulted in many examples of *Sense of Self* in her interview transcriptions. One of the best examples is her response to the question, "what does it mean to be a bisexual educator?"

> What does it mean to be a bisexual educator? Well it means that sexuality is probably a little bit more on the forefront of my brain than it is someone who is just falling into the mainstream. Because it's just something that I've thought more about. And so I am more cognizant of sexual matters when it comes to social constructions of sexuality within the classroom, specifically within texts that I am teaching. Social constructions in general is something that I'm always trying to bring to my students attention whether it be it the freshman or the adult students I have now.

Andi (p.197) is about to enter the classroom and is forthright in his *Sense of Self* explorations. He is exploring threads of this theme, how one understands the self or individual who teaches, and how this understanding is influenced by personal and professional forces. Andi is at the very beginning of a journey that other participants took more than 15 years before him. His codes of *Sense of Self* look very different than the more veteran teachers. He was coded at points in his narrative where he discussed the questions he is seeking clarity on, as he explores what it means to be a gay educator. Due to the lack of his teaching experience, he is currently exploring different mediums, like videos, to help him work through some of these questions.

> I think it would just have to depend on the situation and being a new teacher, I'd be very concerned with keeping a new job and maintaining good relations or whatever. But after watching that *It's Elementary* video, which was real eye opening, it actually gave me a little more confidence that there are people that are stepping out of their comfort zone whether they're straight or gay. I thought it was cool that there were some straight people teaching that.

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Other participants were coded as they described the answers they found to similar reflective questions they posed in the early days of their classroom experiences.

Navigations

The final theme is *Navigations*. This theme attempted to encapsulate the participants' stories, tips, and insights to help others as they look to navigate personally and professionally. This theme included examples of how participants have addressed concerns of risk in the classroom or the way that they phrase items in the classroom when asked about their sexual orientations.

An important insight for me during this entire study has been how differently individuals have navigated being lesbian, gay, or bisexual educators, and yet how these differences offer me support in my own navigation as a lesbian educator. This theme is a micro level theme that integrates the techniques and strategies used as part of navigation. Capturing the practical, the ideas contained in the theme *Navigations* can support any lesbian, gay, bisexual, or ally educator as they continue to address issues in schools and communities.

Language was a significant element in this theme. Participants' numerous examples of how they addressed students, parents, colleagues, and administrators are a resource to any educator looking for ways to handle hate language in the classroom. For example, Evan (p.104) utilized humor as a way to educate his students. Here Evan describes his handling of a student's use of the term bisexual in the classroom.

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I found that humor was the best way for me to sort of attack a lot of those things…Someone called someone a bisexual. And I was like, "Really?" I was like, "What does that mean?" And [the student] looks at me and he goes, "That means you like both." And I said, "Both what? Like ketchup and mustard? I use both ketchup and mustard on my hamburgers. I like both peanut butter and jelly." He was like, "No, it means you like both girls and boys." And I said… I didn't want to embarrass him, so I said, "Okay, well, I'm a man; I've friends that are men; I've friends that are women. Your definition here's still not really making much sense to me. I'm just trying to understand why you use this particular word. Because if you're going to use it I feel like we should be able to talk about what it means, especially if you're going to do it in my presence.

In reading his dialogue, it is evident how he builds on teachable moments for students and can developmentally move them forward in their learning.

Ava (p.145) uses her status as an ally as a way to bring unspoken topics to the table to support lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers. Her poem articulated strategies she would like to implement with other staff members and parents as a way to start the conversation. Ava wants to build opportunities:

…where people could ask the questions that they have and express their concerns that they have, and we could speak to that in an open way, I think that is the first step.   We're trying to figure this out now. What is it going to look like next year? It's just bringing new for us now. But I think it has to be [open]…and the parents that really have something to say, they have to have a place to come in and say it to people who are prepared to deal with that kind of stuff, instead of it being calls or emails to the teacher… I think it would just be so important to get the initial word out to the parents of any changes that we're making…I think we need to be explicit in stating it and making sure they hear it so that there's no surprises with anything that changes.

Allies and lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators alike, could use these ideas. Her focus as an ally is to create open spaces for communication and her poem guides others who may be seeking ways to do the same in their school buildings and communities.

Multiple participants discussed movies, books, and short stories that could help

lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators with *Navigation.* These media could be used for

personal reading reference or with students in the classroom. Sean (p.127) shared his

bookshelf configuration and other educators may find this a beneficial tool in more

conservative school or districts, where justifications could be asked for as they try to

integrate media that is more diverse and representative of their school community.

> In my own bookcase in my room, I took our school statistics – I'm a Math person, remember – so I made sure that 10% of the books were on Gay and Lesbians, 12% are on Hispanic and Latinos/as. And I made sure there were 4% African-American books so it matched our community. So if a parent ever complained, "Why does he have those gay and lesbian books on his shelf," well, I could say, "Well it matches our community and here are the statistics."

I am fascinated with the afterschool special movie and short story referenced by

participants, where groups of people turned blue or purple if they were gay. Samuel

(p.78) told me about this short story:

> I think it's called "Am I blue?" …this kid gets made fun of for being gay and beat up on the way home. He meets the Fairy God Fairy, he says, "I wish everyone who's gay would turn blue." He's like, "That's your wish, okay." So the next morning, all hell broke loose…people were blue, people were shades of blue, some people were darker blue than others. And it was really such a fascinating idea… wouldn't that be interesting if sexual orientation was similar to race?

This visual intrigues me and would allow for a deeper conversation in the classroom

around ideas of visible and invisible identities. Additionally, the concept of a continuum

and how the depth or shade of a color represented where one would fall on the

continuum, presents both a visual and concrete method for teaching about sexual

orientation and its fluidity. These resources help me to visualize how I can personally use

the *Navigations* in the classroom.

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Understanding the experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators as they manage their sexual orientations within a teaching role requires extensive representation from a diverse community. This study is a first step in beginning to uncover the components of many lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators, as each poem further adds to the depth of knowledge. Using the seven themes as a guide, the reader can begin to appreciate the complexities and nuances of how one manages sexual orientation in a teaching role. All seven themes are needed to help illuminate the larger context of this experience and should be not be viewed separately from one another, but rather as pieces of a puzzle. As a researcher, I recognize that there are additional pieces missing from this larger puzzle; some of these pieces are connected to the voices not present in the data pool. Even with the missing pieces, however, I am confident that this heuristic investigation adds further depth to a shallow body of existing literature on lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators.

Sub-Question Theme Reflections

This section is divided into reflections on the two sub-questions. Exploring answers to these questions offers a different entry point into the data and potential avenues for future research. This mission of a heuristics researcher is about "Asking questions about phenomena that disturb and challenge" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 47). My sub-questions were both structured around limited theory, writing, and research that already existed, which allowed me to utilize examples of the phenomena to challenge this existing structure with my own data.

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Sub-Question 1

How do identity development theories and identity management strategies match the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 educators?

Chapter 2 presented scholars' various linear and non-linear models to articulate the stages, phases, or tasks that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals progress through as they seek to understand their identities. I utilized these models to draw conclusions for sub-question 1 and therefore, a reexamination of each scholar's culminating stage is necessary.

The most prominent identity development models contain a final stage addressing identity integration. This identity integration can be understood as the recognition of one's sexuality as part of the whole person, and is also defined by the understanding that sexual orientation is only one facet of a person's identity. Eli Coleman (1982) created a five-stage development model in which the final stage is a level of integration. This is marked by a person's ability to be "fully functioning" within society. Vivian Cass (1979) developed a theory of lesbian and gay identity development which terminates in Identity Synthesis. A person who reaches this point will likely have found a way to mediate their lesbian or gay identity within a heterosexual world. There is less division of self, as the lesbian or gay identity becomes just one factor of an identity and not one's only lens through which one negotiates the world. Trioden's (1988) identity development model is divided up into 4 stages. The final stage is *Commitment*, which is highlighted by a significant same-sex relationship. During this stage individuals create new stigma

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management strategies, such as "blending, covering, and conversion" (p. 112). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals are now able to fully integrate their once dissonant images and identities. Minton and McDonald (1984) created a nonlinear model in which growth is based on the interaction between societal values, beliefs, and the individual. The end goal of this model is to achieve *Identity Synthesis*, which requires the integration of all aspects of one's personal identity. Once one has fully integrated the lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity into other aspects of identity such as race, religion, and class one has reached the *Universalistic* stage. McCarn and Fassinger (1996) developed a model of sexual identity development that separates the developmental tasks into two types of categories: individual sexual identity development and group membership identity development. These categories are independent of one another and can evolve at different paces. The final phase is *Internalization/Synthesis* where the individual integrates both the personal identity and the group identity into the whole.

Since a goal in identity development is to advance through each phase, stage, or task--have my participants reached identity synthesis and integration? This sub-question is more complex than when I originally imagined it within the context of the study. The general assumption of the identity models is that one progresses through the stages, culminating in synthesis; this is not my participants' experience. I cannot compare each participant with the identity models and check yes or no under the column of identity synthesis. I do not have enough information; the theories do not take into account the complexities of schools and school communities, and although theories can help

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professionals to understanding those around them, individuals do not all fit neatly into the boxes provided by the theorists. My participants are not better understood, their experiences not given more credence, by these models by being able to state whether they have reached identity synthesis or not. For some of the participants, this is strongly guided by their school context; the very nature of being in schools prevents some individuals from progressing in these traditional lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development models.

If I cannot confidently state that my participants have progressed into the final identity stage, as traditionally written, then what can I say? I can say with confidence that every individual understands the connection between identity work and the larger umbrella of wellness. Identity work is taken seriously and although identity synthesis, by the above definitions, may not always be achieved, each participant is actively working to obtain balance as they personally define it. To fully explicate these definitions, a detailed interview protocol would be needed in order to achieve the breadth and depth necessary to completely understand this aspect of the phenomena that emerged from my findings. Understanding balance raises a bigger question for me: can individuals have identity synthesis in their personal life and not in their professional life? The theorists would answer this negatively and that both areas are needed for full identity integration and acceptance.

If the identity development models equate wholeness with identity synthesis [being "out" is better], then many of my participants fail to reach this state of wholeness.

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Part of this failure, however, is not on the part of the participants; rather, it is due to the nature of the school community, school rules, and state and federal laws that set up many teachers for failure and underestimates the power of school environments. The participants all spoke about teaching as a passion or as a "calling;" many described how teaching is a core identifier for them. With that said, to reach definitional identity synthesis, both identities – that of an educator and a lesbian, gay, or bisexual individual – would need to be merged. Part of that merger, as outlined by the theories, includes not hiding one identity, possessing the ability to be an outspoken advocate for the identity, having strong social networks connected with the identity, and reaching a point where all identities are in harmony. Many participants have contemplated these merger points in their personal lives, but the identity of lesbian, gay, or bisexual is still not in harmony with their identity as an educator in the school context. The only two participants for whom this statement does not apply are Alec and Sean as they have fully disclosed in their schools to students, parents, and administrators. It is interesting to note that these individuals have more years in the teaching field than any other participant in the research study. Although Darcy and Karly are both "out" at their schools, they have not yet moved to the point of activism within the integration/synthesis stage as Alec and Sean clearly have. This is an important distinction to note. In Darcy's case, she is in a very small charter school with an "out" lesbian administrator. In her interview, she pondered how her life might be different if she was in a larger public school. Other participants still conceal their sexual orientations, they question to varying extents the support they have

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around them, and they are overshadowed by a society that still supports discrimination legally and as a culture. This does not make them "lesser" or any less self-aware. These individuals grapple with identity on a daily basis when they confront students' and/or colleagues' questions, when they select literature and stories for their classrooms, in determining the manner in which they frame questions, how they defuse hate language in the hallways or on the playing field, and in their performance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or ally teacher. It is part of how they make decisions, balance safety and risk, as well as define who they are to themselves and to others.

Therefore, a new theory is needed. This new theory would need to be developed with more extensive research. Though this sub-question makes an argument for the need for a new theory, it does not have the depth necessary for a new theory on lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity development. I propose the theory be one that embraces professional choices that may not be as straightforward as the business world or seen as stereotypical career choices for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, such as theatre, "Hollywood", or areas of design. Identity synthesis needs to be broadened to include individuals who have found ways to resolve and thrive in personal and professional cycles, without setting being "out" as the standard of the whole and integrated person. The participants in my study represent thousands of educators who are working within systems that may not support full identity synthesis. However, these educators are making a difference in the lives of students and being "out" is only one small part of the picture of being a lesbian, gay, bisexual educator.

Sub-Question 2

How does the synthesis of various identities support teachers in finding wholeness and satisfaction in PK-12 classrooms?

After analyzing sub-question 1, this sub-question is no longer valid. In looking at the data, it became clear to me that the ideas of identity synthesis and wholeness in the PK-12 classroom cannot, and should not, be linked when looking at success and satisfaction in the classroom. At the beginning of each interview, and in the beginning of this study, I was careful not to set the notion of "outness" as better than or superior to being "in the closet." However, in the way that this sub-question was framed, I did just that. I made the assumption that there was going to be a positive link between identity synthesis and a deeper understanding of the self for teachers. This was not the case for any of my participants. These individuals are extremely self-aware and reflective practitioners. They constantly acknowledge that the teacher and the content matters in the classroom; however, students are the driving force behind philosophical decision making. Many participants would say that their personal identities are fluid and ever evolving, but it is the daily interactions with students that matter. Others even went as far as to state that if their personal identity were to make a student uncomfortable or unable to learn, then this would defeat their larger aims as educators. Others altered this notion and stated that supporting students through role modeling or being a "pioneer" for others coming through the educational system is a mission they have for education and this requires them to be "out" and in synchronicity with their personal identity.

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On reflection, a better way to frame sub-question 2 would have been: how do the personal identities of teachers support or hinder the process of connecting with students and therefore finding wholeness and satisfaction in PK-12 classrooms? This restating moves away from traditional identity synthesis and allows each individual teacher to be at his or her own fulcrum of balance between being an educator and a lesbian, gay, or bisexual individual. A researcher could, however, look at the ways teachers maintain that balance and what relationship might exist between being out of balance and relationship building with students. The closer examination of being in or out of balance could offer further insight into the ideas of wholeness in the classroom. Parker Palmer (1998) would caution, however, that teaching, and therefore the self that teaches, should never be simplified into one thing or another. The research agenda posed above, could instead be viewed as a way to further explore the complex relationships and dimensions of teaching and the teacher. Palmer captures this vision with his statement, "In certain circumstances, truth is found not by splitting the world into either-ors but by embracing it as *both-and*. In certain circumstances, truth is a paradoxical joining of apparent opposites, and if we want to know that truth, we must learn to embrace those opposites as one" (Palmer, 1998, p. 63). By embracing the two identities of educator and lesbian, gay, or bisexual individual, one is able to join "apparent opposites," as Palmer states into a whole and synthesized individual who is balanced by in and outside the classroom.

As much as I tried to prevent my study from looking at opposites and either-ors, both sub-questions did just that and, in the end, neither offered extensive insight into the

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primary research question. Though the sub-questions may not have granted greater

explication into the primary research question, sub-question 1, in particular, has provided

a substantial area for future research and evidence that the current identity models do not

match the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators. It is the research

framework though, that adds one more important insight from this study.

Data Analysis through the Lens of Queer Theory

Queer Theory is about de-centering, fluidity, and a wider view into identities,

both marginalized and mainstream. This framework was central to grappling with the

data and information that did not mirror my own experience or political stance regarding

being "out" in the classroom. Queer Theory guided my research design from its first

conception. One decision I had to make very early in the study was whether to include

bisexual teachers in this research. It quickly became apparent that this was necessary with

Queer Theory as my framework. I needed to be open to looking across the continuum and

avoid something as simple as putting the participants into one box labeled lesbian and

one box labeled gay. This decision was replicated when determining the appropriateness

of including ally educators who contacted me with interest in participating in the

research. I drew from the definition of Queer Theory and decided that both the ally voices

and the lesbian, gay, and bisexual voices collectively better represented the story of the

school environment and experiences of my participants.

In a few cases, my journals reflect a return to Queer Theory as a way to mediate

viewpoints or stances that did not meld with my own. In writing about what it means to

have fluidity, to be flexible, and to be truly open I came to understand the conflicting

narratives with more clarity than some of the stories that more closely mirrored my own.

This opportunity to wrestle and grapple under the guidance of Queer Theory tenets also

opened up areas of exploration while coding the data. My themes, and therefore the

poems, are richer because I pondered the significance behind the personal rigidity that

occasionally arose.

Rachel's (p.105) story was one that I struggled to know and feel and it was only

after looking at her narrative through the tenets of Queer Theory that I was able to see the

genuine beauty in the story she shared with me. Her story for me represents the very

essence of how I have come to know and understand the theory. The fluidity through

which she has experienced her own sexual orientation and its presentation to others, as

well as the way in which she mediated the personal conflicts that surfaced, attest to the

validly of Queer Theory and how it addresses the complexities of identity in a way that

the traditional identity development models fail to do. Her journey has been one of

change and, in order to understand it, one must look beyond the either-or paradox. In her

interview, I asked Rachel if she had a preferred label for her sexual identity, and she

answered:

> I've always been really open, even when I was with women, anything is possible.
> I could get married one day. And I was thinking more of a man. So, I guess what
> I would say is right now I'm not feeling strongly inclined, but I would have to say
> that my whole view of sexuality is that continuum that everybody talks about and
> you've heard a thousand times where we're all kind of here and I'm kind of really
> here [hand gesturing continuum].

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In my opinion, what makes Rachel's story truly unique is her fearlessness of the continuum. She has lived significant portions of her life on various points of the continuum and has reflected upon each one's importance in building her current label-less identity. In analyzing her story I began to wonder if Queer Theory might be important for other educators to explore, in order to better understand self and reframe the way they construct themselves and mediate internalized homophobia.

Part of the purpose of this study was to understand the merging of personal and professional identities. As previously discussed, this focus on the integration of personal and professional identities set up arbitrary distinctions and hierarchies of power. This contradicts the purpose of Queer Theory. I believe a better use of Queer Theory is as a tool to support lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators. I found more satisfaction personally and professionally when I stopped critiquing myself using another's definition of what it means to reach identity synthesis. I began to embrace synthesis as I understand it and part of that definition pulled from Queer Theory. I stopped putting myself into categories and instead saw the movement and flow present in all of my salient identities. Could Queer Theory offer other educators this same reconciling?

I envision a point where teacher education programs recognize that the teacher is more than one who delivers content, and authentically focus portions of teacher development programs to better understanding identity, privilege, and power. In those discussions of identity, Queer Theory could be a tool used to show the power in removing either-or dichotomies, thus offering lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual educators a

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different way to envision professional choices. Being "out" would no longer be set as the goal to obtain for synthesis, but rather individuals could make decisions based on individual circumstance and yet still have these valued equally. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual educators would not feel dissonance when moving from personal to professional lives with the values implied by society, but would rather see the move between personal and profession circles as fluid and easy. The key component being the removal of value on one level of "outness" preferred over another.

The experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers as they manage their sexual orientations within a teaching role is complex and multidimensional. The process of data analysis, reflecting on the sub-questions, and using Queer Theory as the theoretical framework, begins to describe this multidimensionality for the reader. However, areas for additional data collection, prompted by this study, could add further depth to this research inquiry. As stated in the beginning of the chapter, heuristics is not about proving to the reader an answer to a question, but rather about capturing the themes and essences of an experience for the reader to help provide deeper understanding into an inquiry. It is my intention that Chapters 4 and 5 enable the reader to see these essences and themes and believe, as I do, that these poems and themes do capture how many lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators manage their sexual orientations within a teaching role. The final chapter, Chapter 6, will offer the reader areas for further exploration, as well as discuss the implications of this research study.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

In this final chapter, I review the study's purpose, discuss the implications of the findings, and consider areas for further research. The chapter begins with a summary of the research study. The implications of the data collected, analyzed in Chapter 5, are detailed in the second section of this chapter. Areas for further research comprise the third section. The final part of the Chapter 6 contains my own reflection: a poetry piece created in an attempt to capture the essence of my personal journey through this process.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to portray the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators in PK-12 educational settings in the State of Colorado. This aim emerged from my own personal experiences, previous research, and the current status of state and federal laws.   Using heuristics as a qualitative research methodology, I was directed through a "process of discovery which leads investigators to new images and meanings regarding human phenomena, but also to realizations relevant to theory in their own experiences and lives"(Moustakas, p. 9). The process combines personal passions and inquiry to illuminate larger universal significance.

After writing and reflecting upon my own intersecting identities, as an educator and lesbian woman, I was then able to progress to the next step in the heuristics process.

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This next step involved me using my new understanding of my own journey to frame and design a heuristics interview protocol. Through snowball sampling, I located potential participants for the research study. I completed extensive interviews with 14 lesbian, gay, bisexual and allied identified teachers, including my self-analysis, bringing the total participants to 15. All together the participants possessed over 116 years of teaching experience, ranging from one individual having over 30 years of teaching to another just entering his first year. The participants, including myself, included nine females and six males and of these six identified as lesbians, and six as gay, one as bisexual, one as "straight but open," and two as allies. The group spanned grade levels and content areas and included teachers in traditional public schools, as well as charter schools. Additionally, the participants varied in their level of "outness" to colleagues, parents, and students.

While engaging in the interview process and data analysis, I was mindful of the organization needed to address each of the six distinct phases of heuristics to maintain methodological integrity. They are as follows: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. While the phases have unique tasks, the process of working through each phase is determined by the research. The process may not be linear or hierarchical. It is important to be cognizant from the beginning of the methodological design that the objective of heuristic research is not "to prove or disprove the influence of one thing or another, but rather to discover the nature of the problem or phenomena itself and to explicate it as it exists in human experience"

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(Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). To achieve this objective, the researcher must be flexible in determining appropriate steps in the process. "There is no exclusive list [of methods] that would be appropriate for every heuristic investigation, but rather each research process unfolds in its own way" (p. 43). For this research study, I used a three interview protocol, extensive journaling, member checking, and explored various areas of my own creative synthesis, including the visual arts.

While in the phases of illumination and explication, seven themes emerged from reflection upon both my original research questions/interview protocol and my journals that I kept during the data collection phase. These seven themes were: sense of self, isolation vs. support, educational philosophy, personality, non-negotiables, navigations, and experience. Every interview was coded for each of the seven themes. As suggested by Moustakas (1990), interviews were coded one theme at a time before progressing to the next theme. Also, as I was delving deeper into the coding process, I remained open to the emergence of new themes. Data analysis was an on-going, cyclical process, through the methodological phases of heuristic research. Specific attention was given to the concepts of meaning making and emergent themes through the phases of illumination and explication.

After coding for the seven themes, I re-listened to parts and/or wholes of selected interviews to make sure I understood the texture of each story. I felt the need to reconnect with participants' voices again in order to avoid their stories becoming

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detached from the text. This indwelling and reconnecting with the voices of participants was essential in order to move forward to the creative synthesis.

The creative synthesis medium I selected for my final products was poetic transcription. Poetic transcription, as defined by Glesne (1997) is "the creation of poem like compositions from the words of the interviewees" (p. 207). The poems created as part of this creative synthesis were used as a tool to help illuminate the themes and essences that emerged through the interview and data analysis process. As the researcher, I was "searching for the essences conveyed, the hues, the textures, and then drawing from all portions of the interviews to juxtapose details into a somewhat abstract re-presentation" (Glesne, p. 207). Using poetic transcription further allowed me to draw from my own understandings, as well as from the data gathered throughout the project.

The final important aspect I needed to address with my research study was the question of validity. Moustakas (1990) poses an important question for researchers to answer as one means of reaching heuristic validity: "Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching, and from the explication of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?" (p. 32). Judgments of validity were involved in every phase of the study and required me, as the researcher, to stay connected to personal exploration and the experiences of the research participants. Member checking was a vital step in the validation process. I asked each participant to review each piece of poetry to ensure that it matched the essence of their experience.

In addition to making critical decisions around the heuristics methodology, my theoretical framework of Queer Theory challenged me to explore varying dimensions of the research study, my personal journey, and those of the participants. Queer Theory is about de-centering, fluidity, and a wider view into identities, both marginalized and mainstream. This framework was central to grappling with the data and information that did not mirror my own experience or political stance regarding being "out" in the classroom. Queer Theory guided my research design from its first conception. One decision I had to make very early in the study was whether to include bisexual teachers in this research. It quickly became apparent that this was necessary with Queer Theory as my framework. I needed to be open to looking across the continuum and avoid something as simple as putting the participants into one box labeled lesbian and one box labeled gay. This decision was replicated when determining the appropriateness of including ally educators who contacted me with interest in participating in the research. I drew from the definition of Queer Theory and decided that both the ally voices and the lesbian, gay, and bisexual voices collectively better represented the story of the school environment and experiences of my participants.

In a few cases, my journals reflect a return to Queer Theory as a way to mediate viewpoints or stances that did not meld with my own. In writing on the ideas of what it means to have fluidity, to be flexible and to be truly open, I came to understand the conflictive narratives with more clarity than some of the stories that more closely mirrored my own. This opportunity to wrestle and grapple under the guidance of Queer

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Theory tenets also opened up areas of exploration while coding the data. My themes and therefore the poems are richer because I pondered the significance behind the personal rigidity that occasionally arose.

Finally, understanding the experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators as they manage their sexual orientations within a teaching role requires extensive representation from a diverse community. This study is a step in beginning to uncover the components of many lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators, as each poem further adds to the depth of knowledge. Using the seven themes as a guide, the reader can begin to appreciate the complexities and nuances of how one manages sexual orientation in a teaching role. All seven themes are needed to help illuminate the larger context of this experience and should not be separate from one another, but rather seen as pieces of a puzzle. As a researcher, I recognize that additional pieces are missing from this larger puzzle; some of these pieces are connected to the voices not present in the data pool. Even with the missing pieces, however, I am confident that this heuristic investigation adds further depth to a shallow body of existing literature on lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators.

Implications

Teachers, school administrators, and state and federal policy makers each need the answers to this study's research questions for different reasons. For teachers, the answers are quite personal and address larger issues of social justice in our school systems. For administrators seeking to create safe and productive environments for

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teachers and students, the answers provide guidance as they facilitate the integration of multiple identities within their schools. Lastly, state and federal policy makers must critically examine the impact of law and regulations on a diverse group of citizens. This study offers implications of how each stakeholder can address the needs and questions around what it means to be a lesbian, gay, or bisexual PK-12 educator.

Chapter 4 provided a detailed and textural understanding of the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators. These narratives provide insights for stakeholders and, by implication, some recommendations will be explored for three distinct groups: state and federal policy makers, administrators, and teachers. The task of Chapter 5 was to examine separately the seven themes that emerged through data analysis. This chapter was unique in that it moved the data analysis from the microscopic level of the personal narratives as seen in Chapter 4 to the macroscopic level where narratives were cross-analyzed for themes across the participant group. In my personal journal, I use the analogy of a spider's web to describe this realization. In my analogy, I am the spider, weaving the web between the points of participants' stories, eventually creating an intricate web of experiences.

State and Federal Policy Makers

At the most macroscopic level, state and federal policy makers have an important obligation to support lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators. Many of the research participants referred to this macroscopic or societal level of change as important aspects of their dream scenario to live and work in a more inclusive society and school

environment. This translated into very concrete ways these powerful stakeholders can act as allies for lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators.

The first agenda item is to draft and pass strong legislation on both state and federal levels, which would need to include sexual orientation under non-discrimination policies and human rights legislation. This legislation needs to be passed with strong bi-partisan support and then enforced when violations occur. To have impact at the school level, legislation also needs to address hate language and bullying. The legislation needs to be explicit and include specific language addressing the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators and students. One participant in this research study noted the vagueness of Colorado's current bullying laws as a barrier to support for both students and educators.

Secondly, to demonstrate that these pieces of legislation move beyond being words on a page, they need to be acted upon. Financial support needs to be given to schools and districts that are actively working on creating safe environments and removing all hate language from school hallways and classrooms. Many of the participants discussed how a successful measure to address language is always multifold. If there is to be successful change, there would need to be a three- pronged approach, including education to all community members, consistency in enforcing policy, and expectations that the policies are universal, meaning they include protections for both students *and* teachers. The participants also addressed how the issues are best approached in a broad sense, so as to not exclude other minority populations. For example, when

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addressing hate language targeting sexual minority populations, schools and educators should also address language that is harmful to persons with disabilities. Policy makers can learn from this lesson and write inclusive laws that will positively impact all members of school communities. They can fund programs which support these missions and have a vision of education that is positive and hopeful.

Administrators

Progressing to the micro level, school administrators can also influence the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers, albeit in different ways than the state and federal policy makers. The research participants noted two distinct areas where administrators can strongly shape the nature of their environment: school culture and policies, and how heterosexual privilege is addressed.

The school culture principals help to craft with their leadership, especially in regards to the rules that they enforce, can be powerful role modeling for all other members of the school community. Participants talked extensively about the support they felt when administrators had strong stances and followed through on hate language. Additionally, they looked for environments where all members of the community were expected to have a role in creating and maintaining safe schools. The most important person in these models, discussed by participants, was the principal who had the ability to set the tone for the entire school around these issues. Administrators who were consistent about enforcing policies and able to have difficult conversations with students, other educators, and parents around equity were viewed as genuine allies. This support,

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whether directly needed or not by individuals in this study, offered comfort to participants as they addressed concerns at a classroom level.

At one level, administrators have the ability to influence culture with their leadership. At a second, deeper level, administrators influence the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers with their acknowledgment and understanding of their own privilege, especially heterosexual, in the school environment. Administrators were seen as allies when they used inclusive language and encouraged others to do the same. It was also important to participants that administrators address colleagues who were unaware of their heterosexual privilege, in order to create communities of inclusion. One example of this privilege not being addressed by administrators is the ease at which heterosexual educators can speak about relationships and family in front of parents, students, and colleagues, whereas lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers feel that it is more difficult. Though this may seem like only a small piece of heterosexual privilege, when it and other similar examples go unchecked, then a community of inclusion can never be realized in that school.

Administrators are role models, mediators of justice, and leaders in schools and school communities. Their primary role is to support teachers within a school building. Participants named this support of administrators who immediately addressed issue of language, created inclusive learning environments, and were willing to be voices for the silent and, at times, invisible.

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Teachers

Consistently, participants cited colleagues as their strongest allies. The voices of these educators, especially heterosexual educators, were seen as powerful support both personally and professionally. Participants mentioned how important it was to have other individuals raise equity issues around lesbian, gay, and bisexual topics in the schools. These individuals' actions took some of the burden off lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators to be the only constant voice in faculty meetings and community gatherings.

Strong teacher allies consistently addressed hate language throughout the school building and were not afraid to confront discrimination. Participants discussed moments of transparency when they would feel their sexual orientation revealed as they addressed hate language. Having other educators also combating the problem reduced the participants' anxiety and provided support in a non-verbal manner.

Many participants described numerous verbal and non-verbal ways in which other educators offered ally-ship. Non-verbal signs of support included safe zone signs in classrooms, diverse classroom libraries, and inclusive classroom art. Verbal support included raising issues in faculty meetings, using inclusive language around significant others, and having casual conversations about personal matters in spaces deemed safe by the participants. Participants cited looking for allies through the language that their colleagues used around them. Inclusive language was a key identifier for lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers that there were allies in their school. This language ranged from a positive acknowledgment of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual family member to the inclusion of

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gay subject matter in a conversation, thus signaling that the speaker was a "safe" person. The two allied educators in this study described how they alert others to the fact that they are safe people and the intentionality behind these actions in both verbal and non-verbal ways.

Allied educators were also identified and valued because of their personal awareness of heterosexual privilege. Participants gave specific examples of ally educators who could name the struggles associated with heterosexual privilege and the support this offered, even if immediate change was not possible. For example, one participant discussed the relief he felt when another educator would ask him how he was navigating his sexual orientation in schools. The ally's ability to step into his shoes provided confirmation and validation.

A teaching career is built upon strong relationships with students and with colleagues. Ally educators are friends and provide support networks and safe spaces to discuss successes in and out of the classroom. Every participant in this study was "out" to at least one colleague, which speaks to the importance of having support within a building. For these participants, leaving their sexual orientations at the school door each day was for some impossible because of their activism and for others a necessity due to the climate of their school buildings. Therefore, an ally represented the acknowledgment of multiple identities within a space where separateness was often necessary.

Risk taking alongside lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators and pushing others to move into more inclusive practices were other markers valued by the participant pool.

Some of these risk taking activities included speaking up at faculty meetings and the inclusion of lesbian, gay, and bisexual literature in their classroom. Allies who were willing to be identified and who were willing to act on another individual's behalf sent strong signals to the entire school community, and therefore activated change.

The implications for state and federal policy makers, administrators, and teachers are clear. Each plays a significant role in schools and school communities, and individual and group actions determine the inclusive or exclusive nature of the school culture. Allies act and respond to the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators. They are close colleagues and strong leaders at the school, state, and national levels working to make all schools better lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, parents, and teachers. Allies can also be other lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators who are "pioneers" and pave the way. Allies at all levels are important components of creating inclusive school environments.

Areas for Additional Research

This study points towards five primary areas for further research. The five areas are: the need for a new identity development model; research on ally development; Queer Theory as a way to understand "outness;" risk and resiliency; and transgender educators. Each area needs additional attention to understand the complexities that underlie it and make meaningful connections to the broader research addressing the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators. In reflecting on my own research process, these areas also represent research areas that would benefit from analysis that utilizes a methodology other than heuristics. Although heuristics was best suited for my

exploration of experiences, other areas of research could be better explored with a different qualitative methodology.

The most significant finding of this study was the need for a new identity development model that takes into account a person's professional choices when determining identity synthesis or acceptance. Educators are confronted with school structures and climates that can be socially and politically conservative and governed by outdated modes of leadership, especially in regards to the lack of acknowledgment of heterosexual privilege. It is unfair to force these educators in linear models that do not account for their work culture and setting. The continued hierarchy and power given to those who are "out" by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, and transgender community, undermines the self-esteem and contributions of individuals who work in contexts where "out" is not a luxury, but a battle. Developmental theorists need to properly examine how personal identities intersect with professional environments when conceptualizing a new theory. Until this dichotomy of personal and professional identities is addressed, many lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators will continue to feel divided and separate. While this study has clearly identified the need for a new model, it was not able to create a new theoretical model for identity development due to the limitations in methodological choice, sample size, scope of interviews, and primary research question.

As discussed in the implications section of this chapter, the ally is a central person in the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators. Future research needs to study ally

development and activism. The two allies in this study discussed their desire for professional development on how they can continue to be agents of change in their school buildings. Many others may not realize the role they could play in schools and therefore research is needed on effective ways of recognizing and developing the talents of potential allies. This research agenda could also be expanded to include allies of other minority groups and how taking a holistic approach to creating inclusive environments serves the needs of all students and educators. Additionally, research on how lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators support and act as allies to one another, would strengthen the field.

Queer Theory and its potential as a reframing tool, as discussed in Chapter 5, is an area for further research. Researchers could examine model teacher education programs which recognize that the teacher is more than one who delivers content. These programs address issues of identity, privilege, and power. In those discussions researchers could analyze whether Queer Theory is an effective tool to show the power in removing either-or dichotomies, and thus offering lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual educators a different way to envision professional choices. In this research, being "out" would no longer be set as the goal to obtain for synthesis, but rather individuals could make decisions based on individual circumstances and yet still have these valued equally. Queer Theory analysis could examine if lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual educators would feel less dissonance when moving from personal to professional lives with the values implied by society, but would rather see the move between personal and

profession circles as more fluid and easier. The key component of fluidity would focus on the removal of and value of one level of "outness" being preferable over another level. Master teachers often describe themselves as flexible problem-solvers who can shift classroom activities to accommodate students' needs or teachable moments. Queer Theory may offer a framework for educators to apply the flexibility demonstrated in the classroom activities to their own identity development.

Two other topics that have research implications from this dissertation are resiliency and risk-taking. My participants' experience could benefit others who are examining resiliency and how it is built or destroyed in individuals. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators are often strong examples of resilient individuals, as they can often turn their challenging PK-12 educational experiences into points that they draw strength from as educators. They return to the "scene of a crime" daily and show remarkable indicators of resiliency. Participants discussed being bullied and how going to school every day was a challenge. In many ways, with their role as educator, they return to the "scene of the crime" every time they confront an issue of bullying, hate language, and discrimination for their students. Although this study does not address resiliency, it is a topic worthy of further analysis. The role of risk taking was also evident in this population and merits consideration by researchers. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators balance risk and safety daily and are a population where generalizable results could emerge on how risk taking behaviors are mediated in various employment contexts and settings.

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Finally, not represented in this study and only minimally acknowledged in the literature is the transgender educator. It would be remiss not to include the needs of these individuals in future research. Only one participant raised concerns over the inclusion of transgender issues in his conceptualization of ideal school scenarios, and personally recognized the needs for schools and school districts to proactively examine environments before issues arise. His observations point to the need for research to identify policies and support structures necessary to be inclusive for the transgender educator.

A dissertation is a focused analysis on one gap in a body of literature. As such, it is a small contribution to the known research that hopefully others will continue to add to. This dissertation is focused on expanding the understanding of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators' experiences and the research that surrounds them. The intent was to add additional depth to the narratives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators. The socially and politically conservative context of the State of Colorado, with its relatively new inclusion of non-discrimination policies, makes this study unique due to the fact that the other narrative studies have been conducted in states where there are long standing, extensive safe school laws. Specifically, California and Massachusetts have been sites for similar research, in part because of the laws that address the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students and teachers. In addition to the state context being unique, the chosen methodology hopefully contributes to a greater understanding of experience

lesbian, gay, and bisexual PK-12 teachers and provides future researchers with areas to further enhance the knowledge within the field.

Personal Conclusions

Heuristics is a deeply personal and emotionally taxing methodology. For the purpose of this research, it resulted in a journey of learning on both a personal and an academic level. When visualizing my dissertation process, I underestimated the personal investment I would feel and the deep level of thought needed to complete the process. This study has resulted in many personal insights and will hopefully represent the first of many actions of risk taking in my own professional career.

Chapter 1 began with my personal "coming out" story and therefore it seems appropriate to end the study with a new "coming out" story: a poem that reflects what I have learned, what has changed, and who I am at the end of this quest. This poem is my "coming out" as I seek to support the voices not represented in my data pool and as I seek to know myself. I consider this poem my exit from the "glass closet" and my entrance into the world as an advocate, as an ally, and as a lesbian educator.

My Search for the Missing Narrative

Living the data.
You can never really anticipate how it feels until it overtakes you,
        …at the most unexpected moments;
        just when you feel settled,
        …discomfort,
        …distress.
The purpose of this study,
        find the missing narrative and live the distress.

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The stories shared by the participants are not my story,
        but I see myself,
        I hear myself,
        I feel,
        in one aspect or another,
        in each of the narratives.
While conducting interviews,
        I would flash to moments in my past,
        ... my own fear of the rainbow sticker on a borrowed car,
        …a religious background that taught me to hate,
        …not wanting students to think my silence was shame.
A little nugget of wisdom from a participant,
        would solve a problem pondered for years.
        …what risk taking looks like,
        …how to be an activist,
        …how to come out and just be.
The purpose of this study,
        find the missing narrative and listen.

Starting this project,
        I knew that this was going to be a personal exploration.
        …only in the last stages of creative synthesis,
        that I realized,
        I actually had framed my whole dissertation,
        around my own struggle.
Therefore,
        writing the dissertation for myself,
        …not the narcissistic self;
        …not the self that needs to complete a degree,
        the inner self.
The one that had struggled,
        remained hidden for years.
The purpose of this study,
        find the missing narrative and reveal.

Find identity synthesis,
        …not originally.
Experience again;
        return to the scene of the crime,
        …not intentionally.
Live,

breathe,
and feel the question;
the methodology,
…only on paper,
…I naively thought.
Complete a degree.
…irrelevant now.
The purpose of this study,
find the missing narrative.

Queer Theory,
reframing,
flexibility,
and acceptance.
A lens,
a frame,
a new way to conceptualize.
Conceptualize;
wholeness.
Outness does not equate value,
…or worth,
…or the end.
Identity Synthesis reconsidered.
Reworked.
Reframed.
Fluid.
The purpose of this study,
find the missing narrative within acceptance.

The story that I had searched for.
The map on how to navigate,
how to risk,
how to trust internally,
how to recognize an ally.
Reading all of those books.
Looking for something.
Seeking the answers.
Seeking the stories,
the ones like my own.
Coming up empty.
Not connecting,
not seeing.

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How can I do this?
How can I be a gay educator?
What do I do to get there?
What does it look like?
What does it feel like?
How do I know what the right answer is?
Will I know it when I see it?
The purpose of this study,
       find the missing narrative and answer questions posed.

Share the story.
The story of the elementary teacher,
       the introvert,
       the good girl,
       the one who plays it safe,
       the one who fears rejection.
The story of the lesbian,
       the one with long hair,
       the one who passes,
       the one who wears lipstick,
       the one who looks silly as "Sporty Spice."
The story of the gay educator,
       who wants to be an advocate,
       who wants to be whole,
       who want to be self-assured, on the inside and the outside,
       who wants to know the map.

The map was missing for her.
All the other stories,
       missed the mark,
       the cardinal directions,
       the bridges to navigate,
       those important mile markers to letting you know the right direction.
The purpose of this study,
       find the missing narrative and navigate.

This exploration.
It is for me.
It helped fill in the map,
       BUT
       it is more importantly for the others.
The other elementary school teachers,

the other middle school teachers,
the other high school teachers,
who were too
afraid,
closeted,
silent,
to participate.
As I once was.

This dissertation is for them,
all the voices not in my data pool.
Those still struggling to know.
Those with intersecting identities.
Those still trapped behind the glass closet door.

All those who will seek the text,
seek the map.
Look to see who and how it has gone before.
The dissertation I tried to find many years ago.

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Appendix A: Terminology

A variety of terms are associated with the population of lesbian, gay, bisexual and

transgender people. These terms have been used in accurate and supportive ways where

as others are used to be derogatory and damaging (Campos, 2003). Where appropriate in

the literature review, positive and politically accurate terms have been substituted for

outdated and negative terms. In situations where authors are directly quoted, the original

terms are maintained.

Sexual Orientation

The term describes a person's sexual interest for members of the opposite gender,

the same gender, or either gender. According to Janis Bohan (1996), "While the term

emphasizes the sexual component of interpersonal relationships, in reality any sexual

orientation involves a wide range of feelings, behaviors, experiences, and commitments"

(p. xvi).

> "*Sexual orientation* should be used instead of *sexual preference* because the latter
> suggest that people prefer-or choose-the direction of their sexual interest. Some
> conservative factions believe that a person can change their sexual orientation
> through religious guidance or psychoanalysis. However, most reputable
> organizations maintain that sexual orientation is unchangeable. As such, youth
> cannot be "recruited" to become gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender" (Campos,
> 2003, p. 7).

Queer

The term describes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and what they

personify. Although insulting to some and often politically charged, queer has become a

term of empowerment and is more socially acceptable. Many universities now have Queer Studies programs, and some academic discourse is appropriately assigned under Queer Theory.

Gay

This term has varied meanings. In some instances, it is synonymous with lesbian, gay, or bisexuality and connotes sexual attraction to, romance with, and behaviors toward persons of the same sex. Other times the term is used to describe lesbian, gay, or bisexual men, although the American Psychological Association (1995) suggests that the terms gay men and lesbian be used instead of lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The term can be used broadly to describe modern lesbian, gay, or bisexual life- the social culture, community, and concepts associated with the population considered non-heterosexual. The term has a significant history, with meaning ranging from "merry" same sex love songs in the thirteenth century to prostitution in the nineteenth century (Hogan & Hudson 1998). The American Heritage College Dictionary (1993) elaborates: "Gay may be regarded as offensive when used as a noun to refer to particular individual, as in *There were two gays on the panel:* here a phrase such as *gay people* should be used instead. But there is no objection to the use of the noun in the plural to refer to the general gay community" (p. 565).

Lesbian

This term defines women who have sexual desires or strong emotional affinities for other women. The term is derived from Lesbos, an island east of Greece and the

birthplace of woman poet Sappho (circa 600 B.C.), whose lyrics suggest her passion for other women. Sapphist and gay gal were some of the words historically used to describe the passion, romance, sex, or affinity shared between two women (Hogan & Hudson 1998). Lesbian has become more accepted and readily used since the 1970's (Campos, 2003).

Bisexual

The term denotes persons who are emotionally and sexually attracted to and desire romance with either gender. According to Ruth Westheimer (2000), "Some persons have sexual relationships with men and women at the same time, while others alternate with male and female partners, one after another. Some persons engage in bisexual behavior for relatively short periods of their lives, while for others it is a more stable behavior pattern" (p. 53).

Transgender

The term describes people whose gender identity does not complement their biological anatomy. These are mentally healthy persons whose core existence is the opposite gender. Such people can be heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or bisexual and may cross-dress or pursue sex reassignment surgery if they have no emotional attachment to their body. A male youth could identify himself as a woman, occasionally dress as a woman, and yearn to have romantic and sexual relationships with women; he would be considered transgender, not gay.

Homophobia

The term denotes a fear or hated of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people, their community of what they embody. The term also encompasses the prejudice or discrimination experience by such persons based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Homophobia manifests in a variety of ways, from offensive jokes made about such people or their community to such people being threatened, harassed, or physically assaulted. Social institutions are considered homophobic whenever they deny LGBT people the opportunity to maintain equal rights that ensure a legal recognition of same-sex marriages, adoption of children, and health benefits extensions to same-sex households.

"Coming out"

The phrase indicates the process by which an individual realizes and/or accepts their sexual orientation and acknowledges or reveals this to others. Historically, gay people used this phrase to indicate that a person had accepted their sexual orientation and/or disclosed this to other members of the gay community. The term has taken on an additional meaning that represents political and public declaration of one's sexual orientation and suggests a sense of pride and bravery in the direct line of social rebuke and censure (D'Emilio & Freedman 1997). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people *"come out"* every time they disclose their sexual orientation to others.

Out

The term translates to being open about one's sexual orientation. When a youth announces before her peers that she is a lesbian, she is considered *"out." "Outed" or "outing*," however, is the act of publicizing a person's sexual orientation regardless of the person's desire to conceal that orientation.

In the Closet

The phrase means to conceal one's sexual orientation regardless of whether this is "a state of conscious overt, tacit, or implicit denial of being primarily attracted to the same sex" (Hogan & Hudson 1998, p. 140). People can be "out" about their sexuality, live their life completely *in the closet*, or be in the closet in various social contexts. For instance, a lesbian youth could be in the closet with her parents and school peers, but "out" to her siblings and coworkers.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Forms

The experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual PK-12 educators as they manage their sexual orientation identity within a teaching role

<u>Informed Consent</u>

You are invited to participate in a research study of lesbian, gay and bisexual PK-12 educators in the state of Colorado. The study is being conducted at the University of Denver by Megan Kennedy, Doctoral Student in Curriculum and Instruction. Her contact information is mxxxxx@du.edu and 303-xxx-xxxx.

The study will take about 60 minutes of your time, in the form of an interview, once a week for three weeks. Participation will involve responding to a number of questions about your identity and the identity management strategies connected to your sexual orientation. Your involvement is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question during the interview and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

Participation in this research study will be confidential. Your name or other identifying descriptors will not be used in any publications related to this study. Solely Megan Kennedy will see all information you provide. Although this research does not address the following, I am required to inform you that there are a **few** exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

The benefits of being involved in this study include assisting other educators, administrators and policy makers in better understanding the factors that hinder and support lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers. You may also enjoy the ability to provide information about your own experiences. If you would like a copy of the results of the study, the researcher will be happy to provide one for you. You will, however, receive no monetary compensation for your participation in the project.

Potential risks of being involved include the possibility that discussing *personal experiences* may be upsetting. If this occurs, you have the right to refuse to answer questions or stop the interview at any time. At the start of the study, you will be provided with resources and contact information for mental health care. *Finally,* no deeply

personal questions will be asked, such as ones related to your sexual activity or experiences with violence.

This study and consent form were approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on April 8, 2008.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions, please contact Dr. Dennis Wittmer, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-2431, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303) 871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records.

Informed Consent

Please sign below if you understand and agree to participate.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the research study entitled: Poetry from the Glass Closet: The experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual PK-12 educators as they manage their sexual orientation identity within a teaching role. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I understand that only those over the age of 18 are invited to participate in this study and I certify that I am over the age of 18.

I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____
Signature   Date

_____ I agree to be audio taped
_____ I do not agree to be audio taped

For confidentiality purposes, all audiotapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Principle Researcher's personal residence.

_____   _____
Name   Date

This study and consent form were approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on April 8, 2008

Looking for Colorado PK-12 lesbian, gay, bisexual, or ally educators

You are invited to participate in a research study of lesbian, gay, bisexual or ally PK-12 educators in the state of Colorado. The study is being conducted at the University of Denver by Megan Kennedy, Doctoral Student in Curriculum and Instruction. My contact information is mxxxxx@du.edu and 303-XxX-XxXx.

The study will required three 60 minutes interviews conducted over a period of three-four weeks. Participation will involve responding to a number of questions about your identity and the identity management strategies connected to your sexual orientation or ally status and your role as an educator. Your involvement is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question during the interview and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled and the subject may discontinue participation at any time.

Participation in this research study will be confidential. Your name or other identifying descriptors *will not* be used in any publications related to this study.

The benefits of being involved in this study include assisting other educators, administrators and policy makers in better understanding the factors that hinder and support lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers. You may also enjoy the ability to provide information about your own experiences. If you would like a copy of the results of the study, the researcher will be happy to provide one for you. You will, however, receive no monetary compensation for your participation in the project.

Potential risks of being involved include the possibility that discussing *personal experiences* may be upsetting. If this occurs, you have the right to refuse to answer questions or stop the interview at any time.   At the start of the study, you will be provided with resources and contact information for mental health care. *Finally,* no deeply personal questions will be asked, such as ones related to your sexual activity or experiences with violence.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact Megan Kennedy. My contact information is mxxxxx@du.edu and 303-XxX-XxXx. Please also feel free to pass this flyer on to other individuals who you think may be interested in this topic.

This study and flyer were approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on June 4, 2008.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions, please contact Dr. Dennis Wittmer, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-2431, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303) 871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol 1

Interview One: Life History

The goal of the first interview will be a focused life history (Seidman, 2006). The questions will seek to create a picture of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers and the context of their experiences. I will be asking questions to try to set the context for their identity as a teacher, as well as a lesbian, gay, and bisexual individual.

Warm-up question: These will be used to gain trust with the participants and develop rapport in order to ease into the interview. Some sample warm-up questions are:

1. Where did you grow up? How long have you lived in Colorado?

2. Tell me about your current teaching assignment.

Interview Protocol 1

1. What are the key events in your personal identity development as an educator? In other words, when did you know you wanted to be a teacher and what brought you to this point in your career?

2. When did you first identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual? Individuals in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community often identify with a "coming out" story. Do you have one that marks your identity formation?

3. How would you describe your level of "outness" or openness in terms of your sexual orientation? Do you have a metaphor or an analogy that would describe this?

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4. Describe a time when you have used (i.e. passing, covering, being implicitly "out", being explicitly "out") management strategy in the school environment.

5. What experiences as a student in the PK-12 system influence you as lesbian, gay, or bisexual educator today?

6. What experiences in teacher preparation do you draw upon as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual educator today?

Appendix E: Interview Protocol 2

Interview Two: Context

The second interview will take the context of the experience and "concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experiences in the topic area of study" (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). The interview will begin with a review of the first interview session to provide the participant the opportunity to share and/or expand on any questions or issues that may have arisen since the first interview. Pending the timing between interviews, interview transcripts will be electronically sent to participants and the first part of this second interview will be dedicated to reviewing the transcripts if available.

Interview Protocol 2

1. What, if any, steps have you taken towards being "out" or open in your personal life, school life, etc ? What have been the motivating factors and effects of each of these steps?

2. Would you like to be more "out"/open? Why/why not?

3. What factors have influenced the choices you have made to reveal or not reveal your sexual orientation to people at school? (i.e. administrators, colleagues, students, parents)

4. What drawback have you experienced or do you see or perceive for educators to be "out" or open in school?

5. How do you personally balance safety and risk in regards to your sexual identity?

6. Where have you found support for your sexual identity?

7. Describe your perfect dream scenario if you or another lesbian, gay, or bisexual individual decided to come "out" in school.

8. Describe your worst nightmare scenario if you or another lesbian, gay, or bisexual individual decided to come "out" in school.

9. How is or has your level of "outness" been evident in your personal teaching environment?

10. How has the concept of integrity played a role in your choices as a lesbian, gay, bisexual educator?

Appendix F: Interview Protocol 3

Interview Three: Meaning

The third interview is about reflecting on the meaning of their experience. This interview

focuses on the emotion and intellectual connections between the interactions and

experiences. It is also about meaning making (Seidman, 2006). The interview will begin

with a review of the second interview session to provide the participant the opportunity to

share and/or expand on any questions or issues that may have arisen since the second

interview. Depending the timing between interviews, interview transcripts will be

electronically sent to participants and the first part of this third interview will be

dedicated to reviewing the transcripts if available.

Interview Protocol 3

1. How has your sexual orientation impacted your career choices? (i.e. school district

choice, teaching level, etc)

2. What rewards have you experienced or do you see or perceive for educators to be

"out" or open in school?

3. Are you a member of any professional organizations for lesbian, gay or bisexual

educators (e.g. GLSTN- Gay, Lesbian and Straight Teachers Network)? Why/why not?

4. Has your sexual orientation impacted your educational philosophy? If so, how?

5. Describe the view from your "glass closet", today and what it looked like 10 years ago.

6. Current media/pop TV has changed in the past 10 years in its inclusion of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Do you think this has impacted you personally and/or professionally?

7. What advice would you give to school officials or policy makers as they create laws and policies to support lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators?

8. What advice would you provide, or stories would you tell, to a lesbian, gay, or bisexual student who is considering a career in the teaching profession?