Private Versus Public:
How One Gay Professor Negotiates the Boundaries Between His Personal and Professional Lives

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Abstract

This study examined how one university professor negotiated the boundaries between his personal life as a gay man and his professional life as a teacher. Using his sexual orientation as a focal point, the study explored the circumstances and underlying assumptions that influenced this professor's decisions to disclose information of a personal nature. Data collection was solicited from a number of sources: (a) In-depth interviews with the participant, his colleagues, students, and friends; (b) Field observation of the participant teaching over a 3-day period; and (c) A document review of lesson plans, course outlines, student feedback forms, and the participant's teaching portfolio. The researcher maintained both observation journals and reflective journals during this process. Data analysis using the constant comparative method elicited several themes. The participant engaged in a variety of strategies in disclosing his sexual orientation that included: (a) no disclosure at all, (b) assuming people knew, (c) casually mentioning it in conversation, and (d) deliberately planning to tell someone. The participant also engaged in an ongoing assessment of his environment that included evaluating the level of risk in disclosing his sexual orientation and assessing the listener's ability to receive the information. The participant cited numerous reasons for disclosing his sexual orientation. Further inquiry revealed a number of belief systems that underlined these reasons. These belief systems included beliefs around privacy, authenticity, teaching, manners, professionalism, and homosexuality. The conclusions suggested that the participant utilized a consistent process in both his personal and professional lives to determine what information was kept private and what information was made public. While the process used to determine the degree of disclosure was consistent, the actual disclosures themselves varied widely in nature.
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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

There has been growing interest in the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers over the past decade. A number of studies have examined how being gay or lesbian impacts teachers’ lives (Jennings, 1994; McNaron, 1997; Parravano, 1995). Many of these studies have included narratives of how gay and lesbian teachers disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace and the perceived impact of these disclosures. More recent studies have begun to question why teachers are revealing (or not revealing) their sexual orientation in their classrooms (Eyre, 1997; Khayatt, 1998; Tierney, 1997).

This is a study of how one gay professor negotiated the boundaries between his private and public identities. I examined the factors affecting this professor’s decision to disclose his sexual orientation. I documented how this professor negotiated his private identity as a gay man with his public identity as a teacher by exploring his approaches, rationales, and assumptions. Through interviews with both the professor, his colleagues, his friends, and his students, I captured the complexity of the decision-making process this professor used in disclosing his sexual orientation.

Background of the Problem

When I “came out” as a gay man over 4 years ago, I had just accepted a full-time teaching position at an Ontario community college. I began questioning how and what I should disclose about my personal life to my colleagues, students, and the institution. I started actively looking for guidelines: some literature that would assist me in determining what was appropriate to disclose and what was not. Much to my dismay, I found very little literature to assist me and what literature I did find seemed
contradictory. I was left with growing questions about why I should disclose my sexual orientation at all, and what role, if any, my personal life had in my teaching.

The Ontario College of Teachers (1999) has recently developed standards of practice and ethical standards for the teaching profession. Within these standards, teachers are expected to: (a) maintain professional relationships with students; (b) develop in students respect for social justice, human dignity, and freedom; (c) support the social, moral, intellectual, and emotional development of students; and (d) act with integrity, honesty, fairness, and dignity. While the postsecondary sector has no similar explicit guidelines, unspoken expectations exist and when they are broken, scandal usually ensues. A clear example was the suspension and review of Gerald Hannon from Ryerson Polytechnic University in 1995 based on his having expressed unpopular opinions about sex, boys, and escorts outside his university classroom (Simick, 1999; Small, 1996; Wolper, 1996). One Toronto newspaper headline read, "Hooker-Prof Slams 'Bush League' Ryerson" (Nesdoly, 1996). While this particular incident may seem extreme in nature, it exemplifies the impact community expectations have on the role of teachers.

Relatively little has been written about how we teachers, as individuals with private lives, must live in this very public forum of opinion. How do teachers decide where their personal lives and experiences add value to their teaching? When does disclosing too much of a teacher's private life become inappropriate? How are teachers, institutions, and students negotiating boundaries between an educator's personal life and his/her role as a professional who is accountable to the public?
According to much of the literature, gay and lesbian teachers must be especially careful about how they negotiate the degree of personal information they disclose about themselves in their educational settings (Jennings, 1994; McNaron, 1997; Tierney, 1993). The decision to "come out," that is, publicly disclose their sexual orientation, can carry severe and sometime negative consequences, both personally and professionally. While heterosexual teachers must also negotiate the degree of personal information they disclose about themselves, the issue of sexual orientation does not present the same set of problems. Without any declaration to the contrary, our culture assumes heterosexuality as the norm and teachers are presumed to be heterosexual unless they identify/declare otherwise. Such declarations of homosexuality are often questioned for their relevance and can lead to isolation, denial of funding, or threats (Ontario Federation of Students, 1991; Reidy, 1993).

The decision to come out as a gay or lesbian teacher is compounded by the very public nature of teaching and the community standards teachers are held up to. Teachers are perceived to be moral guardians of our children; teaching them moral responsibility, social justice, and equity issues (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Ontario College of Teachers, 1999). Teachers are expected to be honest, open, accessible, and good role models for students. Yet they are also expected (in some cases, legislated) to regulate the sexual behaviour of their students, conditioning them to conform to appropriate social norms, all while suppressing and denying their own sexual identities through dress and behaviour (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). The community standards for teachers are different from many other professions and, in some instances, are difficult if not impossible to achieve
simultaneously. These contradictions in the expectations of the teaching profession can create serious rifts for the gay or lesbian teacher.

The coming out process is even more complicated by teachers' own personal perceptions of what it means to be an authentic teacher and role model for the students with whom they work. "Out" teachers must make conscious decisions about why, what, when, and how to disclose personal information to their students and colleagues. Gay educators, in large part because of their sexual orientation, must seriously weigh the consequences of any public disclosure.

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

There is a need to arrive at a better understanding of how teachers negotiate their private and public identities. For Canadian gay or lesbian teachers, there is little information, documentation, or precedent established to guide them in the disclosure of their sexual orientation in the workplace. While studies in the United States and Britain have focussed on the impact of teachers coming out of the closet, there is little research addressing the underlying factors, values, and assumptions that affect how they arrived at these decisions. There is a need to better understand the process by which gay professors decide how, what, where, and to whom they disclose their sexual orientation.

Through an in-depth case study of one gay university professor, this study attempted to answer: (a) How did this professor negotiate the boundaries between his private life as a gay man and his public life as an educator, and (b) What factors and beliefs guided his decisions to disclose personal information about himself (in particular his sexual orientation) to his friends, colleagues, and students?

Subquestions explored in the study included:
1. How did he disclose his sexual orientation?
2. To what degree did he disclose his sexual orientation?
3. What process did he use to decide what, when, where, and to whom he disclosed?
4. What factors affected that process?
5. What beliefs affected that process?

Definitions of Terms

The word gay is used in the literature to define a man who forms his primary sexual/romantic relationships with other men. The term began to be used by homosexual men in the late 19th century to describe themselves and came into common usage in the 1940s. Being gay is distinguished from being homosexual: Homosexual is considered a clinical term within the gay community and refers primarily to sexual behaviour. For a man to be gay, he is considered to have integrated his sexual feelings for other men into his self-identity, regardless of whether he engages in any sexual activity. While the word is occasionally used to describe both men and women, the term lesbian is more often used in identifying women who form primary sexual/romantic relationships with other women (Clark, 1987; Isay, 1996; National Museum and Archive of Lesbian and Gay History, 1996; Tierney, 1997).

The terms coming out and out of the closet refer to the process by which gay and lesbian people reveal their sexual orientation to others. Some of the literature describes coming out as a distinct one-time phase in the development of a gay or lesbian person, as in an adolescent phase (Vargo, 1998). Other literature suggests coming out is a continual process: Theorists such as Isay (1996) assert that there is always someone new to whom one must disclose one’s sexual orientation.
The term *queer* has more recently been used in the literature to inclusively describe gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. In some instances, the word *queer* has taken on a broader range, referring to anyone who challenges or does not fit into the heterosexual norm. *Queer theory* is the branch of lesbian and gay studies that questions cultural/sexual norms and the construction of sexual identity (National Museum and Archive of Lesbian and Gay History, 1996; Ristock & Taylor, 1998; Tierney, 1997).

*Privacy* is a term identified in the literature as control of access to information that others have about you (Mohr, 1992). *Privacy* is distinguished from *secrecy*, which is defined as the intentional concealment of information about yourself. Mohr notes that while *privacy* and *secrecy* may overlap, they are not synonymous terms: Not all things private are necessarily secret, nor do all things secret necessarily enjoy the right to privacy.

Defining *professionalism* in teaching has been an ongoing and often controversial topic in the literature. The term *professionalism* is used frequently in the literature with little clarification or definition. Diessner (1997) stated that *professionalism* is not defined by the content of work but rather how it is performed. Diessner referred to two common elements of professionalism: (a) the right and responsibility to act from principle as opposed to rules, and (b) the right and responsibility to evaluate the effectiveness of one's own work. Edstam (1998) identified four similar attributes of professionalism: (a) a feeling of autonomy, (b) a sense of calling to the field, (c) the use of a professional organization as a referant, and (d) belief in self-regulation. Professionalism seems to include belonging to an identified and self-regulated group that holds a code of ethics to guide the conduct of its members (Campbell, 1999). Sackett (1993) identified several
core components to this code of ethics for teaching. They included honesty, courage, care, custody, fairness, and wisdom.

The term authenticity was used broadly by both the researcher and participant throughout the collection period. Brookfield (1995) defined authenticity as teachers finding their voice. In order to be authentic, he asserted that teachers must be able to distinguish their own perspectives from the opinions and assumptions of others. For Brookfield, authentic teachers must not only find their voice, but also speak and act upon it. For others (Tierney, 1997; Wyett, 1997), authenticity is associated with being honest and open and is identified as an integral component to effective teaching. Although the use of the word authenticity can be problematic, no attempt to clearly define authenticity was made during this study. The concept of authenticity as a social construction requires further research and study (particularly in teaching).

Rationale for the Study

There are a growing number of studies on the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers in education. However, almost all of the literature reviewed examined the experiences of gays and lesbians in the American or British educational system. Of over 50 sources cited in the literature review conducted for this study, only six studies were based on Canadian data. Most of the studies reviewed examined teaching at the elementary/secondary school level. The studies that have focussed on gay and lesbian teachers have primarily been concerned with their experiences of homophobia and heterosexism. While these studies have explored the impact of homophobic acts and coming out of the closet, most have not addressed the underlying factors, values, and assumptions that affect how gay teachers chose to disclose personal information. There is
little documentation on the processes by which gay teachers have decided to disclose personal information.

Significance of the Study

Studying the processes that one gay professor has used to disclose his sexual orientation has several benefits. It provides better understanding of how people arrive at decisions to disclose their sexual orientation. It also gives insight into how beliefs about teaching, authenticity, privacy, and homosexuality intersect.

This study is of interest to other gay and lesbian academics who are, as I am, concerned about how they manage their private and public identities. It is also of interest to researchers, teachers, and teacher organizations that deal with issues of privacy, ethics, and sexuality in the classroom. My participant taught in the Faculty of Education for a mid-size university. What are the implications of his personal disclosures as an educator of future educators? What role does he play in how his students will ultimately interact with their students?

The study is of interest to educational institutions that are interested in teacher identity development and the educational impact of having openly out teachers on campus. How does being out affect a teacher’s contribution to the academic community? Does being “in the closet” hinder valid academic contribution? Does being gay actually alter one’s view of the world? What is the impact on their colleagues and students?

The study is designed to contribute to current theories about teacher identity development, to queer theory, and gay and lesbian studies/practices in education. It is intended to broaden the pool of research on this subject and suggest implications for further studies on teacher identity development.
Scope and Limitations

This study focussed on the act of disclosure by one gay male professor at a university in Ontario. The intent of this study was to capture information about how this gay male professor made choices about the integration and separation of his private life and public identity as a teacher. This approach is consistent with current theory that supports in-depth single case studies. The researchers in single case studies attempt to immerse themselves in the problem under study in order to uncover processes that might be missed by more superficial methods (Biddle & Anderson, 1986). Biddle and Anderson cite two difficulties with single case studies, both of which apply to this study: (a) The data are not generalizable to the broader teaching community, and (b) The study is difficult to reproduce in that other researchers would bring different experiences and interests to the research.

The data collection relied extensively on recall and reflection. While field observation and document review were used to collaborate the narrative and anecdotal evidence collected, it is acknowledged that the data rely heavily on the perceptions and memory of both the participant and the researcher. Due to the high involvement of the participant in this research, it was anticipated that his behaviours and opinions regarding the problem under study would change during the period of study. Questions regarding how the research affected his perceptions were explored during the study.

The data also relied heavily on the researcher’s own personal reflections through the collection process. Personal observations, field notes, and reflective journals were kept to document the researcher’s own personal experience during this process. It should be noted here that the data collected during this research in a study of the social
constructions of both the participant and the researcher. At no point in time have the researcher and the participant assumed this study to be objective.

For the sake of feasibility, this study was conducted over a brief period of time: the primary data collection period (interviews and field observations) happened over a period of 1 week. A more extensive study of an individual’s progress from education student to professor, while desirable, was not feasible. The intent of this study was to provide a snapshot in time of how one professor was managing his private and public identities in the forum of his teaching.

Lastly, the complexity of the problem under study posed limitations on the comprehensiveness of the data. Issues of race, class, ethnicity, and gender were not explored as part of the study. Both the participant and researcher are young, white, middle-class professors in the postsecondary sector. The assumptions, beliefs, and practices uncovered by us represent only a fraction of a longer and broader field of inquiry—much work in this area remains to be done.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

Chapter 2 identifies current themes and ideas in the literature. The literature is reviewed in light of three major themes: (a) degrees of disclosure (how, why, and to what degree gay and lesbian faculty disclose their sexual orientation), (b) teacher identity development and its impact on gay and lesbian faculty; and (c) underlying assumptions around privacy, role-modelling, socially acceptable behaviour, and homosexuality.

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the methodology used in this study. It includes a description of the research methodology, the design of the research, and how the participant was selected. It also describes instrumentation used, field/classroom
procedures, and how the data were collected and recorded. Lastly, it describes the data analysis phase and identifies some assumptions and limitations concerning the process.

Chapter 4 describes the findings of the study. It begins with a detailed portrait of the participant, and then identifies three major themes that emerged from the data. Each theme is discussed in detail with quotes from the interviews and observation notes to support and illustrate each claim. A summary at the end integrates all three themes to give the reader a more wholistic picture of the findings.

Chapter 5 provides a summary and a conclusion, along with a list of recommendations. It begins with a summary of what the literature review revealed followed by a summary of the findings. It then moves into conclusions that compare the findings and the literature. Several key assumptions made visible through the study are identified in this chapter and each is discussed in detail. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of this study for practice, theory, and future research.
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CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is a growing body of literature on gays and lesbians in education. While many studies have been conducted on gay and lesbian youth, until recently, there has been relatively little research on gay and lesbian educators. It is only within the past 10 years that studies have emerged that explore the experience and impact of gay and lesbian teachers. Much of this work has been done by gay and lesbian professors themselves and form part of the body of work that is currently referred to as "queer theory" or "sexual identity studies."

While no review could possibly cover all aspects of such a complex subject as identity management, this review explored several key components. Sections in this chapter include:

1. Degrees of Disclosure
   a. How and to what degree gay and lesbian faculty disclose sexual orientation
   b. Why gay and lesbian faculty disclose
   c. Reasons for not disclosing: Reprisals and homophobia

2. Teacher Identity Development
   a. How society's definitions of good teaching impact gay and lesbian faculty
   b. The role of authenticity in teaching and the disclosure of sexual orientation
   c. How being out of the closet impacts on a gay or lesbian teacher's identity

3. Underlying Assumptions
   a. The role of beliefs around privacy in the negotiation of a teacher's disclosure
   b. Beliefs around role-modelling in the literature
   c. The impact of beliefs around homosexuality on teacher identity
It should be noted here that while this review refers at times to both gay and lesbian professors, this study was contained to the observation of one gay male professor. As such, there are many areas/issues surrounding lesbians in education that remain untouched by this review of the literature.

Degrees of Disclosure

How and to What Degree Gay and Lesbian Faculty Disclose Sexual Orientation

A search of the literature revealed disagreement among gay and lesbian faculty regarding disclosure of sexual orientation. Certainly not all of the respondents in the studies had negative experiences in publicly disclosing their sexual orientation: Several reported very positive experiences (Jennings, 1994; McNaron, 1997). While the majority of participants in the studies reviewed saw the value of public disclosure (Jennings, 1994; McNaron, 1997; Parravano, 1995), they described a variety of methods and levels of disclosure. McNaron (1997) reported to her surprise that many faculty in postsecondary education were out to colleagues and individual students, but not to their classes or institutions. Ironically, while almost all of the participants spoke of the societal, political, and community benefits of coming out, all of the participants agreed that the decision to come out was a personal one that must be left to the individual teacher.

Pat Griffin (cited in Vargo, 1998, p. 87) conducted a study of 15 gay and lesbian educators to observe how they managed their sexual identity. She discovered that these educators had no overall identity management plan. Their disclosure of their sexual identity was handled on a situational basis, largely in self-defense. She described four strategies for negotiating their sexual identities at work: (a) Attempting to pass as straight by deliberately misleading others; (b) Attempting to pass as straight, not by
misleading people, but by refusing to provide information to confirm that they were gay; (c) Implicitly out of the closet in which participants talked freely about their lives and relationships but never actually said, "I am gay"; and (d) Explicitly out to colleagues they trust but not out to the entire institution. She noted that only two teachers she interviewed were out to a student; none were out to entire classes.

Woods and Lucas (1993) conducted interviews with 70 gay men between 1990 and 1991. They described four approaches to disclosing sexual orientation. The first was minimizing visibility, in which hints were dropped or partner's names were casually mentioned but there was no overt discussion about being gay. The second approach was normalizing the abnormal, in which the participant, hoping to better fit in, attempted to convince others that his homosexual life was very similar to their heterosexual lifestyle. The third approach was dignifying difference, in which the participant openly acknowledged differences and attempted to articulate the benefits to being gay. The last method was politicizing marginality, a confrontational approach to dealing with first-hand discriminatory treatment.

Both the Griffin study and the Woods and Lucas study suggested that the majority of gay and lesbian educators saw disclosure as a personal act, not a political or public one.

A Dutch study of gay and lesbian educators identified three common patterns of disclosure: (a) normal, in which a teacher passes for heterosexual, (b) camp, in which a teacher doesn't announce his/her orientation, but uses humour and gay stereotypes to challenge cultural norms, and (c) gay, in which teachers are openly out and politically
active (as in advocates for social change). The participants in this study clearly saw disclosure as a public and political act (Dankmetjer, cited in Vargo, 1998, p. 89).

**Why Gay and Lesbian Faculty Disclose**

There is relatively little literature on the pedagogical and ideological reasons for why gay and lesbian teachers would disclose personal information about themselves. Martindale (1997) referred to this lack of research as a malady in the larger picture surrounding queer pedagogy:

While there is an abundance of literature in gay and lesbian studies about how to run an antihomophobia workshop, how to come out to students, how students can organize for lesbian and gay studies, and how to set up and devise curricula for courses in a variety of disciplines and institutional settings, very little has been written about the philosophies of teaching that presumably inform these activities or about their historical and ideological relationship to other and older pedagogies, such as feminist and critical pedagogies, from which they have arisen as critiques. (Martindale, 1997, p. 64)

Khayatt (1998) is one of the few researchers exploring educators' reasons for disclosing their sexual orientation. In a recent article, she examined four common themes that emerged from her research with gay and lesbian participants. The themes cited were: (a) to be a positive model for all students, (b) to support gay and lesbian students, (c) to unsettle the dominance of heterosexuality, and (d) to avoid institutionalizing homophobia. In the article, Khayatt questioned whether the data actually supported teachers' rationales for disclosing.
Vargo pointed to a common belief amongst gay and lesbians that coming out in large numbers will shift the public’s perceptions of homosexuality and end prejudice and discrimination. This belief goes back as early as the 1970s and is attributed by Vargo to some of the more public disclosures of lesbians and gay men, most noticeably Harvey Milk (first openly gay city official in the United States), Larry Kramer (openly gay playwright), and Dave Kopay (former NFL Linebacker; Vargo, 1998, p. 130).

Martindale (1997) questioned the assumption that coming out will positively influence public perceptions. She rejected the belief that providing people with a greater degree of knowledge about gays and lesbians would automatically bring about an end to prejudice and misunderstanding. In supporting her claim, she cited Sedgewick (1990) who asserted that ignorance is an active, not passive, state and that it is actively produced, maintained, and defended by individuals. Martindale concluded that informing people about gays and lesbians is as likely to produce a negative or threatened response as it is to produce a positive one.

Reasons for Not Disclosing: Reprisals and Homophobia

Gay and lesbian people cited fear of reprisal as the number one reason for not disclosing their sexual orientation in almost all of the surveys reviewed. Participants cited actual incidents of reprisal that included graffiti, loss of favour in the department, isolation, and threats (Jennings, 1994; McNaron, 1997; Ontario Federation of Students, 1991; Reidy, 1993; and others).

In a survey of 121 gay students on campus, D'Augelli (1992) found that 77 % of respondents had experienced some form of verbal harassment, and 27 % were actually threatened with physical violence. In a recent focus group study conducted at several
California universities, lesbian and gay participants identified a wide range of experiences that began with explicit marginalization (acts of hostility) and ended with explicit centralization (inclusion of lesbian and gay viewpoints in the curriculum). Students in the study cited differing responses to their environment that included publicly coming out, remaining closeted, or dropping out (Desurra & Church, 1994).

Another survey conducted by LaSalle (1992) examined attitudes and tolerance of the general campus population towards gays and lesbians. An overwhelming 71% of the responses were negative. The negative responses were based upon one of four factors: (a) moral or religious grounds, (b) opinions that homosexuality is abnormal or deviant, (c) opinions that sexual orientation is a private matter to be discussed only behind closed doors, or (d) opinions that the topic is not worthy of discussion at all.

This fear and reluctance appears to have carried over into the teaching profession. Studies of lesbian and gay teachers, although relatively few, have identified the same concerns of lesbian and gay undergraduates; namely, marginalization, invisibilization, and victimization (Epstein, 1994; Kissen, 1993). A 1995 study of 16 lesbian and gay educators in Ontario (one of the few such studies in the province) concluded that an overwhelming number or respondents have experienced some sort of homophobia in the workplace (Parravano, 1995). These results are supported by other studies conducted in the United States (Jennings, 1994; McNaron, 1997; Snelbecker, 1994).

Martindale (1997) argued that institutions play a critical, if unwitting or unintentional role, in shaping the culture of the organization. She argued that the method by which institutions handle other marginalized groups (including women and people of colour) creates a level of expectation (be it positive or negative) as to how it will respond
to gay and lesbian issues. Many of the studies cited here indicated a number of institutional initiatives colleges and universities can take to make the environment more inviting for the openly out professor or student. They included: (a) incorporating gay and lesbian people in antidiscrimination and employment equity policies, (b) dealing swiftly with incidents of homophobia, and (c) including same-sex benefits for gay and lesbian employees (McNaron, 1997; OFS, 1991; Reidy, 1993; Tierney, 1993).

Teacher Identity Development

How Society's Definitions of Good Teaching Impact Gay and Lesbian Faculty

Some of the literature reviewed suggested that definitions of good teachers and good teaching are changing. Hare (1993) argued that teaching was often reduced to a set of trainable skills and competencies. In this model, teachers became knowledge experts and were provided with the necessary skills they required to be effective in the classroom. Hare argued that this model was outdated and proposed a new model that evaluated humility, courage, impartiality, open-mindedness, empathy, enthusiasm, judgement, and imagination.

Even if the definition of good teaching is changing, several studies suggested that the perception of a good teacher has not. Weber and Mitchell (1995) conducted an analysis of pictures drawn by both students and student teachers. They concluded that teacher identity was seen as synonymous with the teacher's role and function. Most drawings had teachers demanding obedience and order, promoting work, suppressing pleasure, and nurturing students. Teacher dress was depicted as nondescript, conservative, dull, respectable, and middle-class. Teachers were viewed as asexual and concerned only with matters of the mind; when they did not fit this stereotype, they were
labelled rebellious, romantic, eccentric, or hip. Even student teachers in this study shared these perceptions. Several of the teachers admitted that they used dress as a pedagogical strategy to command respect and order and establish a working atmosphere in their classroom. Weber and Mitchell pointed out the difficulties imposed by these dress expectations for those teachers working with small children where a great deal of physical movement and activity is required.

Epstein and Johnson (1998) investigated teaching and the regulation of sexuality in schools in England over a 5-year period. Through interviews and field observations, they concluded that teachers often face a contradictory set of expectations both inside and outside the classroom. They concluded that one of the most powerful ways teachers regulated their sexual identity was through dress. Time and again, Epstein and Johnson reported that teachers were "desexualized" through their very conservative and non-sexual dress codes. The pressure to wear conservative business attire, while justified as conforming to standards of professional conduct, succeeded (in Epstein and Johnson's opinion) in suppressing and regulating teacher's sexual identities.

Epstein and Johnson also noted that teachers were expected to be moral guardians of children by the community. As such, they were expected to have "exemplary" lives, which Epstein and Johnson concluded meant heterosexual, married, and with children. Teachers were not to engage in sexual relations with students, nor should they ever indicate that they are sexual beings or have a sexual life outside the workplace (aside from vague remarks about a spouse or family).

The situation became further complicated when Epstein and Johnson explored teachers' responsibilities with regard to the regulation of sexuality within their schools.
Teachers had a legal obligation to report incidents of suspected sexual abuse. They were also required to cover core curriculum on sexuality; a curriculum that Epstein and Johnson noted focussed on biological practices and the heterosexual nuclear family as the norm. Ironically, Epstein and Johnson also noted that teachers are expected to regulate the sexual identities of their students, including rebuking students for inappropriate dress or sexual behaviour.

For the gay or lesbian teacher, then, sexuality is a complex and difficult subject to manage within the school system. They are expected to model a traditional heterosexual lifestyle in their personal lives, remove any suggestions of sexuality from their conversation and dress at work, and regulate the sexual behaviour of their students in the classroom.

The Role of Authenticity in Teaching and the Disclosure of Sexual Orientation

There has been pressure on public figures over the past decade to be authentic in their practices and behaviours. Society has come to expect honesty and openness. Teachers, as public figures, have not escaped this expectation.

In education, much has been written about the authentic teacher. Brookfield (1995) made reference to teachers finding their voice. He argued that teachers become social agents and facilitators of change once they learn to trust their own voice and distinguish it from other opinions, assumptions, and theories about their practice. Brookfield asserted that the authentic teacher is in a powerful place to act upon his/her own teaching.

More recently, Wyett (1997) argued that many researchers have moved away from traditional competency models in evaluating teaching effectiveness. According to
Wyett, these models are being replaced with new criteria that include authenticity, respect, and empathy.

Authenticity in the Gay Community

Lesbian and gay teachers, however, do not always have opportunities to be authentic. In a series of interviews conducted by both Reidy (1993) and the Ontario Federation of Students (1991), faculty who publicly came out or chose to study lesbian and gay issues reported being accused of flaunting their sexuality or being obsessed with sex. Many interviewees cited examples of reprisals in the forms of isolation, lack of funding, or denial of tenure. In almost all of the above examples, participants noted that many of their straight colleagues spoke freely about their personal relationships (marriage, children, and family) and studied issues around these same relationships without penalty or consequence. Reidy and the OFS argued that this double standard of heterosexism (that is, the assumption that everyone is or should be heterosexual) diminished the voices of gay and lesbian students and teachers and effectively kept them in the closet.

It would appear, however, that more and more teachers are coming out of the closet. Reasons cited for this turn of events include being an authentic teacher, role-modelling, and fighting homophobia (Jennings, 1994; Khayatt, 1998; McNaron, 1997). These concepts are recent developments in the gay community. In a series of interviews with older gay academics, Tierney (1997) noted generational differences between the attitudes of gay men who grew up in the 50s and 60s and gay men raised in the 70s and 80s. Specifically, he noted that older gay teachers were required to maintain completely separate personal and professional lives during the past several decades. This veil of
secrecy was seen as necessary for their survival and most of them successfully integrated it into their lives without personal trauma or consequence to themselves. The new generation of gay men, however, see this as schizophrenic or inauthentic. Tierney noted that the environmental factors that prohibited gay men from coming out in the 60s have changed and this may account for the increased visibility of a new generation of gay men.

How Being Out of the Closet Impacts on a Gay or Lesbian Teacher's Identity

A number of studies have examined the relationship of being "out" and its impact on teacher identity development. Juul (1993, 1994, 1995, 1996) found a direct relationship between high levels of stress and low levels of self-esteem experienced by gay and lesbian educators, their degree of public disclosure, and their association with other gay and lesbian academics. In her interviews with academics across the country, McNaron (1997) agreed with the conclusion that association with other lesbian and gay academics had a positive impact on these teachers' development. Ironically, however, Parravano (1995) found a relationship between high levels of public disclosure and increased incidents of homophobia.

Brookfield (1995) noted that teachers are far more likely to be influenced by their formative memories and life experiences than by formal education. It is these kinds of experiences, he has argued, that shape teaching philosophies and methodologies in the classroom. However, the omission of gay and lesbian issues from academic discourse and the curriculum (as identified earlier) has left a void for lesbian and gay people. Without legitimate vehicles in academia, lesbian and gay faculty do not have the opportunity to thoroughly examine their experiences and the implications for their praxis.
The isolation of their sexual identity from their professional identity for gay and lesbian teachers may have more serious implications for their development as college instructors. As Brookfield noted:

If college teachers define themselves only as content or skills experts within some narrowly restricted domain, they effectively cut themselves off from some broader identity as change agents involved in helping students shape the world they inhabit. What is needed to counter this tendency towards isolated separatism is an underlying rationale for college teaching.... Teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than it was before you practiced your craft. (Brookfield, 1990, p. 17)

Significantly, McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) have argued that silencing different groups (including gays and lesbians) in the educational system only serves to damage academic discourse and marginalize members of the academic community from making meaningful contributions. Tierney (1993) also asserted that oppressing gays and lesbians inhibits the construction of knowledge and supports a singular notion of truth. Tierney suggested that academic institutions must reinvent themselves as communities of difference that celebrate multiple constructions of knowledge if they wish to maximize the instructional contribution of gay and lesbian teachers.

Underlying Assumptions

The Role of Beliefs Around Privacy in the Negotiation of Teacher Disclosure

There appeared to be a wide range of disagreement in the literature over privacy and the "right to privacy." While there was general consensus on the definition of privacy, discussion of its application reflected a range in opinion. These differences
became intensified when the application of privacy was applied to the issue of sexual identity/orientation and coming out of the closet.

Mohr (1992) made the distinction between privacy and secrecy. He defined privacy as the control of access to information others have. In this sense, privacy incurs several normative rights, most noticeably the right to bar others from access to information about oneself, as in the "right to privacy." Mohr defines secrecy as the intentional concealment of information. In the normative sense, there is no "right to secrecy." As Mohr put it, "Control of access is the core of privacy; hiding is the core of secrecy" (p. 12). Mohr argued that while privacy and secrecy overlap, they are not synonymous. He asserted that many things that are private are not necessarily secret. One example he cites is marriage and children. While marriage is viewed as a private matter, the act of marriage is not: it is a public institution in society. In marrying, people make a public and legal commitment that is enforced by society; a commitment visually symbolized by the wearing of wedding rings. When heterosexual couples discuss their children, they inadvertently reveal considerable information about their sexual lives; including the fact that they (most likely) engaged in unsafe/unprotected sexual activities in order to get pregnant (Mohr, 1992).

Mohr concluded that one's intimate relationships are not a private matter that, in the normative sense, invokes a right to bar access to that information. He suggested that people who invoke the right to privacy with regard to their sexual identity (and in particular their same-sex relationships) have incorrectly collapsed privacy with secrecy.

While Mohr's view may seem extreme to some, other academics have argued that teachers should have complete control over information regarding sexual orientation.
Barbone and Rice viewed the right to control access of information about themselves as extensive:

[W]e can and should be able to conceal our sexual orientation for the same reason we conceal our bank accounts, our lovers' tastes in food, or a myriad of other information, not because the content of the information is a source of shame (to us), but rather because our interlocutor does not enjoy a level of access which makes such information appropriate. (Barbone & Rice, cited in Vargo, 1998, p. 121)

Vargo suggested that a number of teachers believe that their private life has no bearing on teaching. These teachers argued that their professional life and their personal life are completely distinct and separate: their personal life has no place in their classroom. Vargo noted that while many teachers do not share this belief, they feel pressured by their profession to maintain the artificial distinction (Vargo, 1998).

Beliefs Around Role-Modelling in the Literature

In several of the studies conducted, gay and lesbian teachers reported an internal conflict between the possible consequences and reprisals from coming out publicly, and their desire to serve as role models for youth (both gay and straight). In interviews that Jennings (1994) conducted with gay teachers across the United States, almost all participants commented on the difference they felt coming out made for their students, particularly the lesbian and gay students. Rensenbrink (1996) concluded that a lesbian teacher coming out to a grade school class actually had a positive effect in that it caused the students to engage in critical thinking exercises and to begin questioning cultural norms. Kissen (1993) found similar assumptions in the opinions of gay and lesbian
educators at the postsecondary level. In two of the studies at the postsecondary level, students reported a desire for more gay and lesbian role models in faculty and staff (OFS, 1991; Reidy, 1993).

Other researchers and theorists, however, have questioned this view of gay and lesbian teachers as role models. Khayatt (1998) noted that while many teachers use role-modelling as a compelling reason to come out in class, the evidence suggests its impact could be negative. Identity formation, she noted, is a constantly changing and unpredictable process. She further argued that simple identification with someone (particularly an authority figure) does not automatically translate into imitative behaviour. She concluded that peers and cultural expectations play a more influential role in identity development.

In 1994, Butler examined the attitudes of prospective teachers regarding gay and lesbian issues. The group, which identified itself as largely heterosexual, exhibited a high degree of misinformation about lesbians and gays, and expressed opposition or reluctance to incorporating lesbian and gay issues into the classroom. Eyre (1997) reported similar reactions in a study of health education student teachers: the majority of respondents felt gay and lesbian issues were best relegated to the social science curriculum, if included at all. Almost all respondents indicated that they felt incorporating gay and lesbian issues into the curriculum was a matter of personal choice for the teacher. This is consistent with other studies in which gay and lesbian students reported little empathy, inclusion, or tolerance for lesbian and gay issues in the curriculum (OFS, 1991; Reidy, 1993).

Herek (cited in Vargo, 1998, p. 135) conducted a study on the attitudes of heterosexual people towards lesbian and gay people. He concluded that heterosexual
people had a more positive attitude towards gays and lesbians if they personally knew one openly gay person. This suggests that one of the more powerful outcomes of teachers disclosing their sexual orientation is the impact on attitudes and values of their colleagues, rather than their students.

The Impact of Beliefs Around Homosexuality on Teacher Identity

There were wide ranges of opinions expressed in the literature about homosexuality. Many of those opinions were expressed by gay academics and queer theorists in trying to identify and analyze what it means to be homosexual in a heterosexual society. Bawer (1993) and Sullivan (1995) are American authors who espoused an assimilationist perspective. Both Bawer and Sullivan asserted that gay people are no different than anyone else and that the best strategy for gaining societal acceptance is to emphasize our similarities and downplay any differences. Bawer and Sullivan discouraged any expressions of diversity or difference and frowned upon gay pride parades and flamboyancy, claiming that they were inflammatory and did nothing to advance gay people's cause.

Tierney (1997), on the other hand, argued that Bawer and Sullivan's line of thinking was tantamount to silencing gay and lesbian people and failed to acknowledge inherent differences between the gay and straight communities. He noted that, in many instances, gay people did not receive equitable and fair treatment by playing by the rules. Instead, he cited examples of how gay rights were achieved through vocal protest and citizen unrest. While Tierney acknowledged that alienation from the straight community is not always the best course of action, he asserted that there are many occasions where it is appropriate, if not necessary, to be loud and queer.
In analyzing the assimilationist versus confrontational approach, Tierney suggested that the argument should not focus on how gays represent themselves to the straight community in order to fit in. He asserted that educators in particular should be deconstructing how society drafts its rules for inclusion, how these rules support existing power structures in our society, and their impact on many marginalized groups (gays and lesbians included). He suggested that gay educators could effect more positive change if they were to reconstruct the rules.

Tierney also commented on a consistent practice of gay and lesbian people to suppress their behaviour and feelings in order to avoid negative societal reactions. He spoke specifically of the need to suppress romantic feelings or expressions within the public domain. While he noted that there is a common practice amongst all people, gay or straight, to modify their behaviour in public; he argued that this practice becomes even more complicated and repressive for the gay or lesbian person. For the gay or lesbian person, such overt acts as kissing, touching, or holding hands could result in discrimination, alienation, or even outright hostility.

Summary

Within the past decade, there has been an increasing interest and inquiry into the experiences of gay and lesbian educators. This inquiry has examined the experiences of lesbian and gay faculty, in particular their experiences in coming out and managing their sexual identities at work. The literature identified a number of strategies that lesbian and gay faculty use, which ranged from hiding one's sexual identity to implying it in conversations to being completely out as an advocate for social change. Most lesbian and gay faculty saw the political benefits of coming out, but defended the decision to come
out as a personal choice of the faculty member. The literature also identified a number of belief systems that impacted how lesbian and gay faculty managed their identity.

Student, teacher, and community beliefs around teachers formed a very powerful influence (in some instances, pressure) on how teachers conducted themselves inside and outside the classroom. Beliefs around privacy and professionalism also restricted what faculty would disclose about themselves. The literature identified a number of reasons why teachers come out. Providing positive role models, challenging prejudice and stereotypes, and being authentic were three common themes in teacher reasoning. The literature also identified a number of reasons for not coming out, including fear of reprisal, harassment, or physical abuse. Teachers were required to negotiate the pros and cons of disclosure as part of their coming out experiences.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Overview

This chapter discusses the approach taken to study the research problem in question. It includes a description of the philosophical and historical basis for the methods of study employed. It describes the research design: how and why it was developed, whom it was tested on, and how the participant was selected. Details of the data instrumentation and protocols are provided. A description of the data analysis is provided in detail and the assumptions and limitations of the methodology are discussed.

Description of Research Methodology

Hammersley (1990) described the evolution of an action approach to ethnographic research. In this approach, researchers investigate patterns of activity as products of negotiations and bargaining between groups and individuals. Examining these interactions leads to discovery of assumptions, intentions, motivations, and perspectives. It is this approach that I adopted in examining how the participant of my study negotiated the public disclosure of personal information.

van Manen (1990) described ethnographic research from a phenomenological perspective. He identified six major activities that will form the basis for the research in this study: (a) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us, (b) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it, (c) reflecting on essential themes that characterize the phenomenon, (d) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing, (e) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon, and (f) balancing research by considering both parts and the whole of the phenomenon. I utilized these six activities in guiding my research throughout this study.
Research Design

The research incorporated several different methods of data collection in an attempt to gain a multifaceted perspective of the phenomenon under study. Extensive interviews were conducted with the participant throughout the data collection process. Interviews were also conducted with nine of the participant’s colleagues, friends, and students (hereafter referred to as the key informants). These key informants were jointly selected and approached by the participant and the researcher. Field observations of the participant were conducted over a 3-day period in the participant’s classroom and in the faculty of education where he worked. In addition, I reviewed a number of documents deemed relevant to the phenomenon. These included the participant’s teaching portfolio, his course outlines, student feedback forms, evaluations of the participant’s courses, reading lists for his courses, and institutional policies regarding sexual orientation (specifically, the policy on discrimination/harassment, equity guidelines, and equity sections of the collective agreement). Lastly, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the field observation period to capture my thoughts and impressions of the phenomenon.

Selection of Participant

The participant in this study was selected through purposeful sampling. He was selected based on his professional status as a university professor, his openness with regard to his sexual orientation in his workplace, and his willingness to participate.

I met the participant 3 years ago while visiting a friend at his university. He was completing his Bachelor of Education at the time and we found a common interest in teaching. We have maintained a casual friendship since that time. Both the participant and I share a common gender, class, race, and geographical upbringing. This provided
me as a researcher with an opportunity to extensively compare and reflect on my own practices and beliefs during the data collection period.

Instrumentation

A comprehensive set of interview questions was developed and approved by the Brock Subcommittee on Research with Human Participants. As there are few studies in this particular area of research, the questions were developed primarily from questions posed in the literature (as in areas for further research or study). Similar questions were asked of both the participant and the key informants in an attempt to draw relationships and contradictions out of the data. The questions were pilot tested on two volunteers (friends of the researcher) for validity, that is, did the person interviewed understand the question and did the question elicit the desired type of information.

The questions were intended to provide a framework for the interview. During the interview process, it was anticipated that additional questions and themes would arise from the participant and informants' answers. When this happened, the interview was modified to include this additional material.

Complete copies of the interview guidelines and questions are available in Appendix A.

Field and Classroom Procedures

The researcher in this study assumed the role of observer as participant (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I shadowed the participant for 3 full days, recording observations from the classroom, hallways, meetings, and offices. The participant introduced me to his students, colleagues and friends; along with an explanation of my role and presence. Many of these explanations were made in advance of my arrival on site.
Data from the field were collected through extensive note taking. These fieldnotes took three forms: (a) a condensed account, which included notes taken in the field at the moment of occurrence; (b) the expanded account, which included more detailed accounts and observations that were developed later that day from the condensed account; and (c) the fieldwork journal, which included daily reflections, opinions, and reactions by the researcher (Spradley, 1980).

For a more comprehensive description of the observation protocols, please refer to Appendix B.

Data Collection and Recording

The study consisted of the following components:

(1) An initial interview of the participant to gain an understanding of his issues, concerns, and perception of the problem statement. This interview was conducted in three separate 1-hour sessions.

(2) A document review of the participant’s teaching portfolio (including his teaching philosophy statement), course outlines, institutional policies regarding sexual orientation (including policy on discrimination/harassment, equity guidelines, and equity provisions of collective agreement), reading lists, student feedback forms from individual lectures, and student course evaluation forms.

(3) Field observation of the participant over 3 days. Extensive note taking (see Field Procedures) was made during the observation period. An hour-long interview was conducted with the participant at the end of each day to discuss the data collected.
Interviews with key informants who were perceived to be able to comment on the participant in light of the research problem. Informants were jointly selected by the participant and the researcher based on the length and nature of their relationship with the participant and their willingness/availability to participate.

Given the highly sensitive nature of the data collection, strict confidentiality of the participant, his colleagues, and his students was maintained at all times. All documentation was coded with pseudonyms so that the participant, informants, locations, and institutions could not be identified. The participant's name was changed to Ryan during the writing of this report so that he could not be identified in the reporting of this data.

Data Processing and Analysis

All of the interview transcripts, field notes, and journals were transcribed into Microsoft Word. A review of the documents led to journal entries describing what I found. Relevant pieces of the documents were scanned on a flatbed scanner and converted into a Word file. All of the data were printed and organized in a binder with dividers separating each individual source. In total, it exceeded 350 pages of material.

The data were analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). First, I reread all of the data in the binder; making notes for myself of ideas, phrases, and themes that leapt out to me as I reviewed the material. These notes formed the discovery phase of my analysis and were used later in the analysis to assist in developing categories and themes.

The next phase of analysis involved unitizing the data. In order to automate this process, I designed a database in Microsoft Access to categorize and code the data. Each
piece of data (interview transcripts, field notes, journals, etc.) was broken down into the smallest possible unit of meaning. Each unit was cut and pasted from Microsoft Word into the Access database. In total, the transcripts were broken down into 454 individual units of data. Once all of the data were incorporated into the database, I began systematically categorizing it. Once I coded several units of data with the same category, I developed a proposition (rule for inclusion) for that category. These propositions guided further coding of the data. This process resulted in 41 different categories.

Upon completion of the coding of the data, I generated a report that grouped all of the data under the respective categories. This report also generated the number of units of data within each category. From this report I was able to draw relationships, connections, contradictions, and comparisons between the categories and create groups of categories that I referred to as themes. This process was greatly assisted by my notes from the discovery phase described earlier in my analysis. It was also augmented by a return to the literature to review other studies and opinions of the phenomenon under study.

Once I had grouped most of the categories into themes, I began creating diagrams and flow charts to try to draw an understanding of the relationships between the themes. I created six different diagrams in total, some of which represented completely different models; others that built upon previous versions. These diagrams assisted me in identifying those themes that played a more pivotal role in the phenomenon of disclosure I was investigating.

Having drawn up pictorial representations of my data, I returned to my original research proposal and reread it from start to finish. With my research question fresh in
my mind, I returned to the diagrams and found those that most accurately addressed my original research question. I took the diagrams I found most useful and incorporated them into a PowerPoint presentation that served as a framework/outline for the study.

This framework was shared with the participant in a meeting in May 1999. During that meeting, I went over the entire presentation and asked the participant for feedback. The participant asked for clarification of three points in the presentation and revisions were made to satisfy both of us.

In June of 1999, I presented my initial findings at the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Sherbrooke, Quebec. The group I presented to was the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Studies Association, an organization of lesbian and gay scholars, professors, and masters students from across Canada. Reaction to the presentation was very positive and I received feedback on two very specific areas: (a) the data as presented did not give a sense of who the participant was as a person; and (b) the study needed to more closely examine the concept of implicit and explicit disclosure. In responding to that feedback, I returned to the data to investigate the concepts of implicit and explicit and how they fit into the participant's patterns of disclosure. In addition, I created a more detailed composite of the participant and incorporated as much of his voice as possible into Chapter 4 in order to capture the complexity of him as a person.

The participant engaged in a final review of Chapter 4 prior to the completion of this document.

Methodological Assumptions

There are a number of assumptions at work in this study (as there are in any qualitative study). The greatest assumption at work is that we can accurately capture the
The following text is not legible due to the quality of the image. It appears to be a page of printed text, but the content cannot be accurately transcribed.
complexity of how someone negotiates his or her private and public identities. Although
the Constant Comparative method uses an inductive process to gather meaning from the
data, it is not possible to accurately capture all of the meanings of the data through a
labelling and categorizing process. While I have made attempts to capture the essence of
the data through portraits, anecdotes, and quoted text; I acknowledge that there is far
more content still contained in the data than I could ever capture in this paper.

This situation became even more complicated as the researcher attempted to
negotiate his own private and public identities within the context of conducting the study.
As a gay man studying a gay man, I often found myself struggling with how much to
share with the participant and key informants without unduly influencing their
perspectives, opinions, and voice. It is difficult to ask people to share very personal
views and opinions without expressing any of your own. As a researcher, I walked a fine
line between seeming cold and impersonal and interjecting too much of my opinion into
the discussions. The irony of this situation is that it echoes the very phenomenological
problem the participant was engaged in with his classes.

Lastly, the participant noted on several occasions that he had noticed a shift in his
behaviour while I followed him and interviewed him daily. He responded that he had
become more reflective of his own actions and beliefs as we worked through the study. I
shared in the participant’s experience during the data collection process: I was engaged
in a critically reflective process not unlike the participant’s. While we tried to articulate
and document the effects we noticed, I am cognizant that there are many more effects that
we have not revealed or which went unnoticed by either of us at the time of the study.
Limitations

This study captured the participant's and the researcher's perceptions of the problem under study. Some researchers question the internal validity of data captured through recall and self-reflection: such data collection methods cannot be relied on to accurately capture facts. However, the intent of this study was not to collect facts. The intent of this study was to understand how the participant reflected and made meaning of his experiences, and how this process impacted his decisions to disclose personal information. It should be noted that the participant's recall during the data collection period was fairly recent and there was nothing during the data collection process to suggest that his recall was inaccurate or skewed. I made attempts to assess the validity of the data by comparing and contrasting the participant's recall with observations in the field, interviews with key informants, and extensive document review. There was an internal consistency between all aspects of the data collection.

This study took place over a period of 1 week; hardly time to sufficiently document the complexity of this process and the participant's relationships with other players within the study. A longer-term study, where one could document the participant's negotiation of his private and public identities, was desirable but was not feasible at this time.

As an ethnographic study, this study explored the social constructions and process used by an openly gay male professor teaching at an Ontario university. As such, the data are not generalizable to the broader teaching community or the gay community. The intent of this study was to gain insight into how one particular gay male professor makes choices about the integration and separation of his personal/private life and his public life.
as a teacher. While it is hoped that the findings may provide insight into how other teachers negotiate their private and public lives; it is not an expectation of this study.

Restatement of the Problem

Clearly, there is a need to arrive at a better understanding of how gay teachers negotiate their private and public identities. The review of literature showed that there is little research, protocol, or precedent established to guide the Canadian gay/lesbian teacher in the disclosure of his/her sexual orientation in the workplace. This study investigated the process by which one gay professor decided how, what, where, and to whom he would disclose his sexual orientation.

Through an in-depth case study of this professor, I explored the following questions: (a) How does the professor of this study negotiate the boundaries between his private life as a gay man and his public life as an educator?; and (b) What factors and beliefs guide his decisions to disclose personal information about himself (in particular his sexual orientation) to his friends, colleagues, and students?

Subquestions to be explored include:

- How does he disclose his sexual orientation?
- To what degree does he disclose his sexual orientation?
- What process does he use to decide what to disclose and when?
- What factors affect that process?
- What beliefs affect that process?
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Q. How do you distinguish between your private life as a gay man and your professional/public life as a teacher? Where does one end and the other one begin?

A. I don’t think there is a beginning and an ending. I think there’s definitely a blending. I think that good teaching doesn’t occur without parts of the individual and parts of the self coming through. Part of decisions including values and beliefs and ethics and all of those sorts of things that are personal values come through in teaching. But I think also there are parts of the private life that are just not acceptable in the classroom...like sociocultural definitions and expectations of what’s appropriate and what’s not appropriate in a classroom.

(Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Introduction

The quote above illustrates the complexity of the process the participant of this study engaged in when negotiating his private and public identities. While Ryan (the participant) indicated that the boundaries between what is personal and private and what is personal and public are often blurred, the data suggested that the line is fairly distinct, yet shifts depending on the context and environment of any given situation.

Portrait of the Participant

In order for the reader to obtain a more complete picture of the participant in this study, a brief composite portrait of Ryan (the participant) has been provided.

Ryan is a young adjunct professor in a faculty of education in one of Ontario’s universities. He was offered a one-time teaching contract while he was completing the
final semester of his master of education program. He had approximately 30 students in a final-year course and was a teaching assistant for 131 students in a second-year course. The university he taught at is not located within a major metropolitan area. The majority of students and colleagues interviewed came from a variety of cities and towns across the province.

Ryan was very active on school committees. He sat on the faculty board for the faculty of education as a graduate student representative. He also sat on a planning committee for an annual student conference. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Ryan worked part-time in the faculty of education library.

Ryan is in his mid-20s and was born and raised in a large city North of Toronto. His mother passed away when he was 16 and he moved in with his grandmother shortly after, when his father remarried. He went to a smaller university North of Toronto to earn his undergraduate degree before proceeding to the university he now teaches at to undertake a bachelor of education degree and subsequently his master in education.

Ryan said he knew he was gay in high school but hoped it “was a phase.” He began coming out in his final year of his bachelor of education degree, first to colleagues and friends, then to certain family members (his aunt and grandmother specifically). He had not come out to his father.

Ryan came out to his final-year class in November of 1998. During the data collection period, Ryan came out to another final-year class as part of a guest lecture. He was not out to his second-year class, but he did not consider his sexual orientation to be a secret.
Ryan lived by himself in a one-bedroom apartment near the faculty of education. His living room resembled more of an office: His desk, computer, bookcase, and files occupied half the space, testifying to his dual role as both professor and master's student. Ryan continually emphasized the importance of his friendships in his life and talked frequently of and to his friends.

I would describe Ryan as a very open, accessible, and thoughtful young man. He was very eager and accommodating during the data collection period and took a genuine interest in my study. He tends to be very pragmatic, organized, and dependable. He is very logical and prefers to think out his answers carefully when probed or interviewed. These qualities made the interview and data collection process much easier.

The Major Themes

The analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of three major themes:

(1) **The process used to determine the nature, degree, and timing of disclosures of a personal nature.** The participant drew distinct boundaries between his personal life and his professional life; however, these boundaries were in a constant state of flux. Consequently, the participant described a wide range in the degree and approach he used to disclose personal information, in particular information regarding his sexual orientation. This range was a continuum from no disclosure at all to implicit disclosures to explicit disclosures.

(2) **The ongoing assessment of environment and its effect on disclosure.** The participant engaged in an ongoing assessment of his environment to determine the level of risk and readiness in disclosing personal information, in particular
information about his sexual orientation. This assessment was pivotal to his negotiation of what remained private and what became public information.

(3) The belief systems that affected the participant's decisions to disclose. The participant's belief systems drove his decisions to disclose. He used these beliefs to determine the degree of disclosure, the content of the disclosure, the approach/method of disclosure, and to whom he disclosed. These belief systems formed the foundation from which he negotiated his private and public identities.

The Process Used to Determine the Nature, Degree, and Timing of Disclosures

Figure 1 best illustrates the analysis of the data. Central to the diagram is Ryan's decision of what to disclose and to what degree. Ryan engaged in a wide continuum of disclosures around his sexual orientation ranging from no disclosure at all, to implicit disclosures (assuming they knew or dropping it into the conversation), to explicit disclosures (planned moments of disclosure). These approaches were directly affected by Ryan's reasons for disclosure (the white ring in the diagram)--a number of which were cited by Ryan in the interviews. These reasons included: addressing homophobia, building relationships, a desire to be authentic, role-modelling, encouraging openness, and feeling comfortable. Ryan's approaches and reasons for disclosure will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

At another level, Ryan also engaged in an ongoing assessment of his environment (the grey ring in the diagram). This assessment, which at times was quite deliberate and at other times not, helped Ryan to make decisions about his disclosure. Specifically, he gauged the level of relationship he had with the person(s) he was disclosing to, the level of risk involved, the listener's readiness or ability to receive the information, the
Figure 1: A Model of the Disclosure Process
relevance of the disclosure to the situation, and the degree of openness/vulnerability required of him in the disclosure. This assessment will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

All of the processes Ryan engaged in were driven by a very strong system of beliefs (background of diagram). These beliefs drove Ryan’s reasons for disclosure, his ongoing assessment of his environment and, ultimately, his decisions to disclose. While we (Ryan and I) identified several of Ryan’s belief systems during the process of this study, we acknowledge that there are many more which remain undocumented here. The beliefs we did identify included beliefs around privacy, professionalism, manners, emotions, authenticity, teaching, and homosexuality. Each of these beliefs are discussed in detail in this chapter.

**Degrees of Disclosure.** The process by which Ryan negotiated the boundary between public and private information about himself was complex yet relatively consistent. Subsequent sections in this chapter will deal with his environmental assessment and his belief systems. This section will attempt to capture the range and degree of disclosures that are typical for Ryan.

During the period of observation and the interviews, Ryan reported and was observed engaging in a wide continuum of approaches to disclosing his sexual orientation. The continuum included: no disclosure at all, assuming people knew or had figured it out, dropping it casually into the conversation, and deliberately planned "coming out" episodes.

In several instances, Ryan reported that he assumed colleagues and classmates had figured his sexual orientation out and that he had not encountered a situation in
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which he felt it necessary to bring it up in conversation. When it did come up in conversation, Ryan often casually mentioned it as part of the conversation. Ryan described one such situation in his master of education class:

This was the master's class that I was doing this past Fall and I think by the time this had occurred it had come up before somehow or we talked about issues before, so I think they suspected. The particular story I am thinking of was class Monday night and I got there early and was sitting at a table with a few other of the students and was chatting about how did the weekend go, what's new? One of the women was pregnant so we talked about, "How are you feeling, struggling through teaching Grade 10 English at one of the high schools locally." Another of the women was talking about, "When I was pregnant," etc. All these stories. Anne, who was beside me, there was a lull in the conversation and she says, "I thought you said you were going away this weekend? How did it go?" And I said, "Yeah, you know--to Toronto, visited a friend, went on to London, visited the person that I was seeing there, and John in London is great. Everything is going wonderful," and we sort of kept going, you know...The one woman who, to that point, had had less conversation or less contact--we just happen not to be sitting near each other when we did group kind of work, not a planned thing, it just hadn't happened yet, her reaction was something along the lines of, "Oh, it's a guy you're seeing," and I just sort of nodded or said "yes" or something and she said, "Oh" and we went on with the story and it was sort of a, "Oh, I didn't know that but OK, new piece of information." (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)
Two of the key informants interviewed indicated that Ryan had never actually come out to them, despite the fact that Ryan had assured me he had. This is consistent with his pattern of assuming that people have figured out he is gay; an assumption that Ryan spoke of regularly during the interview process.

In some situations, Ryan deliberately chose not to disclose his sexual orientation. Ryan noted of his father:

I don’t know that there’s anyone with whom I interact that I haven’t told that I feel really badly not having told. My father, for example, who I really don’t socialize a whole lot with. We’re not particularly close, the relationship is quite strained, we see each other rarely, all those sorts of things—I think coming out to him isn’t going to ameliorate an already strained relationship. I don’t think it’s going to help anyway and I don’t ever see him, I don’t ever deal with him so I’m not sure coming out to him is necessary. However, if all of a sudden I found myself in the media spotlight then I feel that I would have to quickly double back and tell him to his face before he hears it from someone else--I don’t believe that’s fair to him. There is more respect for him than just having happened to find out. It is on a sort of need-to-know basis. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Where Ryan felt it important to disclose his sexual orientation, he tended to plan it and be much more explicit and direct in his disclosure. In some of these instances, he perceived his personal life as having an impact on his professional life. He described coming out to his thesis advisor:
I knew it would have to be somebody that I felt I could work really, really well with and that there probably wouldn't be anything I couldn't tell or share with that person so I know that that was a choice that wouldn't easily be made, it wouldn't just be somebody that I would just pick....And I talked to her briefly about, "This is sort of my long-term sketch of what I want to do thesis-wise in a timeline kind of context. Maybe we can go for lunch and talk about that and I'd like to get your feedback on what you're thinking," and I was quite frank with her and I said, "I'm considering asking you to be my thesis supervisor and I just really want to make sure that I'm making the right decision." And I was really quite blunt with her. So we were out at lunch and we talked about my plans for thesis and timelines and whether that was "do-able" and that sort of thing and we also, over the meal, talked more socially just to get to know each other a little better so I asked about her husband and her previous experiences at the University of Alberta and those sorts of things and I asked about her family. So originally she's from Ontario so she'd moved away and come back and was it nice to be home and is it easier to see your family, that sort of thing. But I also said to her--one of the questions that I asked was, "You know I'm gay, right? Like you figured that out?"... and the look on her face was very funny. She does not get that look very often--it was that look of surprise, of disbelief of, "Why would you ask, like it doesn't make any difference. I'm so surprised that you even thought that would possibly be an issue for me." It's not that her reaction wouldn't be, "I don't care," because it's not an issue of "don't care," it's just that it's a non-issue. It doesn't at
all shade the perception that she has of me and that was the "look" reaction that I got. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

There was a greater degree of detail and planning when it came to disclosing Ryan's sexual orientation to people he was close to. Ryan described his experience coming out to his close friend, Rob:

We're very close, and he was one of the last people that I told and I travelled to where he was living, just for the weekend, with the intention of telling him. I did, hopefully, a whole lead-in thing so that he'd ask me sort of a question like, "So what's new with you?" and so it could sort of work itself into the conversation somehow without me doing the "by the way, there's something I need to tell you" kind of lead-in. The little attempts I gave him didn't work so finally I just had to do the "Look this is important and I need to tell you this." So I did and it was funny because at this point we were making dinner and I was sitting at the dining table reading the recipe and figuring out what we had to do. He was in the kitchen chopping the things that we were going to use, so I told him and he sort of looked at me and we talked a little bit and he was like, "Whatever, it's no big deal," like it didn't faze him, it wasn't an issue, that sort of thing. A few moments later, he stopped chopping and he looked at me and he said, "I knew there was something and I suspected this was what it was. Why did it take you so long to tell me, like why am I the last person to know?" And I said, "Well, you know, it's because I was most worried about losing you." And he sort of looked at me for a moment and it took him a moment to process that and then he had tears welling up in his eyes and I'd never seen this reaction from him before and it--the whole
process has brought us much closer together, but it was a really good experience... (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

In the context of his teaching, Ryan made a detailed and deliberate plan of how he would discuss his sexual orientation with students. The following notes from my observation journal described how Ryan came out to a final-year class.

Ryan moved the conversation onto homophobia and heterosexism. He acknowledged that the students had discussed this issue last semester and asked them what they had discussed. He received no response. He asked the class, "What would you tell a student in Grade 10 when they asked what homophobia and heterosexism are?" A female student said she would start by defining homosexuality. She defined it as, "when two people of the same sex are attracted in a romantic way rather than a friendship way." She defined homophobia as, "when people think being gay is wrong and not normal." Another female student added that homophobia is, "when you are uncomfortable or treat people differently." Another female student added that homophobia is an unnatural focus on a person's sexuality and ignores other aspects.

Ryan gives the class an overhead definition for homophobia that he identifies as being from an "AIDS Network Document." Ryan asks the class to define heterosexism. A female student says heterosexism assumes being heterosexual is the norm and outside of that has a negative connotation. Ryan gives the class an overhead definition for heterosexism, which he again identifies as being from an "AIDS Network Document."

Ryan tells the class that often people only hear negative stories about
being gay, like the Matthew Sheppard incident. Ryan tells the class that there are positive stories. He says, "You've probably figured out by now, I'm gay." He talks about his positive experience coming out and whom he has come out to. He tells them that the response was, "So? We've been waiting since Grade 10 for you to tell us." The class laughs.

Ryan relates the story of coming out to his best friend Rob and bringing a male date to Rob's brother's wedding. He jokes about the wedding being his "coming out ball" and the class laughs. Ryan talks about travelling to Rob's city specifically to tell Rob and how he kept looking for a lead-in in their conversation to tell him. When Ryan tells the class about Rob's reaction, he gets emotional: tears well up in his eyes and his voice cracks. He quickly finishes the story and tells the class, "I'm going to detach from the personal now."

Ryan starts talking about the importance of this issue in high schools. He shows the students a diagram from a 1986 text on attraction/repulsion in physics. The diagram uses same-sex couples to illustrate repulsion. Ryan talks about books that can serve as positive resources. He shows several to the class and describes what they are about. Ryan gives the entire class rainbow ribbons to wear. He talks about the significance of the rainbow to the gay community. He also shows the class some statistics about gay people and the rate of young suicide amongst gay people. The students appear solemn and quiet at the end of this part of the presentation.

Ryan then asked the students if they had any questions. A student asked Ryan if he was open when teaching in schools....He said the decision to come out
depends on the climate at the school and the length of time he has been there.... Another student asked why Ryan's sexual orientation is any of their business and why would he want his students to know? Ryan talked about being a role models for all students and showing them that being gay is not a handicap or about being a freak. (John's Observation Journal, January 1999)

In this instance, Ryan's reasons for disclosure played a pivotal role in negotiating how much information he was willing to share with the class. This disclosure was further impacted by Ryan's assessment of the classroom environment and his belief systems, both of which will be discussed later in this chapter. As a result, Ryan's disclosures were broad in approach and varied in detail. The negotiation of the boundary between what remained private and what became public shifted depending on the circumstances, his assessment of the environment, and his intentions in disclosing.

The Ongoing Assessment of Environment and Its Effect on Disclosure

On a number of occasions, Ryan described that he felt safe or secure in disclosing his sexual orientation. Both in conversation and in observation, it became apparent that Ryan was always assessing the environment; evaluating the level of risk involved in being "out" within a given community. This assessment was not always apparent to Ryan and he sometimes described situations where he just felt safe to come out. In other instances, Ryan engaged in a very conscious and deliberate gauging of his audience. He said of his final-year Faculty of Education class:

I knew that before I could do this that I had to have this feeling, safe in my class. Safe for me but also safe for them to receive this kind of information. A sense that the climate in that class was open and accommodating—not necessarily
embracing, but accepting. In addition, it didn’t take long to realize that this group had already had that. I missed the first two weeks of their bonding time together because the other Prof. was still here and I hadn’t been hired yet. But it didn’t take long for that group of 32 students who travel...all their courses are together, they move in a pack together so they know each other quite well...that they had already developed that sense of cohesion and connectedness and it also didn’t take them long to figure out, "OK, this young guy, he seems to know what he’s doing, he’s trying, he’s giving us some really interesting stuff but he’s also listening to our feedback." So it didn’t take long for me to realize that this was a warm enough climate that I felt safe. It probably wouldn’t be something I would do on the first day of a class just because I hadn’t felt that climate and then I have to deal with them later and if they can’t deal with me coming out to them on the first day then we’re going to have some serious challenges later. There’s just going to be overriding issues or some sort of feelings of tension and that’s not what I wanted. In prepping myself I guess it was just a lot of background thinking about what do I want to do, how do I want to tell this, how do I want it to look like it sort of flows into the lesson and it’s not a "by the way, I’m gay, now we’re going to talk about deaf students." How am I going to build this flow, how am I going to talk about why it’s important for them to know about these issues in an educational context. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

A major component of this environmental assessment appears to be Ryan’s concern for the listener’s ability to absorb and process the information around Ryan’s
sexual orientation. On numerous occasions, Ryan talked about how the listener might receive the information. Of his Faculty of Education class, he noted:

I still think that those criteria include how much of what I disclose will be beneficial in meeting a learning objective or promoting the learning or enriching the learning that I’m hoping is going on in my classroom. I think those decisions are still metered by how well do I know the students, how comfortable am I in sharing pieces of information, how comfortable do I think they (his emphasis) are in hearing this kind of information and this type or depth of information. I think there’s [sic] a lot of factors that weave in there...I think it comes into the "how well do I think they will react to this information" in terms of will it spoil a teachable moment, but also in terms of how safe is it for me, how much risk am I putting myself at, how vulnerable is this disclosure going to make me. I think that's the personal side. (Ryan, personal communication. January 1999)

Ryan also claims responsibility for helping them to process the information. He described both his role as an educator and as a friend as one of assisting others with information about himself:

I think it probably stems from the fact that I have a relationship with that person and if I want--all of a sudden I'm springing new information about myself on them and if I expect them to fairly deal with that then part of what I give in the relationship would have to include helping them deal with that. Like, it's not...a friendship includes both sides giving and both sides taking and both sides sharing together and it's just not fair for me to dump something on somebody and expect
them to deal with it and not be willing to help them. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Ryan’s vulnerability figured prominently in his assessment of the environment. He mentioned on several occasions environments that he would not feel comfortable coming out in. On the subject of vulnerability, he said:

I think that it has to do with the fact that when we reveal personal information about ourselves it makes us vulnerable, it makes us open to outside judgments and criticisms and external commentary on our individual selves. Sometimes that commentary can be really good and sometimes opening up and sharing who we are can have really positive effects but sometimes it can be really damaging. I think part of trying to decide how much you want to keep private and how much you are willing to reveal, I think there’s lot of other issues tied in like self-esteem and confidence and security; security itself, security in your employment, security physically in the space.

Q. So is it like a fear of getting hurt?

A. I think so, but I think not just on a physical level but there’s an emotional and a psychological--and there’s that vulnerability that happens when we reveal so much about ourselves. I think it happens similarly in relationships as people become closer, like partner relationships--when people become closer and closer they reveal more and more and more about themselves and that vulnerability is really scary for some people. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

In this example, Ryan described how the boundaries break down when his level of relationship increases. There appeared to be a connection between the degree of
disclosure and Ryan’s environmental assessment, in particular the level of relationship with the people he disclosed his sexual orientation to and the level of risk/openness required. The closer the relationship, the greater degree of openness required and often, the more explicit the disclosure. For Ryan, his level of relationship was a critical factor in his environmental assessment. When Ryan was asked how he distinguished between what he tells a student or colleague compared to a personal friend, he noted:

I think the difference is based on trust, and the amount that you know that person, and the closeness and the trust and the respect that exists in the relationship that you share. That would be why there are people that know that I’m gay but there are other people--that I just don’t believe they need to know, it doesn’t help the relationship that we’ve got and it’s not necessarily that I don’t trust them but it’s that I think that there is less of a need to discuss that or to broach that topic.

(Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Level of risk and reasons for disclosure were factors that Ryan seemed to weigh against each other in his decisions to disclose information about his sexual orientation. In the situation with his father, the risk outweighed any compelling reasons. Ryan noted, however, that a compelling reason to disclose his sexual orientation to his father (such as media coverage) would override any level of risk involved. Similarly, Ryan’s reasons for disclosing his sexual orientation to his class outweighed any risk of disclosure he felt. The data revealed that Ryan’s disclosures become more explicit and planned as the degree of relationship and the degree of openness required increased. However, Ryan’s decision about what was private and what was public was greatly affected by a number of environmental factors, most noticeably level of risk and the listener’s readiness.
In summary, Ryan’s assessment of his environment was a key component in the negotiation of what remains private and what becomes public. He evaluated the level of risk involved in the disclosure, the listener’s ability to process the information, the level of vulnerability required on his part, and the level of relationship he had with the listener. These criteria were weighed against Ryan’s reasons for disclosure, which are discussed in the next section.

The Belief Systems That Affected the Participant’s Decisions to Disclose

As mentioned earlier, Ryan cited a number reasons for disclosing his sexual orientation. These included addressing homophobia, building relationships, a desire to be authentic, role-modelling, encouraging openness, and feeling comfortable. As we engaged in the inquiry during our interviews, we uncovered a number of beliefs/assumptions that informed these reasons to disclose. While this list in not exhaustive, we felt that it accurately captured some of the major beliefs around Ryan’s reasons to disclose his sexual orientation. These major beliefs included privacy, professionalism, manners, emotions, authenticity, teaching, and homosexuality. Each belief will be discussed in greater detail.

Beliefs Around Privacy. Ryan described privacy as the right to choose what information to disclose about yourself. In particular, he felt that people have the right to determine how much information they are comfortable sharing with others. In discussing his relationship with students, he noted:

I think there are things about my students that I just don’t want to know. When I taught Grade 7 and 8 there were students that I know were sexually active. I don’t want to know about some kid who’s 13 who’s "with" some other kid who’s
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13. I don't want to know that--it's none of my business. I don't want to know. So there's probably things about me that my students don't want to know but I think it's fine and I think it's fair to be able to say, "I'm not comfortable answering that question," or, "I don't believe that that's any of your business." I think that that level of comfort is important and I think then again it even models that there are things that I, as the teacher, can ask you and if those are things of a personal nature you have every right to tell me, "That's none of your business, I don't have to answer that." But it limits how much you're open and out and willing to share about yourself to your students but I think that it also sends a message that they also have the right to decide how much they want to share with me in return. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Not all personal information is necessarily private for Ryan: Personal information appears to move into private information when the details of the information become very specific or the information is something that we do not wish to disclose for fear of embarrassment or discomfort. Ryan acknowledged that there is a reluctance to disclose negative information ("dirty laundry" in his terms) even though it can provide prime learning opportunities for students:

We try not to broadcast all of the bad things about ourselves, we try to keep some of those things about which we're embarrassed or we're reluctant to reveal, we try to keep those things secret. But I think as educators they're prime opportunities to build empathy and to build a learning opportunity from, so I think that negative experiences have a really good basis from which to learn. Although they're difficult to be open about. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)
For Ryan, this right to privacy extended into the closet. He felt that coming out was a personal act (see Beliefs Around Homosexuality) and that individuals have the right to choose what they will reveal about themselves both in and out of the classroom. He noted:

I still think it's that individual's personal choice to do that. I think there is an impact of this person's decision. It means that people close to him or her might sense that there's something being kept from them, there might be this sense of secrecy or hiding that won't necessarily really make their relationship better but I still think it's that person's personal decision. And I think that...I would assume that for most gay men that's a part of the process...it's part of that. I think this is who I am, I think this is what I want, let's dabble and figure out if that's what I want but don't tell anyone yet...and it's part of the process, I would assume for most people--I think it was for me. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Beliefs Around Homosexuality. Some of the more subtle beliefs at work were Ryan's beliefs around homosexuality. They were harder for both him and I to detect and appeared to be a more sensitive topic for both of us--this is evident from the number of rewrites we undertook in an attempt to accurately capture them.

Ryan believes that gay people are absolutely no different from anyone else and should be treated exactly the same. He repeated throughout the interviews that he felt no different from anyone else and that he did not believe gay people were different from straight people. When asked what begin gay meant to him, he responded:
To me I think it just means that when I am attracted to someone or when I fall in love with someone, that person happens to be a guy, whereas traditional relationship definitions it's someone of the opposite sex. I don't think that, I know that being gay doesn't make any difference on my ability to teach or my ability to be a good friend or my ability to enjoy music, or to dance or to cook or my non-ability to fix a car, or whatever. My sexuality doesn't make any difference that way. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Ryan also described gay people as facing discrimination and hardship. He noted on numerous occasions how difficult some gay people's lives were and how fortunate he had been in his coming out. He uses statistics in his lesson on homophobia and heterosexism (the class in which he came out) to emphasize the high suicide rates of gay and lesbian youth. Ryan believes that most parents are not going to be happy that their children are gay—that the news will be received in a negative way. In his own words:

I just think that it's just one of those disappointments that, you know, it's not... my being gay doesn't come into what their vision or their plan for me would have been. Sort of similar to going home and telling Mom and Dad, "No, I don't want to be a medical doctor, I want to drive taxies for the rest of my life." It's not the idealized dream that parents or grandparents have for their children. So being gay—I don't think that you'll come across many parents who think, "I really hope that this kid that I am about to have is going to be gay." I just don't think that parents have that. So I think in that sense it would be a disappointment. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)
Ryan believes that gay people should not disclose their sexual orientation without good reason. When prompted for situations where it is permissible (or not permissible) to disclose his sexual orientation, Ryan consistently referred to the context of the situation. He felt that there needed to be circumstances and reasonable justifications for disclosing such personal information. Of his second year students, he noted:

To date they haven’t had to deal with sexuality so it hasn’t come up. I think in that setting, if it came up it would just sort of come out but it hasn’t yet and it would seem to me that it would be forced if it just sort of got pushed in, even though it didn’t come in the evolution of the lesson or the class or the subject or whatever, then it would seem out of place. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

This belief also affects disclosure in his personal life. Ryan cited a reason for coming out (or not coming out) to virtually all of his family members and friends. Ryan talked about coming out to his best friend, Rob:

I think that’s most of my decision--who needs--does it either just sort of come up or are there specific reasons that I have to tell them....My friend Rob who’s in Ottawa...it casually came up in conversation with his brother when I was visiting and the brother who was getting married said, "Bring a male guest to the wedding." So when I decided to do that I knew I had to go and tell Rob to his face because it’s not fair to just show up and spring that on him in public. I knew that I would have to go and tell him and that was really difficult to do.

(Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)
Ryan emphasized one particular reason for coming out: to educate others. Ryan believed that coming out was an effective education tool, in his own words, "a teachful moment." While this reason had its strongest application in the classroom, Ryan felt that coming out to people in his personal life also had an educational component.

Both Ryan and his students shared the belief that most people do not already have the skills to deal with homophobic incidents. Ryan said that his lessons on homophobia and heterosexism were designed to assist student teachers in acquiring more awareness and ability to deal with gay and lesbian issues. Three of the students interviewed described situations where they felt inadequately prepared to address homophobic incidents in their practice teaching. One of his colleagues described many of her students as homophobic or ignorant of gay and lesbian issues. This belief seems to be centred on people's discomfort in dealing with lesbian and gay issues.

**Beliefs Around Professionalism.** The most frequently cited beliefs by both Ryan and his students and colleagues were beliefs around professionalism. During the interviews, participants often cited professionalism as an essential guide in their decisions about the disclosure of personal information. One's personal life was seen as clearly distinct from one's professional life: You should not bring your personal life into your profession without good reason. In reviewing Ryan's teaching portfolio, I noticed:

It was interesting to read another teacher's portfolio--it differed so greatly in style and content from mine. The major difference I noticed was that Ryan did not include a critical reflection article at the beginning of each chapter--a requirement for mine. I find the critical reflection piece the most interesting aspect of the portfolio as it causes you to reflect on your accomplishments, your teaching and
learning styles, your strengths, and your weaknesses. Ryan includes a section entitled "An Autobiography," yet all that this section includes is his resume, a letter for a job application, his transcripts and copies of his degrees--there is absolutely no personal information about him or reflection on how this personal information might influence his pedagogy. (John's Reflective Journal, January 1999)

Most interviewees conceded that their professional image extended beyond the classroom to include the whole community. In this sense, your professional life impinges on or affects your personal life. One of Ryan's colleagues noted:

I mean when I first came here I stopped walking around without a bra in a summer dress because I felt it was too small a town, I'm a professional, and you don't really want to kill the image. It doesn't mean you're not human but whatever you do you convey in impression. I think that's really important.

(Fred, personal communication, January 1999)

Interviewees described a number of common elements of professionalism. They included: (a) maturity, (b) fairness and understanding, (c) being organized and prepared, (d) dressing appropriately--being well groomed and presentable, (e) being responsible--keeping your word and doing what you say you will do, (f) having clearly defined relationships with students and co-workers, (g) maintaining your composure (see Beliefs around Emotions), (h) control of the classroom, and (i) understanding and being confident in your job.

Beliefs Around Emotions. When Ryan came out to the second final-year class, he shared with them the story about coming out to Rob, his best friend, and his best friend's
reaction. During the story, Ryan became emotional and appeared as if he was going to cry. Tears welled up in his eyes and his voice began cracking. The feeling quickly passed, but Ryan appeared to be quite embarrassed about his emotional reaction.

When probed about it in a later interview, Ryan acknowledged that he felt embarrassed being emotional in front of the class. He attributed this to his social conditioning that men are not supposed to express emotions so freely:

I think that part of that emotional response for me was, I think it comes back to that sociocultural sort of learned things--strong men don't show emotional weakness--and I don't believe those--that I don't believe that it's a sign of weakness for men to show emotion, I don't believe that, but I think that's where the reaction came from. You know, it's still sort of an embedded kind of learned reaction. "Men don't cry, men don't lose composure, men don't show emotion."

Q. Did it make a difference that it was in front of these people?
A. Well, I think that's the cause of embarrassment. I think under that--what I think is an outdated and overly traditional kind of perception that men don't show emotion and don't cry and don't, like--it's all right to do all of that kind of stuff in the privacy of your own home when nobody else sees you but you don't demonstrate those sorts of emotions in front of someone else. I'm not sure that it being a class or a group of people that I don't know very well or a group of people that I do know or just even you--like you and I are--I would call you and I very good friends--I think I would feel embarrassed if I lost that composure with you. I think it's that sort of embedded kind of learned reaction. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)
For Ryan, being composed or having control over one's emotions was closely associated with being professional. Losing control of his emotions in the class represented a lack of classroom management and made Ryan feel very uncomfortable. This belief system not only affected how Ryan interacted with his students, but how he interacted with friends and colleagues. Liz, a colleague and close personal friend of Ryan, commented on Ryan's constant attempt to put a strong face forward:

I think the whole notion that a man should be strong, tough, that something shouldn't—he was—last year—he had a problem with his neck, there was a lump and he wasn't quite sure what it was and this was before he went to see the doctor and I think, due to his mother's death from cancer and stuff, I think he was nervous about it though he didn't say it and he mentioned how the whole societal reference to a man having to be strong and that whole sort of connotation and I think he was really trying to be, yet he was scared and I think he still tries to be that way, though. And I could be assuming a lot of things right now, but I think he tries to be very.... Yeah, strong--I mean not being too emotional, I think being practical and logical. Practical in the sense that "You know you can't do anything about it so there's no point getting all worried about it" kind of thing and logical and practical go hand in hand, logical being that "Well, you don't know anything about it so logically she shouldn't get all bent out of shape about it." Yeah, I think it's sort of his practicalness [sic], he always comes off as being very composed, I think that's a really good adjective for Ryan. Yeah, I haven't seen him get very emotional over things. (Liz, personal communication, January 1999)
Beliefs Around Teaching. There were so many beliefs about teaching identified during this process that it would become too cumbersome to list them all in detail here.

A general list of key qualities for good teachers is provided here:

1. Teachers are knowledgeable about the content/subject they are teaching;
2. Teachers are meticulous, highly organized, and pay attention to detail;
3. Teachers are consistent and clear in their expectations;
4. Teachers are accessible, attentive, and personable;
5. Teachers are open, honest, and authentic (see Beliefs Around Authenticity);
6. Teachers are eager to learn and improve;
7. Teachers act professional at all times (see Beliefs Around Professionalism); and
8. Teachers are role models for their students.

Ryan's own description of the role of teaching and good teachers highlights many of the views shared by the other interviewees:

I think that good teachers are knowledgeable in their subject area and in the topics that they need to address in their classes and that covers that first little bit of what makes a good teacher. But the second, and what I think is the much more important portion of teaching means that a good educator needs to be able to clearly communicate, needs to open them[sic]elves up, to be honest with students, to be fair and just and accommodating. I think that good teachers are the teachers that share parts of themselves with students and because that makes the
environment for learning so much more welcoming and warm. I think that good
teachers are—usually the words used are like friendship and friendly—but I think
that for me that includes being approachable and understanding and flexible and
accommodating and all those sorts of things. For me I think it’s really important
as well that what I try to do is set up a kind of routine and a clear expectation that
these are the guidelines, this is what I expect from you as a student and being
firm. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

These beliefs around teaching neatly dovetail into Ryan’s other beliefs around
authenticity, emotions, and professionalism.

Beliefs Around Authenticity. All of the interviewees cited authenticity as a
positive and desirable quality in teaching. Authenticity was defined as being yourself and
not conforming to the expectations of others. It was believed that authenticity builds
closer relationships with others by encouraging openness, safety, welcoming, modelling,
and learning. As Ryan described it:

I think that if you want the students to buy into what you’re telling them and to
believe what you’re telling them and to enjoy what they’re doing and to want to
be there in your classroom, to want to come to your school and to be there and not
just be there because there’s some law that says you have to be in school until
you’re 16. To really enjoy that, then you have to create that environment that
makes them feel welcome and makes them feel like they’re individuals and that
their special concerns are being accommodated. I think that without authenticity,
creating that inviting environment is really difficult. If you’re not willing to share
the real sides of yourself, I don’t think that you can really get to know another
person and I don’t believe that good learning exists in the absence of a sense of person, a sense of personality. It’s the voice of the individual, that sense of "person." (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Ryan believed that authenticity is a part of being "out of the closet" although he did not believe the two terms are synonymous. For Ryan, authenticity meant being true to yourself. Being out of the closet meant not only being true to yourself but also extending that honesty and openness into your community. Ryan felt it was possible to be authentic without being out of the closet. For him, being out meant taking your authenticity to a new level. Ryan defined being "out of the closet" as:

...being honest and accepting of themselves and either having been completely open and honest with the significant others around them or being in the process of coming out to those people around him and it’s that level of being true and honest and authentic to yourself. This is really going out and this is me actively letting you know that I’m not going to continue being someone because that’s what you think I should be like or that’s what society has said I should be like or...I think that’s what it is...it’s that formal act of decision to be truly yourself. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

It was believed that authenticity benefits not only the students but also the teacher who is being authentic. It provided freedom and openness, although it was generally acknowledged that it required openness, courage, and vulnerability to be authentic. When asked how far out of the closet a teacher should go, one of Ryan’s colleagues noted:

I think out in your classroom, out to everybody because again there’s just too
many inconsistencies. Like if I care about kids then why wouldn’t I show up in a public demonstration about kids and it seems to me when there’s that kind of inconsistency, almost a hiding, then that’s when problems arise because it’s the uninformed public that might phone the principal or a trustee and say, "What is that asshole doing holding a placard that says gay rights?" Well, why shouldn’t he, he’s gay and he’s proud of it and again that conflict, so I think--my high school had the motto "knowledge is power" but at the same time a lack of knowledge is power too, so in a way if you diffuse it, if everybody has the knowledge then you’re not allowing them to laud that over you. So yeah, so what if I’m gay, what are you going to do about it--I know it, my principal knows it, my board knows it, I perform in the local theatre group, so? No it can’t be used against me, kind of thing. (Fred, personal communication, January 1999)

**Beliefs Around Manners.** Beliefs around “manners” played a powerful role in how Ryan and the other informants made decisions around disclosure. They defined manners as socially acceptable rules of conduct that defined and regulated normative/appropriate ranges of behaviour. Several of the participants spoke directly about manners; all of them described manners as a necessary skill required to get along within society. According to Ryan, manners not only help determine what is appropriate within the classroom; they also affect disclosures within one’s personal life:

I think maybe the social construction that has to include or can include societal-based rules or rules of conduct or culturally-based things and I think those are just things that are learned. I think I’m also thinking that some of the majority of things I feel quite strongly have no place in the classroom are not specifically only
out of place in a classroom, they're also out of place in most social contexts...I don't think--talking about intimate sexual details, for example. I don't believe it's appropriate to discuss things like that in a classroom. I don't think that those are things that should be discussed at work, I don't think that those are things that come up around a lunch table with a bunch of colleagues, I don't think that they should be casually addressed like that. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Ryan and others identified language as a critical element of manners. The appropriate (or inappropriate) use of language indicated one's correct social upbringing and intellectual/linguistic ability. As a result, manners not only determine the content of conversation but also affect the language and method of delivery in communication. As Ryan noted:

I've used before a line like, "Would you say words like that in front of your mother or father or a family member?" Most often when I've used words like that it's--it would be similar to saying, "Would you have used that swearing kind of language in front of your mother? No."

Q. So is that manners?

A. I think that usually it is, usually when I've used that it's been with younger kids and their response is "No," and, "Well then, it's not acceptable in front of me either, I don't want to hear it here. I don't believe it's acceptable here." How do they know that it's not acceptable at home? I would suggest that it's a learned thing--that language is not appropriate to be used and Mom and Dad or whomever at home don't want to hear it--well, I don't want to hear it here.
either...I think it comes from the concept that if you resort to using language like that I think it really demonstrates that you don’t have the ability to use what would be considered appropriate language to convey that sentiment, so you’re reverting to something that is improper or--almost like a class thing, but that’s not what I’m thinking. I think it has that social perception...I think we think that déclassé people use those kinds of words—that...

Q. What do you mean by déclassé?

A. Well, of lower class, of lower ability, of lower linguistic or intellectual ability or I think it has, socially, that kind of a connotation. I think it’s perceived as being a mark of lower social ability. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

Integrating the Themes: Putting the Process Together

Using his belief systems as a foundation, Ryan was able to negotiate a complex process of assessment, evaluation, and reflection in deciding what, where, how, to whom and to what degree he disclosed personal information, in particular his sexual orientation. His beliefs around teaching and professionalism played a pivotal role in the classroom, yet his beliefs around homosexuality, authenticity, manners, and emotions affected his disclosures in both his personal and professional lives.

Ryan’s ongoing assessment of his environment reflected his beliefs that people might react to homosexuality in a negative way and his belief that the disclosure of his sexual orientation should be relevant to the situation. This assessment was also influenced by Ryan’s belief that coming out to someone is a “teachful moment” and that he had the responsibility to assist both friends, family, and students in dealing with this
information. This assessment continually weighed the reasons for coming out to someone against the level of risk and vulnerability required in doing so.

As a result of this assessment, Ryan chose how, to whom, and to what degree he would disclose about himself. This disclosure often ranged from assuming they knew, dropping it casually into the conversation, or planning a deliberate and explicit conversation. As the level of risk and degree of openness/vulnerability increased, Ryan moved towards a more explicit and carefully planned approach. The following quote provides a good example of various belief systems at work:

I think it's part of my responsibility to give more of a fleshed-out picture of myself as a gay man, rather than just "plunking" this information on them and leaving them to either sink or swim with it. I think the benefit is that I can have an idea of how they reacted and whether this was a positive effect or whether this was a negative effect and if it is negative then how do I try to steer that and change it into a positive effect? Ideally, by coming out, what I would like the students to leave with is a concept that it doesn't matter whether there's a student or an individual or a teacher or a principal or a brother or whatever that happens to be gay, it doesn't matter, that's just one part of their life and it's not making them a better or a worse person and I think that that's one of the most important results that I want to have happen. (Ryan, personal communication, January 1999)

In the above quote, one can see the complexity of the process Ryan engaged in. A number of Ryan's belief systems are evident: (a) Ryan's belief that he is responsible for helping people to deal with the information; (b) Ryan's belief that homosexuality does
not make any difference; (c) Ryan’s belief that people will have a negative reaction to homosexuality; and (d) Ryan’s belief that it is important for teachers (in this case student teachers) to have an awareness of gay and lesbian issues. In this process, one can see Ryan engaged in a process of assessment: determining if the reaction to his disclosure is positive or negative and then determining how he could steer it in a more positive direction. The degree of explicitness of his disclosure in this instance was more “fleshed out,” a determination of Ryan’s that he needed to provide explicit information to his student teachers in order for them to better understand what being gay means. The integration of his belief systems with his environmental assessment provided Ryan with the context and tools he needed to be comfortable in his disclosure of personal information.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The objective of this study was to examine how an openly gay professor negotiates the boundaries between his private and public life. Specifically, I was interested in knowing how this professor disclosed information of a personal nature (the information used for this study was his sexual orientation) to his friends, family, colleagues, students, and others in his institution. I was also interested in uncovering the reasons, assumptions, beliefs, and external factors that affected this professor’s decisions to keep information private or make it public.

What the Literature Revealed

A review of the literature revealed a wide range of approaches teachers made in the degree and method of disclosing their sexual orientation. Some teachers attempted to pass as straight, while others did nothing to dissuade people from the assumption they were straight. Others implied they were gay by talking about their relationships, but never actually discussed being gay (Griffin, cited in Vargo, 1998; Woods & Lucas, 1993). Many teachers were explicitly out; in these instances they took one of several approaches to disclosing their sexual identities. Some tried to normalize being gay and convince others they were no different from straight people, referred to as the assimilationist perspective (Bawer, 1993; Sullivan, 1995). Others tried to articulate and dignify the differences in being gay. Others were confrontational: calling attention to their marginalization in order to confront prejudice and discrimination (Tierney, 1997).

Numerous reasons were cited by gay and lesbian educators for why they would come out. These reasons included: to end prejudice and discrimination, to positively
influence people’s perceptions of gays and lesbians, to be a positive role model for students, and to unsettle the dominance of heterosexuality (Jennings, 1994; Khayatt, 1998; McNaron, 1997). Numerous reasons for not coming out were also identified; they included: fear of reprisal, fear of isolation, loss of favour in department, and concern for physical and emotional safety. Many of the participants in these studies had personally experienced some sort of homophobia (D'Augelli, 1992; OFS, 1991; Parravano, 1995; Reidy, 1993).

The literature also revealed several key beliefs or assumptions that affected how and what gay and lesbian teachers disclosed (Khayatt, 1998; Martindale, 1997; Vargo, 1998). These beliefs largely centred on assumptions about what constitutes a good teacher; qualities such as professional, authentic, open-minded, and a positive role model as a “good citizen.” Teachers were expected to maintain distinct lines between their personal and professional lives. Teachers were also expected to dress conservatively and suppress their own sexuality (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). The literature noted many contradictions between the beliefs and expectations placed upon teachers by students, the community, and their own profession. Authenticity, for example, required teachers to be open and honest with their students; yet the community expected teachers to be moral guardians of their children: suppressing their own sexual identity to the point of vague references while managing the sexual behaviour of their students. This created a conflict for many gay and lesbian teachers (Epstein & Johnson, 1998).

Teachers’ own personal beliefs also played an important role in negotiating their private and public identities. Beyond their own beliefs about teaching and
professionalism, teachers struggled with their own beliefs around privacy and how much information they felt comfortable in sharing.

What the Data Revealed

The participant of this study engaged in a complex process of negotiating his private and public lives. In conversation and field observation, the participant engaged in a wide range of disclosures surrounding his sexual orientation. This range included: (a) no disclosure at all, (b) assuming people knew or had figured it out, (c) dropping it casually into the conversation, and (d) explicitly coming out to people in a planned approach. The approach the participant used was dependent upon his assessment of his environment, reasons for disclosing, and his belief systems that informed those reasons.

The participant reported and was observed engaging in an ongoing assessment of his environment. The purpose of this assessment was to evaluate how safe and appropriate it was to disclose personal information (for the purposes of this study, we examined his disclosure of sexual orientation). As part of this assessment, the participant evaluated the level of relationship he had with people he was disclosing to; the listener's ability to positively receive and process the information; the degree of vulnerability the disclosure required of him; and the level of risk involved in disclosing.

The participant cited a number of reasons for disclosing including: being a positive role model, being authentic, addressing homophobia, building relationships, encouraging openness, and being comfortable. These reasons were informed by the participant's belief systems. These beliefs included the following:
1. The belief that people have the right to decide what information about themselves they keep private. Personal information became private when it became specific, detailed, or negative in nature. The right to privacy extended to the right to be in the closet.

2. The belief that gay people are no different than anyone else and should be treated exactly the same. The participant, his colleagues, and his students believed that gay people often face discrimination and hardship. They believed that most people (teachers included) are not adequately equipped to deal with homophobic incidents. They also believed that people should not disclose their sexual orientation unless it is relevant.

3. The belief that teachers must continually maintain an air of professionalism at all times. One’s personal life was seen as clearly distinct from one’s professional life; yet how one behaved in his/her personal life greatly affected one’s professional life. How one dressed, conducted oneself, and maintained one’s composure were common elements of professionalism.

4. The belief that control over one’s emotions is a sign of professionalism and masculinity. Lack of control or composure was seen as a sign of weakness and a loss of classroom management.

5. The belief that good teachers are open, honest, caring, knowledgeable, professional, equitable, and in control.

6. The belief that authenticity is a vital and necessary component of any learning environment. Authenticity requires courage and vulnerability.
7. The belief that all social interactions (in and out of the classroom) are governed by good manners (a series of socially acceptable norms or rule of conduct). Bad manners were seen as a mark of lower social standing and intellectual ability.

In integrating his belief system with his assessment of the environment, the participant was able to determine the appropriateness of disclosing his sexual orientation in any number of situations. As a result, his disclosures appeared varied and inconsistent at times. In actuality, while the disclosures varied, the process he used in arriving at those decisions and the applications of his beliefs to those disclosures were remarkably consistent.

Conclusions

The literature reviewed suggested a wide and varied pattern of approaches to how gay and lesbian teachers manage their public and private identities. The participant in my study followed many similar patterns in his disclosure. However, much of the literature focussed on how (as in the method/pattern) these disclosures were made; as a result, the teachers in these studies appeared to be inconsistent and unplanned in their disclosures. By examining the process my participant engaged in to arrive at a decision about disclosure, I was able to see a consistent application. This application used his belief system and environmental assessment to develop reasons to feel comfortable in disclosing information about his sexual orientation. In most of the cases observed and reported by my participant, the actual disclosures varied greatly, but the process he used to decide to disclose did not.

The participant in my study attempted to maintain clear and distinct boundaries between his private life as a gay man and his public life as an educator. This process at
times was complicated, as the context and reasons for disclosing constantly shifted. In addition, the participant’s own beliefs were often in conflict with one another; as in his desire to be authentic conflicting with his beliefs about what was appropriate to share with his students. The literature referred to these contradictions and conflicts on several occasions. It noted several instances where gay and lesbian teachers were put into difficult situations as a result of conflicting belief systems and expectations. While the teaching profession advocates authenticity, equity, and openness as desirable values, it regulates (even legislates) teachers’ behaviour with respect to not only managing their own sexual identity but the sexual behaviour of their students.

This struggle can be observed in my participant’s own negotiating of his identity. His beliefs about manners, professionalism, and privacy inhibited him from openly talking about his sexuality; creating a conflict with his beliefs around authenticity, good teaching, and role-modelling.

Assumptions at Work

Core to these arguments are a number of assumptions. The first assumption is that sexuality is not appropriate in conversations within the educational setting. Many of the people interviewed as part of this study indicated that homosexuality should not be brought up unless it is relevant. This assumes that heterosexuality is not relevant or discussed. In fact, without a conversation to the contrary, heterosexuality is read/assumed into any discussions/conversations in the learning environment. As Mohr (1992) discussed, marriage, divorce, and heterosexual relationships all exist within the context of the classroom—because they are so ingrained into our fabric of the “norm,” they appear invisible to most of us and do not require specific reasons to be introduced.
Thus when homosexuality is discussed, it appears as abnormal, out of place, and requires a reason or context for being introduced.

The second assumption at work is that being gay is taught from an exceptional or “other” paradigm. In class lessons, homosexuality is discussed as an issue for consideration as opposed to being naturally integrated into the curriculum. This approach has been identified by a number of educational theorists, most noticeably James Banks (1988), as an approach that identifies and isolates marginalized groups that require special treatment. Although the participant expressed the desire to present gays and lesbians as no different from anyone else, his special treatment of the subject further isolated gays and lesbians as a different group from the norm. In interviews, many of his students often referred to gay people as a group separate and distinct from them.

The third assumption stemmed from the belief that discussions of homosexuality centre on sexual behaviour. Many of the people interviewed in this study cited discussions of sexual activities and practices as inappropriate to the classroom. None of them could articulate anything about the gay community, even in the broadest terms. With the exception of one senior faculty member, no one talked about using coming out as a departure point for discussing sexual identity formation, gender politics or critical deconstruction of societal conditioning or norms.

The fourth assumption was that coming out to someone automatically increases his or her level of awareness. As Khayatt (1998) discussed, simply providing people with the information that you are gay doesn’t translate into increased awareness, perception, or a shift in attitudes. While the participant described the desire to increase the awareness and understanding of lesbian and gay issues as one of his primary reasons in coming out
to his class of student teachers, it is unclear from the interviews with students what they learned from his disclosure. Many of the students interviewed expressed that they knew nothing about gay people other than Ryan was gay. Several reported incidents of homophobia in their student teaching practice that they felt unable or unwilling or uninterested in addressing.

The fifth assumption was a tendency to associate all things personal as private. As we have discussed earlier, not all things personal are necessarily private, yet the participant and most of the informants interviewed tended to collapse the two. The participant felt strongly that his right to privacy extended to almost all areas of his personal life. This meant that he had control over access to any personal information about himself, an assumption Barbone and Rice (cited in Vargo, 1998) share, as do many other educators I have met.

The intent here is not to poke holes in the assumptions and beliefs of the participant (and other educators). I believe it is important for educators (be they gay or straight) to have the opportunity to critically reflect on the beliefs and assumptions that inform their practice. One major outcome of this research was the opportunity for both the participant and myself to reflect on our assumptions/belief systems and how we put them into practice. As we moved through the data collection process, we uncovered more and more of the assumptions and social constructions around teaching that we have both made for ourselves. At first, I thought our belief systems were quite different from one another, yet as we moved through the process, I saw more and more common elements emerge. I am curious to know how many other educators share these beliefs.
It appears evident to me from the literature and the data that gay and lesbian educators have little-to-no opportunity to engage in critical reflection on the impact of their gay identity on their teaching. This is further reinforced by the lack of formal networks for gay and lesbian educators. Without these networks, gay and lesbian teachers are inhibited from dialogue on these issues. This lack of support further reinforces the perception that gay and lesbian teachers are “on their own” in choosing to come out.

Implications for Practice

The beliefs, pressures, and expectations placed upon teachers by students, parents, the community, and the teaching profession itself may change over time, but they will never disappear. While these expectations are very explicit in the elementary and secondary school sectors (witnessed by the formation of ethical standards and proposed testing/review of teachers in those sectors), there is more subtle pressure exerted on teachers within the postsecondary sector. In order for teachers to be able to successfully manage these expectations, opportunities become imperative to critically reflect on these issues.

Juul (1996) indicated that gay and lesbian teachers experienced higher levels of esteem and satisfaction as a result of their associations with other gay and lesbian faculty. I believe these kinds of associations provide prime opportunities for teachers to reflect on the beliefs and expectations that inform their teaching. My participant expressed to me that he valued the opportunity to reflect on a number of issues in our interviews and that the process was a positive learning experience for him. I share his opinion: Investigating
these issues with Ryan provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my own belief systems. It has been a very positive and enriching experience.

Implications for Theory

The literature/theory reviewed proposed a number of key ideas that have been largely substantiated by this study.

The data support the theory that teachers are affected by the beliefs and expectations of their students, peers, community, and profession. Both the participant and his community shared beliefs around professionalism, good manners, good teaching, and privacy: They affected how he made decisions about disclosing his sexual orientation. For me, the most interesting aspect of this study was that the participant held similar beliefs about homosexuality as did his community of peers and students. This is not entirely surprising considering that the participant grew up in the same heterosexual environment as his colleagues and students.

The data in this study differed from the literature in the participant’s reasons for not disclosing. The literature cited fear of reprisal, isolation, loss of tenure, and concern for safety as factors in not disclosing one’s sexual orientation. Although level of risk was a factor in Ryan’s assessment of his environment and his decision to disclose, he repeatedly described how safe he felt in his educational environment. The greatest factor that affected Ryan’s environmental assessment seemed to be his degree of relationship with the person he was disclosing to and how they would be affected by that disclosure. This concern over the impact on his relationship with others carried over into both his professional and personal lives and equally affected how he chose to disclose to students, peers, friends, and family.
Lastly, the data in this study confirmed and integrated much of the available theory on the coming out process for gay teachers. Viewed in isolation, methods of coming out, reasons for coming out, and beliefs about coming out seem fragmented. In this study, the participant integrated these aspects into a process that he consistently applied in coming out to students, peers, family, and friends. The process he used in the workplace was the same process he used in his personal life.

Implications for Further Research

Similar studies of other gay and lesbian educators could be pursued to widen our information concerning those factors, beliefs, and assumptions that affect their decisions to disclose their sexual orientation. Certainly studies that examine the experience of lesbian women are warranted. Issues of colour, race, and culture as part of teacher identity are also important to explore. As mentioned before, my participant and I are both young, white, middle-class, gay men. How do our experiences compare to those educators of different races, genders, and cultural backgrounds? How do all these elements intersect in teachers negotiating their private and public identities?

As my participant was a relatively young and new university professor, it would be valuable to compare and contrast the perceptions of older, tenured, gay faculty against those of younger, untenured faculty. Issues such as job status, coming to terms with one’s identity as a teacher and a gay man, being in a long-term gay relationship and generational differences would be interesting factors to explore.

Studies of lesbian/gay/bisexual teacher organizations might reveal interesting data about how their members perceive the benefits of belonging to such an organization.
There are few such organizations in Canada, most noticeably the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Studies Association and the Toronto Centre for Lesbian and Gay Studies.

Personally, I would find it both interesting and valuable to follow up with the participant in my study 5 to 10 years from now to see how (if at all) his negotiation of his private and public identities has changed. Will the boundaries he has set for himself move? What new factors (job status, relationship status, teaching experience, societal acceptance) will impact his decisions to disclose? From my own personal experience during this study, I believe I have become more comfortable, confident, and clear about why, when, and how I disclose my sexual orientation to my students.

Yet studies that explore the actual impact on our students when we disclose our sexual orientation are warranted. Both the participant and I shared the belief that our disclosures to our students meant something, and we hoped that in disclosing our sexual orientation to them we were providing positive educational experiences. Yet the actual impact of our disclosures, if any, is not accurately captured in the current literature.

Lastly, studies that examine the phenomenon of personal disclosure for straight teachers would be extremely valuable to provide comparisons for studies such as the one I have conducted. I suspect that straight educators engage in a similar, if not so explicit, process in negotiating their private and public identities. It would be worthwhile to see how these teachers negotiate the boundaries between private and public within the everyday context of their teaching.
References


Bibliography


Appendix A - Interview Guidelines

Interviewing the Participant

Prior to the Interview

A copy of the research proposal and the application to the Subcommittee on Research with Human Subjects will be provided to the participant prior to any research commencing. An initial meeting will be held with the participant to answer any questions, address any concerns, and sign the necessary consent forms.

Before undertaking the first interview, the researcher will review the participant's teaching portfolio. Typical teaching portfolios include samples of teachers' work incorporating their philosophy on teaching, lesson plans, educational history, and autobiography as it relates to their profession. The portfolio will be reviewed in light of the research problem with the intent to gain a better understanding of the participant and his perspective and practices in the classroom. Issues that may be examined in reviewing the portfolio include:

- How does the participant view the role of teacher?
- What qualities does he think make up a good teacher?
- Does he describe the qualities of teachers whom he has admired? What were those qualities?
- Does he see himself as a good teacher? If so, why?
- Does the participant see himself as a role model? For whom? In what way?
- How long has he identified himself as gay? How long has he been out? Why did he come out? To whom? How did he come out?
• Did he come out first personally (to family and friends), then professionally (to work)?

• How comfortable is he in his current teaching position?

Setting Up the First Interview

The interview will be arranged for a quiet setting, preferably on campus (most likely the professor's office). The first interview will be approximately three hours long. The researcher will go over the guidelines for conducting the interview (the participant has the right not to answer any question or to terminate the interview at any time or to withdraw from the research altogether). The researcher will inform the participant that the interview is being recorded (with the participant's permission) so that it may later be transcribed. The researcher will also reiterate that pseudonyms will be used in the transcript so that the participant cannot later be identified.

Interview Questions

The following questions are intended to give an overall structure to the interview and to provide a framework for leading the discussion. Questions listed here are open probes designed to give the interview some initial direction. More detailed and in-depth questions will arise as a result of the participant's answers.

Personal Information

• Could we start off the interview with you telling me a little bit about yourself?

  You know, the usual stuff. I was born... My family... I studied at....

• What are your educational qualifications?

• How long have you worked for the university? In what capacities?
• Is there anything you think I should know about you that is relevant to the problem under study?

On Being Gay

• When did you first realize you were gay? What was that time like for you?

• When did you start coming out? To whom? How did you do it? Why did you do it?

• What does being gay mean to you? Do you think it has altered your perceptions or your behaviour in any significant way?

• Do you think it is important for people to know you're gay? Why or why not? For whom is it important, you or them?

• How far out do you think is far enough for you? Out to family and friends? Out to co-workers? Out to students? Out to your entire school? Out to the public (as in a media spokesperson)?

• Do you think that gay people have an obligation to be out? Why or why not?

• What is your current assessment of the gay community in general?

• What is your current assessment of the gay community in postsecondary education?

• What is your current assessment of the gay community in education?

Teaching

• Why did you become a teacher?

• Do you consider yourself to be a good teacher? What qualities about you as a teacher do you like most? What qualities about you as a teacher do you like the least?
• What are the qualities of a good teacher? Why?

• What do you see the role of teaching as?

• Do you think teachers are role models? If so, for whom? How? Why do you (or do you not) assume so?

Authenticity

• How would you define authenticity?

• Do you think authenticity is important in teaching? Why or why not?

• Would you describe yourself as an authentic teacher? Why or why not?

• Could a teacher choose to not reveal their sexual orientation and still be considered authentic? If yes, under what circumstances? If no, why not?

• Is authenticity synonymous with being out of the closet? How or how not?

Personal Disclosure

• Who have you disclosed your sexual orientation to at work? Students? Colleagues? Your supervisors? The institution?

• Why did you choose to disclose to them? (Ask for each incident of disclosure)

• What factors do you think came into play in choosing to disclose to them at that specific period of time? (Ask for each incident of disclosure)

• Do you think your motivations for disclosing to the people at work differed from your disclosure to your family and friends? If so, how? If not, how is it similar?

• How did you choose to disclose to them? (Ask for each incident of disclosure)

• What was their reaction to the disclosure? (Ask for each incident of disclosure)

• Do you think your disclosure has had long-term benefits or hardships? Why? (Ask for each incident of disclosure)
• Do you have any concerns about negative fallout as a result of being out at work? Why or why not?

• How do you distinguish between your private life as a gay man and your professional/public life as a teacher? Where does one end and the other begin?

• How do you decide what is appropriate to disclose about your personal life to your students and colleagues?

• Are there circumstances where it is inappropriate to disclose personal information about yourself? What are they?

• Have you ever felt like you should have disclosed more but didn't? Tell me about it.

• Have you ever felt like you disclosed too much? Tell me about it.

• What role does your personal life play in the classroom (i.e., in your teaching)?

Concluding Interview

• Do you have any questions or comments about what we've just discussed?

• Is there anything else you'd like to add?
Interviewing Key Informants

Prior to the Interview

A copy of the research proposal and the application to the Subcommittee on Research with Human Subjects will be available to the informants prior to the interviews. Time will be allotted at the beginning of each interview to answer any of the informants' questions, address any concerns, and sign the necessary consent forms.

Setting Up the Interview

The interview will be arranged for a quiet setting, preferably on campus. The interview will be approximately one hour long. The researcher will go over the guidelines for conducting the interview (all informants have the right not to answer any question or to terminate the interview at any time or to withdraw from the research altogether). The researcher will inform the informants that the interview is being recorded (with their permission) so that it may later be transcribed. The researcher will also reiterate that pseudonyms will be used in the transcript so that the informants cannot later be identified.

Interview Questions

The following questions are intended to give an overall structure to the interview and to provide a framework for leading the discussion. Questions listed here are open probes designed to give the interview some initial direction. More detailed and in-depth questions will arise as a result of the informants' answers.

General Information

- What is your role here at the university (student, professor)?
- How long have you been at the university?
• How long have you known Ryan (the participant)?

• Is there anything you think I should know about you that is relevant to the problem under study?

**Teaching**

• What are the qualities of a good teacher? Why?

• What do you see the role of teaching as?

• Do you think teachers are role models? If so, for whom? How? Why do you (or do you not) assume so?

• What do you think of Ryan as a teacher? What qualities do you like best about him? What qualities do you like least? Why?

• Do you think of Ryan as a role model (for you or for others)? Why?

**Personal Disclosure**

• Has Ryan ever disclose any personal information about himself to you? If so, what was it?

• Has Ryan ever disclosed his sexual orientation to you in either a direct/indirect way?

• How did Ryan disclose this information to you? Was it a one-time incident or several incidents?

• Why did you think Ryan chose to disclose that to you?

• What was your reaction to the disclosure?

• How would you describe your colleagues' reactions to his disclosure?

• Do you see any benefits to his disclosure? How? Why?

• Do you think his disclosure of his personal life was appropriate? Why/why not?
• Have you ever felt that Ryan wanted to disclose more or should have felt comfortable with you to do so but didn't? Tell me about it.

• Have you ever felt like Ryan disclosed too much? Tell me about it.

• What role should Ryan's personal life play in the classroom (i.e., in his teaching)?

On Being Gay

• What do you know about gay people and the gay community?

• What do you think about gay teachers?

• Would you describe yourself as gay positive or gay negative?

• Do you think knowing Ryan as a gay person has altered your perceptions or your behaviour in any significant way?

• If you are or were gay, would you think it important for people to know? Why or why not?

• How far out do you think gay people should go? Out to family and friends? Out to co-workers? Out to students? Out to their entire school? Out to the public (as in a media spokesperson)?

Authenticity

• How would you define authenticity?

• Do you think authenticity is important in teaching? Why or why not?

• Could a teacher choose to not reveal their sexual orientation and still be considered authentic? If yes, under what circumstances? If no, why not?

Concluding Interview

• Do you have any questions or comments about what we've just discussed?

• Is there anything else you'd like to add?
Appendix B - Observation Protocols

Observation Protocols

The researcher in this study will assume the role of observer as participant (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). He will shadow the participant at work for one week, recording observations from the classroom, hallways, meetings, and offices. Introductions of the researcher will be made by the participant to his students, colleagues, and friends; along with an explanation of the researcher's role and presence. Where possible, these explanations will be made in advance of the researcher's arrival on site.

Data Collection

Schoepfle & Werner (1987) describe two types of observations: (a) observations of surroundings and (b) observations of the ethnographer's internal states—his reactions, feelings, effects of others, and reflections. They emphasize that both types of observations are equally important to the ethnographer.

Data will be collected by the researcher through extensive note taking. These fieldnotes will take one of three forms: (a) the condensed account, which includes notes taken in the field at the moment of occurrence; (b) the expanded account, which includes more detailed accounts and observations that are developed from the condensed account later in the day; and (c) the fieldwork journal, which includes daily reflections, opinions and reactions by the researcher (Spradley, 1980).
The condensed account will be recorded by hand in a spiral notebook. The fieldwork journal will be recorded in a separate section of the notebook as events occur and again at the end of each day. The expanded account will be written by microcomputer each evening.

Elements of Observations

Spradley describes a process by which ethnographers move from general observations (what is going on) to focussed observations (what is going on in relation to the problem under study) and selective observations (what is going on that is important to the problem under study). He describes a matrix to assist ethnographers in recording comprehensive observations in the field. This matrix consists of nine dimensions that interact with each other:

1. Space: the physical place or places
2. Actor: the people involved
3. Activity: a set of related acts people do
4. Object: the physical things that are present
5. Act: single actions that people do
6. Event: a set of related activities that people carry out
7. Time: the sequencing that takes place over time
8. Goal: the things people are trying to accomplish

By examining how these dimensions are related, Spradley is able to develop more focussed and selective observations. For example, one could ask how actors' differing
goals impact on their events; or how space, objects, and time affect their feelings. This matrix will be used during site observations to assist in taking field notes.

Confidentiality and Control of Data

Given the highly sensitive nature of the data collection, strict confidentiality of the participant, his colleagues, and his students will be maintained at all times. All fieldnotes will be coded with pseudonyms from the start so that the participants, locations, and institutions cannot be identified.

References for Observation Protocols


