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This study, using a narrative research methodology, focuses on how gay, lesbian, transgender, and queer educators in the South negotiate the complex intersections between their identities and their teaching. The central dilemmas on which this study focuses are the problematic situations of addressing sexuality and difference in classrooms at the K-12, college, and university levels; negotiating the complexity and controversial nature of the different ways of being "out" as an LGBTQ educator, especially in the South; and examining how various aspects of educators' lives influence the development of their pedagogies and relationships with students and fellow school workers. This researcher found that identities are dynamic and complex and cannot be reduced to stages in monolithic processes or be easily defined by socially constructed categories. The nine educators (K-12, college, and university)—who shared their life stories and who live and teach in the South—problematize their own identities; strive to make-sense of how their identities inform their teaching, living, and learning; and often provide counter narratives to dominant and master narratives perpetuated by tradition, popular culture, and the literature about LGBTQ educators. The goal of this study is not to come to definitive conclusions about what it is like to be a queer educator in the South at the beginning of the 21st century but to broaden socio-historically situated understandings of the intersections of identities and how these identities within a

Southern regional context influence, or not influence, teaching and learning for equity and social justice.

“IF YOU’RE COMING OUT, WHAT ARE YOU COMING INTO?”:
QUEER EDUCATORS THEORIZE ABOUT TEACHING,
LIVING, AND LEARNING IN THE SOUTH

by

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To Alison, my lawyer

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Topic

The role of the teacher has traditionally been linked to the role of moral exemplar. Teachers, from the advent of public and formal education, have been charged with inculcating society's norms and standards. Thus, educators have been held to the highest standards for what their communities consider "moral behavior." Schools, especially K-12, police teachers' behavior through morality clauses in contracts since educators play significant roles in socializing students to conform to society's norms. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) educators have been targeted as poor and even dangerous and harmful role models for students because their presence challenges heteronormativity in schools and society. According to Myrna Olson (1987), "of all the professions, education is probably the most discriminatory against homosexual individuals" (p. 73). The extreme virulence of homophobia and heterosexism in American society, especially prior to and during the 1970's, is illustrated by the American Psychological Association's classification of homosexuality as a mental illness until 1973 and by a 1970 *Journal of the American Bar Association* poll, reporting that respondents "considered homosexuality a crime second to only murder or to murder and armed robbery" ("Homosexuals Acceptable," 1970). The abhorrence of homosexuality coupled with past and current resistance to addressing issues of sexuality in classrooms,

particularly in K-12 ones, has made being an open LGBTQ educator and educating students and others about matters of sexuality extremely challenging.

Legal Battles

Although *Morris v. State Board of Education* (1969) limited schools' ability to fire teachers because of real or perceived minority sexual orientations or homosexual behavior, schools, colleges, and universities have continued to discriminate against gay and lesbian teachers. The *Morris* case did place the burden of proof on schools to show that a teacher's immoral conduct directly and negatively affected that teacher's ability to be effective in the classroom. Nevertheless, before the 2003 U.S. Supreme Court decision that decriminalized sodomy between consenting adults, most states had laws against sodomy. Therefore, teachers who openly identify as LGBTQ have, in the eyes of many school administrators and school boards, admitted to committing a crime and, thus, can be fired for illegal and immoral conduct. Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1985) has supported employers' right to terminate employees for identifying as LGBTQ since sexual orientation is not a legally protected category at the national level (Blount, 2005; Jackson, 2007). However, nearly all these major court cases involve K-12 educators, and not college or university educators, perhaps because K-12 educators teach minors whereas college educators mostly teach adults, and sexuality is not as much of a taboo subject in college and university classrooms as it is in K-12 ones.

In the 1970s, LGBTQ educators began challenging their being fired or placed in administrative positions that did not involve working with students. Before then, there was seldom any legal recourse for gay and lesbian teachers who were fired for their

perceived or professed sexual orientations. Compounding gay and lesbian educators' struggles to remain in the teaching field, in the 1970's conservative and Fundamentalist Christian groups gained support through promoting laws barring gay and lesbian educators from teaching and denying gays and lesbians protection from discrimination. Specifically, Anita Bryant and then Senator John Briggs led "Save Our Children" campaigns in Florida and California respectively. These campaigns relied on the false and harmful stereotype that gays and lesbians are pedophiles who prey on children and "recruit" them to become homosexuals since these conservatives believed homosexuals could not have children of their own. In 1977 Anita Bryant's campaign in Florida succeeded in overturning a Dade County ordinance that banned discrimination based on "sexual preference" for housing and employment (Blount, 2005; Sanlo, 1999). California's Proposition 6 that would have barred gay and lesbian people from becoming educators or maintaining their current teaching positions was defeated in 1978 (Blount, 2005). However, Oklahoma passed a law in 1978 that prohibited teachers from "advocating, soliciting, or promoting homosexual activity" (Harbeck, 1992, p. 129). This law was not declared unconstitutional until 1985 (Harbeck, 1992).

During the last 35 years, LGBTQ educators have been involved in courtroom battles over their being terminated from teaching positions because they openly identify as LGBTQ or simply because they are suspected to be an LGBTQ person. However, most of the cases in the 1970's and 1980's did not yield positive results. For example, in the early 1970's John Gish, Joseph Acanfora, Peggy Burton, James Gaylord, Steve Dain, and Paula Grossman were fired from their teaching positions for being perceived to be gay or

lesbian and in the cases of Dain and Grossman for having gender reassignment surgeries. None of these teachers were able to return to teaching. Despite these rulings, in the early 1970's two major teacher unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) extended their support to LGBT educators by including "sexual preference" in their anti-discrimination statements (Blount, 2005; Harbeck, 1992). Today, 21 states protect LGBTQ people from discrimination in employment, and teachers who identify as LGBTQ are less likely to be fired directly because of their sexual orientations (GLSEN, 2010). As Kissen (1996) contends, "The most worrisome part of hiring and firing decisions, as many teachers point out, is that it is not always easy to know whether a decision has been based on a teacher's sexual orientation" (p. 74). In other words, if educators are out as LGBTQ people and experience negative treatment at work, they may not know or be able to prove that their treatment is a result of being "out" in school or public. These educators could be fired or censured for reasons that lack validity but are not stated as being related to their sexual orientations.

Gay and Lesbian Educators' Organizations

In the United States, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender and lesbian educators have been both parts of the larger gay and lesbian movements as well as movements within education to increase acceptance of differences, to protect LGBTQ educators' employment, and to address issues of sexuality in schools. Some courageous educators have taken part in creating LGBTQ teacher organizations and gaining support from national teachers' unions such as the National Education Association and American

Federation of Teachers. In 1974, John Gish, a teacher who would later lose his job for being openly gay and participating in lesbian and gay rights movements, began the NEA's Gay Teacher Caucus, the first organization for lesbian and gay teachers. Later organizations would form in New York and Los Angeles and garner support from local school boards. Unfortunately, these organizations had little impact in smaller towns and cities throughout the United States. More recent groups, which have grown out of the earlier groups, have more effectively reached LGBTQ educators throughout the United States (Blount, 2005).

The Gay and Lesbian Independent School Teachers Network (GLSTN) was founded in 1990 as a volunteer organization, encouraging the development of gay-straight alliances (GSAs) among teachers and, later, in schools among students. GLSTN also focused on developing ways to discourage bullying in schools and acceptance of LGBTQ students. In 1995, GLSTN, led by private school teacher Kevin Jennings, became a national organization. One of the most prominent leaders in the movement to increase visibility of queer educators, Jennings currently serves as Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools in the federal government. Jennings led GLSTN as the organization evolved into The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), a more inclusive organization focused on coalition-building. GLSEN became involved in supporting students who sought to form gay-straight alliances throughout the United States. GLSEN has often been criticized by conservative groups that claim the organization encourages discussions of sex and sexuality for students at inappropriate ages. These conservative, and often Christian

Fundamentalist, groups discourage open discussions of sex and sexuality for all K-12 students. Nonetheless, GLSEN continues to support dialogues about sexuality in schools and to promote safe schools in which all students feel secure and accepted. The organization has sponsored many conferences, and nearly 4,000 GSAs have registered with GLSEN. GLSEN is affiliated with many local LGBTQ teacher organizations and has developed programs to decrease bullying and to increase safety especially for LGBTIQQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and questioning) students (Blount, 2005; GLSEN, 2010; Woog, 1995).

Central Dilemmas and Significance of the Topic

Because, as Martin Luther King, Jr. argued, “an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” everyone should be concerned about the continued discrimination of LGBTQ educators. This situation is particularly acute in the South where Fundamentalist Christians have substantial influence over electoral politics and school policies. The central dilemmas on which this study focuses are the problematic situations of addressing sexuality and difference in classrooms at the K-12, college, and university levels; negotiating the complexity and controversial nature of the different ways of being “out” as an LGBTQ educator, especially in the South; and examining how various aspects of educators’ lives influence the development of their pedagogies and relationships with students and fellow school workers. These dilemmas are significant to those involved in education and others because sexuality continues to be a controversial topic and is often seen as unsuitable for students, mainly in the K-12 setting. Moreover, many LGBTQ educators fear losing their jobs because of their sexual orientations. This is reflective of

the homophobic and heterosexist environments in which they work and in which students learn to be intolerant or, at best, merely tolerant of differences, in particular those related to sexual orientation and sexuality. In fact, school environments at all levels of education tend to shy away from addressing issues and implications of differences (Bettie, 2003; Johnson, 2006). Specifically, sexual orientation is frequently configured as a difference “chosen” by LGBTQ people and, therefore, is unlike other socially constructed categories of difference such as race, class, gender, and ability. Sexual orientation is also linked to the perceived morality of individuals, and since educators have traditionally been held to high moral standards (in the conservative and in Christian Fundamentalist senses), LGBTQ educators have been persecuted and deemed immoral because they have “chosen” a deviant “lifestyle.” All of these issues make this study of LGBTQ educators’ lives significant.

Despite one’s sexual orientation or personal beliefs about homosexuality, educators of all sexual orientations and in all regions could benefit from learning more about how to address issues of discrimination, especially in regard to sexual orientation, in their classrooms. Moreover, many people in education are white, heterosexual, and middle-class and typically do not have to think about difference because they “fit” the dominant culture’s normative descriptions for behavior and personhood; these people could benefit from learning more about the experiences of those deemed “Other” in our society and, hopefully, would become more sensitive and empathetic to the plight of LGBTQ people living in homophobic environments and would act in ways that resist homophobia and heterosexism.

Guiding Questions

Some questions that I address in this study and that are linked to these significant educational and social issues already discussed are as follows: What is it like to be an LGBTQ educator in the South? How do LGBTQ educators define “out” in their particular contexts and how do they explain their level of openness in different contexts? How have their experiences as LGBTQ people influenced their decisions in regards to their careers, the development of their pedagogies and teaching practices, and their relationships with others at work, including students, fellow educators, and administrators? How do these educators negotiate their teacher identities with their identities related to their sexual orientations? How does the context of teaching in the South problematize the intersections of the various aspects of themselves? How and why do these educators integrate (or avoid) discussions of sexuality, difference, oppression, and social justice in their teaching? The purpose of this study is to analyze how some LGBTQ educators theorize their identity development processes and to further explore how region influences identity development and LGBTQ educators’ pedagogies. In addition, this study could potentially help others who work within the field of education to better understand the issues and challenges LGBTQ educators in the South face and to be more cognizant of and willing to address differences of all kinds in a variety of educational contexts.

Review of the Scholarly Literature

During the last 20 years, an increasing number of studies have been conducted about gay and lesbian educators and their lives. However, many of these studies focus on

educators who reside in the northeastern and western parts of the United States. Both Kevin Jennings (1996; 1999) and Dan Woog (1995), well-known researchers of gay and lesbian educators' lives, agree that their studies would have had very different implications and outcomes if they focused on participants living and teaching in the South because of the population's conservative and religious leanings as well as the history of discriminatory behavior and prejudicial attitudes in this region. According to Jennings (1999):

It is important to note, however, that coming out remains a step freighted with risk in a still-homophobic society. For example, the paucity of contributors to OTIT [*One Teacher in Ten*] from regions such as the South (where only two of the thirty-six authors teach) indicates that what might be possible in some communities remains not viable in others.

The second edition of *One Teacher in Ten*, published in 2005, only contains stories from three authors teaching in the South. Additionally, Janna Jackson conducted a pilot study in the South and found: "all participants in my pilot study described their school communities as homophobic and none were out at school" (p. 114). Jackson's (2007) published study—*Unmasking Identities*, which focuses on teachers who live in New England—and others' studies (Evans, 2002; Kissen, 1996) begin to explore identity formation and development in relation to gay and lesbian teachers' teaching, and they recognize that local communities and states, with their varying degrees of legal protection for LGBTQ people, influence teachers' outness. For instance, Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca (2010) analyze how geographic region influences LGBTQ educators' lives and work; they examined "the lived experiences of six lesbian and gay teachers working

in primary and secondary school settings in the Midwest region of the USA” (p. 1023). In addition, Sanlo (1999) conducted a study about gay and lesbian educators in northeast Florida; none of these educators were out, and all feared job loss if they were “exposed” as gay or lesbian. However, these researchers do not theorize in depth about how contexts, as well as regions in which teachers live, significantly influence identity development and ways of being an educator who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (a more encompassing, political, and flexible term and identification).

Theorizing Identities and Relationships

Although previous studies of gay and lesbian educators’ lives have done much to make visible gay and lesbian educators’ struggles and triumphs teaching in the virulently homophobic United States, much more remains to be done in terms of focusing not solely on gay and lesbian teachers but also on teachers who identify as bisexual, transgender, and queer. Furthermore, there is much work to be done in terms of theorizing through the lenses of queer theories about the connections educators make between their queer and regional identities and their pedagogies and teaching practices. As Yin-Kun Chang (2007) argues, many of the books published about gay and lesbian educators “still fall into the same problem; that is, they do not theorize their findings, only vividly describing schoolteachers’ oppressive experiences” (p. 124). Nevertheless, more recent studies have aimed to theorize about teachers’ lives, developing models of the processes and understandings of negotiating queer and educator identities (Evans, 2002; Jackson, 2007). Specifically, Jackson (2007) developed a theory of gay teacher development from the patterns and scripts she noticed gay and lesbian educators using when recounting their

experiences, and from this, she derived a model she calls “the gay teacher identity development process” (p. 44). Although Jackson (2010) grants that “instead of defining an individual’s trajectory, these generalized stages represent an overall collective movement, as regressions, plateaus, jumps, and co-existence within individuals” (p. 38), I contend that identities are dynamic and complex and cannot be reduced to stages in developmental processes. Such models oversimplify identity formation and naturalize categorizations instead of theorizing about why such patterns and parallels between narratives appear or what the significances of such patterns are.

Outness and Visibility

In particular, researchers and scholars who study gay and lesbian educators’ lives (rarely do studies mention bisexual or transgendered educators) intensely focus on outness and visibility. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. First, because there is a long history of LGBTQ educators being fired or not hired due to their sexual orientations (either perceived or professed), there is much at stake in being out or not out (Blount, 2005; Griffin, 1992; Harbeck, 1992; Sears, 1992). Second, outness enables educators to address issues of sexuality from the position of an LGBTQ person, thus, giving them authority to discuss such topics and to become a resource for the school community. Third, the demonstration that gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer people can be “normal” and “well-adjusted” combats the stereotypes that persist about LGBTQ educators being child molesters or otherwise immoral; these “model” sexual minorities provide role models and support for all students and in particular

students who are questioning their sexuality or coming to their own recognition of their same-sex desires.

Nevertheless, this emphasis on LGBTQ educators appearing normal for the sake of being role models elides the significance of difference and the challenge of negotiating sexual minority identities in a heteronormative society. Despite these performances of normality, these educators challenge heteronormativity by being open about their LGBTQ identities. As Hall (2003) argues, “We find telling traces of the ‘abnormal’ even among ‘normal. . . . The credibility of the very concept of ‘normality’ is thereby rendered highly questionable” (p. 56). In other words, appearing normal and participating in life activities that are deemed normal does not negate the abnormality, in the eyes of many, of LGBTQ teachers; however, it does call into question what normality means and how it is enacted. Thus, what is normal and what is abnormal is not clearly definable, and visible LGBTQ educators who strive to be “normal” will likely be challenged in our heteronormative society.

Although issues of outness and visibility are important to this study, I argue that outness is a historically, culturally, racially, and socially constructed and contingent experience. Moreover, there is not one way of being an “out” educator. Researchers have explicitly or implicitly defined what outness is and have imposed these definitions on participants in studies (Griffin, 1992; Jackson, 2007). Mayo (2007) has argued that in the research about LGBTQ people, outness has been constructed in terms of what it means to be out as a white, middle-class gay person. Like Mayo, I will argue that “there are forms of being known as gay that do not entail being out in a White conventional sense” (p. 88).

Others have troubled conventional formulations of outness and described being out as a continual process (Jackson, 2007; Jennings, 1994; Mayo, 2007). While Jennings (1994; 1999), Kissen (1996), and Woog (1992) have pointed to the negative repercussions some educators have experienced as a result of being out at their schools, nearly all of the research about out LGBTQ educators I have read describes being out as an overall positive and empowering experience (Epstein & Johnson, 1994; Jackson, 2007; Jennings, 1994; Jennings 1999; Kissen, 1996). However, only Jennings questions whether or not this phenomenon is related to the population of educators who are willing to share their experiences. According to Jennings (1999), “Those willing to publish their stories, one might assume, are willing to do so as a result of having had a generally positive experience, and thus have fewer qualms about going public: those who fear retaliation might self-select out of a similar project.” More recent studies have come to the conclusion that out LGBTQ educators tend to associate predominantly positive experiences with their outness (Evans, 2002; Jackson, 2007; Jennings, 2005). However, being an openly LGBTQ person is not a simple matter of having positive and/or negative experiences. Mayo (2007) emphasizes the complexity of “being out”:

Being out is not a settled issue, it is not dependent on political ideology, and it is not an indication of either safety or utter unlivable risk. Rather being out is a complex series of negotiations, a complicated set of weighed consequences and benefits, as well as a way of creating spaces for possibilities with others. (p. 83)

In this study, I problematize the universalizing script of being out at school as an empowering experience because it might be for some, but not for others, to varying

degrees; moreover, what it means to be out and what the stakes are for being out differ from person to person and context to context.

Outness as Teacher Authenticity and Effectiveness

Related to the configuration of being out as being empowered is the assertion that to achieve authenticity as a teacher or self-actualization as an individual, LGBTQ people must be out in their personal and professional lives. First, rarely are LGBTQ identified people out in all contexts or all of the time for a variety of reasons. Second, the effectiveness of a LGBTQ teacher is not necessarily related to being “out.” For example, Jackson (2007) has argued that “coming out at school served to free participants from monitoring their own behavior, which allowed them to focus on students” (p. 124) and that being out led to the teachers in her study being more authentic, student-focused, and effective educators than teachers who are not out to their students. Jackson (2010) posits that “by using the term ‘authentic’ I do not mean to suggest that each person has one true core identity that emerges, rather that in that phase, they are not bifurcating their identity as those I describe as being in the ‘closeted’ stage did” (p. 37). I challenge the notion that “outness” is directly related to teacher effectiveness or authenticity (in a variety of senses) and question how one could come to a determination about teacher effectiveness from interviews with LGBTQ educators. Moreover, I argue that educators who are not out to their students—as in consistently proclaiming their LGBTQ identity to students implicitly or explicitly—can also have “integrated” identities, aspects of oneself that work in conjunction rather than in opposition to one another. As Parker Palmer (1998) has pointed out, “We teach who we are” (p. 1). Educators’ selves are inevitably reflected

in how and what they teach, no matter their levels of outness. Additionally, not everyone weighs their identities as sexual minorities the same, so being out does not mean the same thing for every LGBTQ person and is not valued in the same ways by different individuals.

While many participants in this study address social justice issues in their curricula, I challenge the assertion that being an out educator necessarily leads to an educator being more focused on teaching for social justice. Jackson (2007) observed that “openly gay participants openly challenged stereotypes about gays and lesbians. By not coming out, closeted participants perpetuated them” (p. 154). I contend that being an openly LGBTQ educator in the classroom is not inevitably and causally linked to teaching for social justice. There are diverse factors that lead to educators integrating issues of social justice into curricula; those who are not open about their minority sexual orientations may or may not focus on issues of oppression, inequity, and difference in their classes. Nevertheless, I agree with the many researchers who have argued that coming out in particular contexts (i.e. teachable moments and interactions with students) can be understood as ethical acts (Griffin, 1992; Jackson, 2007; Jennings, 1999; Khayatt, 1996; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). I will explore how, why, and in what situations being out is an ethical act. I will address the questions: How could being out benefit all students? How could being out benefit LGBTQ educators? All educators? Many scholars and researchers have discussed how out educators create safer environments for all students, increase acceptance and/or tolerance for LGBTQ people, provide resources to school communities about LGBTQ issues, humanize LGBTQ people, and provide role

models for LGBTQ youth (Jackson, 2007; Jennings, 1994; Jennings, 1999). In this way, outness is constructed as not only empowering for educators but also as having positive impacts for students and school communities. However, no studies have addressed how these ethical concerns and possible positive outcomes have manifested themselves in schools, colleges, and universities in the South specifically.

K-12, College, and University LGBTQ Educators

Another way this study uniquely contributes to the study of LGBTQ educators is by focusing on not only K-12 but also on college and university educators. The vast majority of research regarding LGBTQ educators deals only with K-12 educators (Endo, et al., 2010; Evans, 2002; Jackson 2007; Jennings, 1994; Sanlo, 1999; Woods & Harbeck, 1992; Woog, 1995). The research that has been done on LGBTQ college and university educators discusses mostly anecdotal experiences and recommendations for coming out (Adams & Emery, 1994; Khayatt, 1996). Norris (1992) conducted a study, finding that even a progressive and liberal college such as Oberlin College in Ohio is only superficially concerned with issues regarding sexual orientation. For example, “while Oberlin was among the first institutions of higher education to adopt non-discrimination clauses for sexual orientation, implementation has been spotty. Many LGBs at different levels of the institution are convinced that being too out would lead to harassment” (p. 117-18). Granted, this study was published nearly 20 years ago, and attitudes and environments at many colleges and universities have changed. However, in the South, many colleges and universities still do not include sexual orientation in their anti-discrimination policies and non-tenured faculty in particular fear coming out. I believe

this lack of research about LGBTQ college and university educators and comparison with LGBTQ K-12 educators' experiences is due to the assumption that those (faculty, students, and administrators) at colleges and universities are more accepting of diverse sexual orientations because of the liberal environments at many of these institutions and because students who attend these institutions are adults. Since the students are adults, the assumption is that it is more acceptable to discuss issues of sexuality at colleges and universities than in K-12 educational settings.

Conceptual Framework

My analysis of interviews with teachers who identify as queer, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or lesbian will reflect the theory that identities are contingent and fluid. In particular, I will analyze how these teachers (K-12, college, and university) theorize about their own identities and how these theorizations influence their teaching, living, and developing relationships. This narrative analysis is informed by queer theories that claim that "everything is textual in the sense of being open to active forms of critique, reading, and interpretation" (Hall, 2003, p. 82). After all, as Hall (2003) posits, "The point of queer theories generally is that we are not all 'really' any one thing" (p. 101). Thus, such theorizing in this study aims not to come to definitive conclusions about what it is like to be a queer educator in the South at the beginning of the 21st century but to broaden socio-historically situated understandings of queer identities and their influence on teaching, leading, living, and learning for social justice.

Discourses as Effects of Power

Close readings are central to this study. From my experience conducting a pilot study about LGBTQ educators' lives, I anticipated that many dominant discourses would play roles in this narrative analysis. In particular, I examine how the following discourses influence the narratives I collect: discourses of safety/danger, public/private, out/closeted, secret/confession, learning/unlearning, ethical/immoral, heterosexism/queerness, healthy/unhealthy, thinkable/unthinkable, stability/fluidity, knowledge/ignorance, and normal/deviant. I have configured these dominant binaries as they have much power in determining how we think and use language. We "shape and are shaped by language" (Evans, 2002, p. 5). Further, "binaries are always weighted toward the first term, which is held at greater social value, but which also always needs the second term to substantiate that value" (Hall, 2003, p. 62). These discourses weigh one term over the other and necessitate the lesser valued term in order to establish the intelligibility of the dominant binary term, which reflects that language use and these discourses are effects of power. Foucault (1976) theorizes power as multidirectional and productive; power and its effects on language are multiple and not always repressive. Dominant discourses and narratives are those that have gained power by being supported and perpetuated by authoritative institutions such as religion, government, science, the media, and education. These discourses do not always have the effects that those in power intend. According to Evans (2002), "Social discourse reflects, enacts, limits, and exceeds what is possible" (p. 23). In other words, social discourses, those that are privileged and those that are not, are examples of the interchanges, relations, resistances, and acceptances of power.

As Foucault often pointed out, where there is power there is resistance.

Throughout this study, I examine how narrators resist and disrupt these dominant discourses, how they have influenced their lives and constructions of selves, how these discourses have power over the narrators' behavior and language, and how they continue to frame their experiences within discourses that reify their oppression. These narrators often present counter narratives to both the master narratives produced and reproduced by those in power and dominant narratives (narratives that repeat themselves in popular/mainstream culture, scholarly literature, and particular communities) about what it means to be LGBTQ people, to be out, to be an educator, to live in the South, and to be a Southerner. The counter narratives many of the narrators develop challenge the universalizing discourses espoused by many grand narratives. Thus, they, at times, question the social constructions on which dominant and master narratives are based and imagine and live alternatives to these narratives.

Theoretical Lenses and Identity

Specifically, I view this topic, research, and challenges that I wish to explore through queer and postmodern lenses. Queer theories extend feminists' ideas about the constructedness of gender and sexuality, focusing on the contingency and indeterminacy of identities and labels and resisting binary thinking (Hall, 2003). The identities that educators in this study construct are contingent and contextually situated. Although our selves are constructed in relation to the "other," with what or whom we do or do not identify, we are not simply amalgamations of socializations or half of a binary oppositional identity such as man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, or teacher/queer.

We develop selves from interacting in social worlds, yet we also make choices about how we respond to others, our environments, and even our own selves. Identities are dynamic, social and individual creations; moreover, our identities and selves are not determined now and forever. We all have agency whether or not we decide to act upon it. Some are more open than others to possibilities for multiple identifications and changing selves, yet there are patterns in our behaviors and in our responses that maintain some consistency or at least coherence.

Paradoxically, our selves are always in flux and in dialogue with the world in which we inhabit, yet our “responses [to others, ourselves, and outside phenomenon] begin to have patterns; the dialogue [we] have with existence begins to assume the form of a text, a kind of book” (Holquist, 2002, p. 30). Our formulations of our selves require us “to give order (to what would otherwise be) the chaos of lived experience” (p. 31). Such constructions of selves make order out of disorder through “a collective project” (Casey, 1995, p. 222) in which we engage with others and attempt to see ourselves through the eyes of others. Still, there may be cases where life events and lived experiences “cannot be incorporated [into one’s narrative] because it disrupts how the self might imagine itself and others” (Britzman, 1998, p. 220). What other events do storytellers share that would suggest why certain events would disrupt how they currently see themselves or how they wish to be seen? What do storytellers leave out? Avoid discussing? In looking back at one’s lived experiences through memory, people often wish to see themselves in ways that are congruent with showing cause-and-effect relationships between who they were in the past and who they are now.

Disrupting Normativity

Halperin (1995) contends, “‘Queer’ does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing particular to which it necessarily refers*” (pp. 61-2, emphasis original). As a queer analysis of LGBTQ educators’ narratives, this study reexamines what other studies and society have taken for granted or have assumed such as the meanings of outness; what outness can do for educators, students, and schools; how the South has been stereotypically viewed as conservative and even backward; what self-knowledge and experience are; and what purposes narratives serve in teaching, learning, and research contexts. Outness is not a simple form of disclosure nor is it a complete disclosure. Jennings (1999) argues that LGBTQ teachers’ being out can “make conditions better for gay students” and improve these teachers’ “relationships with the general population.” However, outness has other potentialities such as fixing and disciplining identities and simplifying the very problematic dynamics of language and identification. Being in the closet or out of it can foreclose the possibility of something in between or other ways of constructing the self that do not fit neatly into preconceived and constructed identities and labels. Likewise, experiences, and specifically experiences of living and working in the South, are not simply matters of truth represented by language. These experiences are constructed through multiple lenses involving contexts and are shaped through experiences and perceptions. What must readers, listeners, and narrators learn and unlearn to negotiate meanings of narratives? Certainly, the context of the South

and what this context means to readers, the researcher, and narrators affects how people perceive and/or interact in environments they may see as or expect to be hostile or discriminatory. So if the telling of experiences and narratives are not accurate representations of reality and are not meant to be, what is the purpose of collecting and analyzing such narratives? The goal is a queer one: to examine how “the self is trapped in language, culture, and history” (Morris, 2000, p. 19) and how power relations and productions are implicated in narrating one’s existence.

Because I see people as always becoming and unfinished, I do not wish to present my analysis as definitive or necessarily applicable to larger populations. There has only been one study, published over a decade ago, focusing on LGB teachers in South, specifically in northeast Florida (Sanlo, 1999). This study more broadly focuses on LGBTQ educators in the South, so I believe that this study provides fodder for other researchers to begin to explore more thoroughly how regional contexts interact with LGBTQ educator identity development and negotiations. I believe these narratives and the participants’ own theorizations give researchers, scholars, and others insights into how teaching and living in the South as an LGBTQ educator is different than teaching and living in other areas of the United States. There is a significant amount of research already published about LGBTQ educators in other areas of the country that provides a basis for comparison. However, my study is not simply about “giving voice” to LGBTQ educators in the South; they already have voices. This study is about listening to these educators and not simply presenting their stories but examining how they themselves theorize their own continual identity development through language.

Narratives as Postmodern, Queer Curricula

Nevertheless, the narratives I collect are not just stories or mines from which I can harvest information or analyses. Rather, I view my research, narratives, and analysis as a form of postmodern curriculum/knowledge that has potential to be educative, problematic, and complex. As in the postmodern curriculum that Slattery (2006) describes, this study “embraces complexity, tolerance of ambiguity, acceptance of uncertainty, and authentic, situated assessment” (Slattery, 2006, p. 54). Learning processes, like processes of becoming and narrating stories of the self, are complex and are not always comfortable. Narratives do not provide certainty or clear-cut answers. As a researcher, I strive to “disrupt”—and help others do so as well—what is taken for granted in traditional research methods and presentations of findings as well as to seek alternatives to the status quo. Additionally, I delineate how I assess and evaluate my narrative research in authentic ways. While I must have some means to determine the integrity and usefulness of my research, I am also open to participants’ and other readers’ opinions and alternative analyses and readings of my research. In this way, I strive to have reciprocal and ethical relationships with participants.

Meyer (2007) asserts that queer theory goes beyond dealing with lesbian and gay issues and can help people in general question “taken-for-granted assumptions about relationships, identity, gender, and sexual orientation” (p. 15). However, queer theories and queer pedagogies undeniably focus on issues of sexuality, desire, gender, and *eros*. Utilizing these concepts troubles not only the status quo of education but also what teachers/people do and discuss inside and outside formal education. In this study, I

analyze how and whether LGBTQ educators confront topics that are traditionally avoided in classrooms and the ways that they use these topics to help students develop critical thinking skills and critical consciousnesses. I am interested in learning how or if LGBTQ educators take queer approaches in developing curricula and question normative assumptions about thinking, reading, teaching, and learning. As with queer pedagogy, this study cannot claim to “cure” others of their ignorance, for ignorance is a matter of knowledge and what we refuse to learn because it disrupts our other knowledge (Britzman, 1998). Learning and living are complex, and I use this paradigm of queer pedagogy to explore this complexity and to see what applications may come of troubling normative thinking and doing inside and outside formal educational contexts.

In addition, queer pedagogy implicates the self and identity as part of the processes of learning and becoming. After all, as Schlasko suggests, “One does not acquire knowledge the way one acquires belongings. When we ask students to learn something, we are asking them to change” (p. 129). What do the LGBTQ educators who participate in this study, as well as myself, learn and unlearn to develop identities and strategies for negotiating these identities in particular contexts? In other words, using the lens of queer pedagogy, I will examine how the participants risk themselves in their continual learning about and construction of their selves and how they have changed through their learning. Learning involves and evolves our identities. As a form of queer pedagogy, I intend for this study to engage participants and readers in learning as a process of becoming. I encourage participants to explore why they resist some knowledge/identifications, why they do not resist others, and what is personally and

socially at stake in these tensions, resistances, and acceptances. Overall, I co-create with participants new knowledges vis-à-vis multiple perspectives, identifications, and possibilities for teaching, learning, and being.

Queer Theory and Analysis

My analysis is informed, as previously mentioned, by various aspects of queer theories. As Jagose (1996) contends, “Queer itself can have neither a fundamental logic, not a consistent set of characteristics” (p. 96). Queer theory does not have definite tenants on which to base one’s analysis. Despite the difficulty of defining queer or queer theories, these concepts espouse ways of reading normality/abnormality and the socially constructed nature of all identity categories. Therefore, I have looked for ways in which these narratives have engaged in “destabilizing [the normative and taken for granted] and opening [them] up to multiplicity” (Hall, 2003, p. 121). However, this multiplicity is ambiguous. Butler (1999) argues that a goal of queer analysis is “to open up the field of possibility without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized” (p. viii). Hence, queering my analysis necessitates that I be open to alternative readings and possibilities for thinking, living, and identifying. “To see queer theory as this wholly enmeshed in discussions of identity, multiple identities, and the possibilities of *changing* identities is vital. . . . Identity [is] always plural and contingent” (Hall, 2003, p 64). Yet even multiple and changing identities are affected by social norms, so I strive to view these narratives through a critical lens, recognizing that “the very concept of homosexuality is a social one, and one cannot understand the homosexual experience without recognizing the extent to which we have developed a certain identity and

behavior derived from social norms” (Altman, 1971, p. 2). Sexual identities, and all identities for that matter, are social constructions subject to change and resistances by those who accept, reject, and impose these identities.

Instability of Gender and Sexuality

At times, the participants in this study challenge gender roles and categories related to gender and sexuality; at other times, they reinforce essentialist categories of gender and sexuality. For example, although there are no self-proclaimed bisexuals in this study, several participants discuss how some conceptions of bisexuality reinforce binary notions of gender, and some of these same participants challenge binary notions of sexuality as either heterosexual or homosexual. Furthermore, as with bisexual people, “queer studies neglect the lived experiences of transgender people” (Hines, 2006, p. 51). There is one person who identifies as transgender who participated in this study. Towel and Morgan (2002) contend, “The potential that trans bodies and trans lives have to shed light on normative gender relations is immense. Who else has the opportunity to live these questions: . . . Through what acts are gender identities communicated? What does failing to communicate a gender identity mean for social interactions?” (p. 491). Indeed, the experiences of the participant who identifies as transgender provide explorations of these questions as well as examples of the ways he challenges normative constructions of gender and sexuality, reflecting the instability of these categories. The experiences of transgender people including the one in this study illustrates that “some bodies are never at home, some bodies cannot simply cross from A to B, some bodies recognize and live with the inherent instability of identity” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 164). In a society that

demands categorization and adherence to normative standards of behavior relating to one's presumably unambiguous gender, LGBTQ people often must use a variety of strategies to negotiate their non-heteronormative performances of gender and sexuality. However, bisexual and transgender people in particular are placed in precarious positions, as "those whose gender identity and gender presentations fall outside of the binary are stigmatized, ostracized, and socially delegitimized to the extent that they may fail to be socially recognized" (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997, p. 490). Much of the literature regarding sexual minorities focuses predominately on gay and lesbian people. Despite this, what many transgender and bisexual people have in common with gay, lesbian, and queer people are their abilities recognize the "instability" and contingency of gender and sexuality yet still formulate meaningful, coherent expressions of their selves.

Limitations

Theories, research, and identities of all kinds are limited, despite my privileging narrators' theorizing. Language is multifaceted and does not neatly equal "true" representations of experience. Mayo (2007) contends that we must be "suspicious of the process of narrativation" while also pointing out that "however necessary a fiction they are, narratives are also themselves sites of critique, especially as those narratives are bound together with political questions about coming out and hiding, knowledge and ignorance" (p. 84). In other words, narratives are limited when taken for truth, as actual experience; however, they have much to offer when viewed in terms of their critical potentials as representations of socially constructed realities and as forms of resistance

(i.e. counter narratives) to dominant discourses and ways of being. In this study, I also contend with the limitations of language. “Researchers and researched alike are continually coming up against the limits of language, concepts, and identity positions to adequately describe themselves” (p. 85). By analyzing and conducting this research through queer and postmodern lenses, I do not avoid these problematics but also do not become paralyzed by them. These theories allow for ambiguity, for confronting limits, and for engaging complexity. My goal is to explore and interrogate these limits, so queerly these limits further my research agenda rather than impede it.

Overview of the Dissertation’s Organization

In chapter two, I give an overview of the narrative research methodology I use for this study along with brief descriptions of the nine participants in this study. In chapter three, I focus on issues of outness and visibility, exploring how these educators define being out and how being out affects their teaching, careers, relationships, and lives in general. In chapter four, I analyze what roles language use play in how they teach and construct their selves through language. Further, I focus on which aspects of themselves they emphasize and elaborate upon and which aspects they avoid or do not mention. In chapter five, I discuss how contexts shape narrators’ stories and these stories’ priorities. Specifically, I discuss how teaching in the South has influenced their teaching, becoming, learning, and living as well as compare how each narrator’s specific contexts (teaching K-12, college, or university) shape their teaching and negotiating their identities and various roles. Last, in chapter six, I offer my conclusions regarding my analyses and

findings as well as discuss the implications of this study for further research, for educational institutions, and for the larger study of LGBTQ educators' lives.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

Methodology

I have implemented a narrative research study because I believe this methodology best suits the population I am studying and the research questions I wish to examine. Quantitative methods would not be appropriate for this study that seeks to explore how LGBTQ educators in the South construct their identities as queer people and as teachers. Specifically, quantitative studies often demand random samples, and a random sample for this population is not possible because LGBTQ people who participate in such studies are a unique population since they are willing to be out at least to the researcher (Jackson, 2009; Nardi, 2006). Finding LGBTQ educators willing to participate in studies is challenging since so many of these educators fear losing their jobs or being “outed.” However, using more confidential data collection strategies such as Likert scales and other quantitative methods in conducting research about educators’ lives seems inadequate and limiting because these methods often reduce the responses that can be given to a few choices. I posit that more can be learned from asking educators open-ended questions. “It is preferable to ask questions that open up topics and allow respondents to construct answers, in collaboration with listeners, in the ways they find meaningful” (Riessman, 1993, p. 54). Asking questions to elicit certain answers, which is often done on surveys and questionnaires, is antithetical to learning how educators

construct meaning and how those constructions affect their teaching and living. No method can reveal all the contexts involved in shaping a response; however, open-ended questions often lead to responses that provide contexts for ideas and experiences.

Criteria for Participation and Narrative Collection

I collected life histories from nine LGBTQ K-12, college, or university educators who live in the South as of 2010. Participants identify as lesbian, gay, transgendered, or queer and are currently employed as educators in the South. However, this study does not include any participants who currently identify as bisexual. This is especially disheartening since, as Gammon and Isgro (2007) and Yoshino (2000) contend, individuals who are bisexual are frequently not represented in studies and are indeed rendered invisible. The bisexual label is often thought of as transitional and transitory, whereby bisexual people are either “really” heterosexual or homosexual. Yoshino (2000) argues that alternative possibilities such as bisexuality make it nearly “impossible for them [heterosexuals] definitely to prove their heterosexuality” (p. 362) since, as Seidman (1993) points out, “‘heterosexuality’ has meaning only in relation to ‘homosexuality’” (p. 130). Bisexuality, then, troubles the dichotomy of heterosexuality/homosexuality, which threatens the intelligibility of both homosexuality and heterosexuality. Sexuality, then, seems to fall into the categories of either heterosexuality or homosexuality whereby the value of heterosexuality depends on the devaluing of homosexuality. Further, the assertion that there are two “genders” is reinforced by the bisexual who is attracted to both biological men and women. While several interviewees describe being attracted to both biological men and women, none of these participants claimed the “bisexual” label

perhaps because they reject binary notions of gender and sexuality and because bisexuals have been criticized by homosexuals as “not really gay” and by heterosexuals as “bisexual chic,” following a popular trend (Gammon and Isgro, 2007).

For the purposes of this study, I have defined the “South” similarly to how the U.S. Census Bureau has. “The South” includes Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Because of my small sample size, which is typical for a narrative research study, I do not have representatives from all Southern states. More specifically, the participants in this study live in North Carolina, Virginia, or Georgia. According to Squire (2008), “Researchers who study life narratives, or who aim for fully biographical accounts of at least parts of interviewees’ lives, tend to use small numbers of interviewees, sampled theoretically, often on an opportunistic and network basis, with little randomization within this sampling frame” (pp. 47-8). I found participants by using the “snow-ball” method, finding contacts from recommendations made by other participants, friends, and colleagues. I asked participants to tell me the story of their lives and one follow-up question: How has your sexual orientation influenced your teaching and career? Although I engaged in dialogues with participants and solicited further information, interviews consisted mostly of participants’ extended monologues, allowing them to engage in story-telling with little interruption. In this way, these educators told their life stories on their own terms, which is important because I wished to see which aspects of their lives on which they focused and which aspects they de-emphasized or perhaps did not even mention.

Common Trends in Narrative Research and Applications to this Study

While there are various ways of conducting narrative research in many fields and disciplines, there are common trends in current narrative research approaches developed over the last 20 years. I see that many researchers agree that discussions of reflexivity, theoretical frameworks, story-collection techniques, methods of participant recruitment, and strategies used for interpretation and analysis are important to narrative research studies. Although these explanations differ from study to study and researchers contest and emphasize different aspects of these topics, these discussions are frequently included in narrative research studies (Casey, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Goodley, Lawthom, Clough, & Moore, 2004; Josselson & Lieblich, 2003; Squire, 2008). All of these topics will be important in terms of the principles and ethics I follow in data collection.

Reflexivity

Researchers' statements of reflexivity position themselves in regard to their research. I discuss my positionality (personally, politically, culturally, socially and theoretically) in relation to the topics of study and interviewees (Peshkin, 1988). I explore what is at stake for me as a researcher, scholar, and person in conducting this research. Reflexive statements often include information about the researchers' social location (i.e. background, race, religion, socioeconomic status, and gender). The purpose of reflexive statements is to acknowledge that researchers are not "objective" observers but rather that their research and their interpretations are influenced by their own historical and geographical contexts, socializations, beliefs, experiences, and values.

Collecting narratives

I met with each interviewee once. Most interviews lasted one to two hours. I recorded interviews and focused on a limited number of participants because of the amount of data collected during interviews. It is not uncommon for narrative researchers to have hundreds of pages of transcripts with only a small number of participants. Unlike quantitative studies and some qualitative studies, the point is not to obtain a representative sample of a larger population or to make generalizations applicable to large groups; rather the goal is to focus on particular socially and culturally situated understandings of the human-centered focus of the study. As I have already mentioned, I recruited participants through the snow-ball effect. I transcribed the interviews, and these transcripts are the data for analysis.

Analysis of narratives

For my purposes, I view this study and my analyses through a queer lens, looking for disruptions and critiques of normativity and alternative possibilities and ways of thinking, doing, and being. In terms of coding and analyzing narratives, some studies have specific approaches to analysis such as “event-centered” narrative studies that focus on critical events and their significance to the structure of the story and other events in the story (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Other methods of analysis focus on themes, areas of overlap, and intertextuality between participants’ narratives (Casey, 1993). Intertextuality is the common patterns of language use, script use, and structures between narrative texts. I focus on both intertextuality and critical events in my analysis of narratives, closely reading and examining language use (i.e. word choices and ordering).

Moreover, the selection of events and aspects participants emphasize and in what order provides insights about how they construct their identities and selves and how they do so in relation to their work as educators. I coded transcripts by looking for common discourses, themes, and intertextuality between narratives.

Assessment of Quality in Narrative Research

Like other narrative researchers, I insist that narrative inquiry is unlike other forms of qualitative research and is quite different than quantitative research in general, and the same constructs of reliability, bias, and validity for these other types of research are inappropriate for gauging the significance or authenticity of narrative research findings (Goodley, et al., 2004; Squire, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). I analyze narratives in a thorough and critical way through careful transcription, developing collaborative relationships with participants, and acknowledging the limitations of my study and narrative research in general.

Transcription is interpretation. For instance, how one punctuates what was said could have great bearing on the meaning of what was said. Webster & Mertova (2007) argue that “in quantitative research ‘reliability’ refers to the consistency and stability of the measuring instruments, whereas in narrative research, it is directed to the ‘trustworthiness’ of field notes and transcripts of interviews” (p. 5). But how do we determine the “trustworthiness” of notes and transcripts? I have constructed, as much as possible, notes and transcripts that are close to the original recordings and the storytellers’ intended meanings. I spent time listening to interviews, then transcribing them, and then verifying the transcripts by listening to recordings of them while reading

the transcripts. Riessman (1993) points out: “Analysis cannot be easily distinguished from transcription” (p. 60). Transcription is tedious work but is nonetheless essential to ensure that researchers understand what interviewees say and how they say it, giving researchers more insights about how to interpret stories, see patterns or themes, and make connections between narratives.

I shared transcripts and subsequent analyses with participants and learned more about the processes through which stories are constructed and how these stories are contingent upon a multitude of factors. Such sharing also gives participants opportunities to reflect upon their life experiences and actually possess their stories in transcript form. Input and collaboration with participants enhances interpretations and analyses by adding multiple perspectives that interact in dialogic ways with the ever-evolving texts of people’s stories and then eventually the products of analysis. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) and Deyhle (1995) posit that researchers must negotiate and collaborate with those they represent in their texts in order not only to present authentic findings but also to treat interviewees in ethical ways, “well beyond the ethical considerations called for in formal processes and in signed commitments to protect participants from harm” (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 30). While I believe we should strive to form more egalitarian and dialogic relationships with interviewees, the researcher remains the person who develops these interpretations, analyses, and syntheses. In spite of this, there are also possibilities to resist and undermine, to an extent, these power-relations by allowing participants to again review, if they wish, the product of the research (the paper, the book, the book chapter, the essay, or the article). In negotiations and sharing with participants, I received

“responses that [were] sometimes affirming and sometime disrupting” (p. 30). I viewed this as yet another opportunity for interviewees to engage in dialogue with me as the researcher and to contribute to the analysis and interpretation. The question still remains, however: Who retains ultimate control over the products of the research? I believe that participants should have the control, and I made participants aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point in the process.

Gready (2008) brings up other important points about researcher-participant relationships. He argues that much more is at stake than has previously been considered in such relationships. Frequently, researchers discuss “giving voice” to marginalized, traditionally unheard voices. However, all people have voices; it is a matter of having listeners. The question I continually ask: How can I, as a researcher, avoid contributing to marginalization? Gready points out:

Voice can no longer, if it could ever really, be considered a simplistic form of power. The struggle now is less over the articulation of the marginalized and subaltern voice than for greater control over voice, representation, interpretation, and dissemination. Voice without control may be worse than silence; voice with control has the capacity to become a less perishable form of power because in essence it allows voice to enter into a more genuinely reciprocal dialogue. Such dialogue could provide a more enduring challenge to the power relations of research, knowledge production and the public sphere. (p. 147)

In order for potentials of various forms of authentic narrative research to be realized, researchers must take these considerations seriously and be constantly mindful of these historically tenuous and unequal power-relationships between “the research participant” and “the researcher.” As Casey (1995) contends, “interviewers need to respect the

authenticity and integrity of narrators' stories, to see them as subjects creating their own history rather than objects of research" (pp. 231-2). I do not think it can be emphasized enough that storytellers are human beings. To objectify them is to dehumanize them, which undermines the most important purpose of narrative research: to explore what it means to be human in all its complexity and multiplicity. Narrative research provides a unique opportunity for researchers to recognize the humanity of others and the implications of this recognition not only for narrative research or the topic of interest but for co-creating knowledges in new and dialogic ways.

Research Limitations

Furthermore, I acknowledge my research and the study's limitations. There are limitations and problems in narrative research that I do not think will ever be finally resolved. First, people cannot completely know what it is like to be another person. However, this is precisely why researchers should describe the lenses through which they analyze and interpret research; this will, to an extent, reveal how writers view others from multiple, yet limited perspectives.

I contend that authentic narrative research should "attend to [narratives'] internal priorities. Every narrative is a highly constructed text constructed around a cultural framework of meaning and shaped by particular patterns of inclusion, omission, and disparity" (Casey, 1995, p. 234). Such analysis lends itself to convincingly and ethically presenting research findings and working toward privileging narrators' analyses and interpretations over the researchers'. This leads us to the second limitation of narrative research. Since researchers are typically the ones who initiate research and choose

participants, there are significant power imbalances between researchers and interviewees that cannot be simply resolved or made equitable. Nevertheless, this does not mean that researchers should not even attempt to make researcher-storyteller relationships more equitable. While such perfect equity may not be possible, there are ways to lessen the power of the researcher over his or her research participants by recognizing their humanity through sensitive and reflexive research methods and analyses.

Last, narrative research is limited because it does not make broad generalizations about populations, which many argue is an advantage of narrative research. As Goodley, et al. (2004) contend, what is significant in narrative inquiry is “*specificity not generalization* – amenable to specific description and explanation of a few people rather than the representative generalities of a wider population” (p. 97-8). Although people have social identities, which may incline them to share similar experiences and viewpoints with others who have similar social identities, narrative and life story studies’ conclusions cannot be simplistically applied to everyone who seems to fit similar identifications as the narrators in a given study. Still, researchers should not avoid justifying and situating their studies in regard to the larger context of the research being done in a certain field or on a given topic and to larger social and institutional issues (Clandinin, et al., 2007).

The Narrator-Participants

I collected life histories from nine educators who identify as queer, lesbian, transgender, and/or gay. “Donna” is African American and in her mid-thirties. She grew up in a large city in the northeast, has been teaching for nearly a decade, and now teaches

at a private high school in an urban area in the South. “Sharon” is white and in her late fifties. She grew up in the Midwest, has been teaching for nearly 30 years, and currently teaches at a large community college in a medium-size city in the South. “Susan” is white and in her mid-twenties. She grew up in the rural South, has taught K-12 guidance classes in the rural South, but currently teaches at a university in a medium-size city in the South. Susan has been teaching for three years. “Greg” is white and in his mid-thirties. He grew up in the rural South, has been teaching for over a decade, and currently teaches pre-K and elementary grades in an urban public school in the South. “Skye” is Indian-American and in her mid-thirties. She has been teaching for approximately five years and currently teaches at a large state university in a medium-size city in the South. Skye grew up in India and is now an American citizen. “Wanda” is white and in her mid-twenties. She has been teaching for three years and currently teaches at an urban middle school near where she lives and grew up. “James,” originally a Midwesterner, teaches at a private women’s college in a medium-size city in the South. James is in his early sixties, is white, and has been teaching for over 30 years. “Tom,” also from the Midwest, has taught middle school but currently teaches at a state university. Tom is in his mid-twenties, is white, and has been a teacher for approximately five years. “Gina” is white and in her early thirties. She grew up in and teaches elementary school in the rural South; she has been teaching for eight years.

I chose these interviewees based on their willingness to participate in this study; their identification as gay, lesbian, transgendered, or queer; and their current status as working educators in the South. I found these educators through various colleagues who

recommended them as potential interviewees. I met with them each once for one to two hours in private rooms at local libraries, in their homes, or in their offices and asked them to tell the stories of their lives. I allowed them to ask any questions they wished during the interviews about my research. Although most of the interviews consist of participants' extended narratives, I did share information about the study, my research, and myself. When participants needed direction, I reassured them that there were no "right" answers.

Myself as Researcher

According to Peshkin (1988), "One's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed" (p.17). Quite simply, we cannot account for all our subjectivity because it is even somewhat elusive to us. Although I cannot fully understand what it is like to be someone else, I recognize some of the ways I am implicated in the processes of research and analysis and how I must be ever-mindful to resist marginalizing "Others." According to Solomon and Higgins (2000):

There is no absolute knowledge that transcends all possible perspectives: knowledge is always constrained by one's perspective . . . and that perspective depends on our physiological constitution, our skills of inquiring and interpreting, our culture, and our language. (p. 35-6)

Despite endeavoring to be especially self-aware, I am constrained by my perspective, so I believe it is important to acknowledge that my research and my interpretations are influenced by my own beliefs, experiences, and values. The time and place in which I live, the beginning of the 21st century in the South, necessarily affects my research,

thinking, theorizing, and the stories my interviewees tell. As Andrews (2008) posits, “The historical context in which we produce our work not only frames its meaning but is not replicable in other places and times. Even the very same words carry different meanings when they are authored—or read—in different places and times” (p. 93). This study and my own teaching, learning, living, and leading are based in the South; thus, this research reflects my and others’ current, yet dynamic, understandings of negotiating “being” both queer and an educator in the South.

I come from a working-class background and am a first-generation college student. On both sides of my family, men are steelworkers and women pursue careers as pink collar office, grocery store, or retail workers. I chose to teach at a community college because I am able to relate to my community college students better than I was able to relate to students I encountered while attending and teaching at universities. I know what it is like to balance many responsibilities at once. I identify as a queer person with multiple ethnicities and a white racial identity. I have lived in the South for more than four years but am originally from Ohio and have lived in the Southwest as well.

As an educator and researcher, I am interested in teaching and learning for social justice and praxis—“reflection and action on the world to transform it” (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2007, p.19). Thus, I am likely to notice how other educators pursue these purposes of education or, conversely, how they do not. I cannot deny that there is something at stake in this research for me personally. I identify as queer and am an educator in the South. I, like the participants in this study, have struggled with my “outness” at work. Whom should I tell? When? I think what many LGBTQ educators

teaching in the South agree upon is that one should not simply come out arbitrarily. For many, “coming out,” which continues to be redefined, is a meaningful statement about an important aspect of a queer person’s life. I disclose that part of my identity in various ways—other than saying, “I am queer.” I feel slightly uncomfortable even using the term “coming out” because it is fraught with contradictions. Of course, I do say that I am gay, lesbian or queer, but I have also “come out” during teachable moments, to individual students during conversations in my office about pictures on my desk, and by talking about the gender identification of the person I am dating. Nonetheless, I do not announce my sexual orientation to all students in every class or to everyone with whom I work.

I strive “to recognize the unrecognized” (Villaverde, 2008, p. 112). Listening to and critically reading the narratives I have collected have helped me in this endeavor to recognize what often goes unnoticed. I have purposely designed my research to allow narrators to tell their stories on their own terms with limited interruptions or input from me so that I could analyze how they construct their own priorities in articulating their identities. Moreover, this design has helped me to notice what has often gone unnoticed by connecting these narrators’ lived experiences to how they define the identity categories they use to describe themselves. What I have learned from this is that identities and the discourses used to articulate them are both shifting and multidimensional. This recognition on my part has troubled how I define myself and relate to the participants in this study. While in the past I have essentialized the way I identify in terms of my sexual orientation, I now tend to relate more on an analytical level to the participants who trouble fixed identities and complicate the meanings and ways of being out since I, too,

resist participating in what I see as oversimplified views and discourses of being in or out. Rather, I believe being in or out of the closet is a complicated series of negotiations that are never final; additionally, I see outness as a social construct to which a high degree of meaning is often attached. However, this construction contradicts how many think of being in or out or even of rejecting this binary construction of self disclosure that is always incomplete as well as more complex than simply articulating one dimension of one's identity. For myself, I do not attach a high degree of meaning to people knowing or not knowing how I identify in terms of my sexual orientation. Like others in my study, I believe there is much more to me than my sexual orientation, and while I do come out in various ways, I do not see coming out as the ultimate expression of an essential truth about myself. Instead, my sexual orientation, which has and continues to evolve over time, is one aspect of myself that is influenced relationally; to whom and how I am out is a result of my relating to others or seeing a specific purpose for intentionally sharing my sexual orientation that challenges many peoples' heteronormative worldviews.

Sharing Voices, Not Giving Voice

According to Riessman (1993), "Whereas traditional social science has claimed to represent the experiences of populations and cultures, the new criticism states that we cannot speak, finally and with ultimate authority, for others" (p. 15). Throughout the following chapters, I quote heavily from interviewees as they will have in many ways authored this text with me. I hope to share their voices by presenting their stories in their own words. However, I cannot "speak for" those whom I interviewed. Narrative research methodologies, like all research methodologies, are not without their limitations and

problems such as the balancing of authority between researchers and interviewees and the privileging of narratives as “truth,” rather than recognizing them as contingent, social constructions. While I recognize these limitations, I also see the importance of allowing educators to interpret their own experiences, to put emphasis on the events and topics important to them, and to make their own connections between their lives and work (Casey, 1992). My goals are to recognize intertextuality between these life stories, examine patterns within individual narratives, and analyze the various theoretical and practical implications of these stories for teaching and learning.

CHAPTER III

OUTNESS AND VISIBILITY

In or Out: Or It's Not So Simple

Much of the literature about gay and lesbian teachers has focused on the level of teachers' outness in their professional and personal lives. Being "out" has often been constructed as the ultimate evidence of a gay or lesbian person's self actualization. Jackson (2007) argues "outness" is the ongoing result of the gay teacher development process. As many, including Jackson, have pointed out, coming out is a process that does not just happen once. How some conceive "being out" is not the same as how others conceive it. Some define an "out" person as someone who consistently and explicitly tells colleagues, students, friends, and others that he or she identifies as gay, queer, bisexual, transgendered, or lesbian. This is especially problematic if one does not "fit" into the typical definition and/or stereotype of what it means to be a man or a woman or gay or lesbian; for example, one may identify as queer and be in any number of relationship configurations with biological males or females, or with intersexed or transgendered individuals.

All the individuals in this study do consider themselves "out" in some ways even though some of them have not explicitly announced to their students and all their colleagues that they identify as gay, lesbian, transgender, or queer. Although these teachers do not explicitly announce how they identify to everyone, this particular group

of educators does unequivocally live their convictions of teaching, learning, living, and leading for social justice. However, I acknowledge that there is no singular, shared experience. While there may be similarities in experiences and intertextuality between narratives, everyone's experiences are uniquely his or her own. LGBTQ communities, organizations, and identities are recent phenomena as are homosexual acts being equated with homosexual identities (Evans, 2002; Hall, 2003). Because one engages in homosexual behavior does not lead to a person feeling a sense of solidarity with LGBTQ people or ensure that a person's sexual behavior is static and stable throughout his or her life. Unfortunately, essential and binary categories such as biological sex are so ingrained in us through our culture's ways of socialization that it is often difficult for us to understand that people are not simply born men or women, straight or gay but that they become these vis-à-vis genetics, education, social interactions, and life experiences. Who we are to ourselves and others is a process that is not simply up to us.

The educators in this study discuss how aspects of their identities inform various parts of their lives—even if they are not “out” in commonly defined ways. These teachers challenge meanings of outness, and several are creative as well as courageous in their ways of teaching for social justice. “Announcing” one's gay, lesbian, or queer identity takes courage, but there are other ways of expressing queer identities, which also reflect bravery and dedication to creating climates that encourage the development of critical consciousness and the celebration of the diverse ways of being human. Researchers, such as Woog (1995), notice a trend of educators' feeling “a powerful surge of freedom—accompanied by tremendous energy, creativity, and fulfillment—when that closet door

opens” (p. 16). Many of the narrators in this study feel a sense of freedom due to their being out; however, being out is a continual process for them, and it does not chiefly consist of continually proclaiming one’s identification as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered.

Donna’s Critique of Outness

Donna, an African American high school science teacher, questions what it means to “come out” in the first place; she theorizes coming out as a process that is as problematic as it is multifaceted in her personal and professional lives.

Knowing my own experience I have had with my own coming out process, not necessarily to the world, [it] formed the kind of community I try to build in the classroom. This is where I feel my particular story is most useful, most relevant. I don’t believe in this whole coming out for the reason: if you’re coming out, what are you coming into? So I have never publicly as a teacher come out to any of my students, and it’s not because I fear reprisal or what may come of that.

But I think about trying to be a culturally responsive teacher who builds classroom community. One of the things I want to impart to them is all people have a place in that community irrespective of what they do. ... They can disagree with their neighbor, with me, but it has to be respectful. I identify for them that my class is a safe space. I have a sticker outside my door that says so. I also have another sticker that says, ‘gay friendly.’ I put those things up. That has been a visual symbol to welcome all voices, all perspectives into my classroom.

Jackson (2007) argues that for her interviewees, “coming out at school served to free participants from monitoring their own behavior, which allowed them to focus on students” (p. 124). “Coming out” in Jackson’s theorization and interpretations of interviewees’ stories “opens” the door for educators to avoid monitoring their behavior for fear of “being found out.” Jackson’s study focuses on teachers in New England where

in many states marriage equality exists as well as legal protection and recourse for discrimination based on “sexual orientation,” not that this would necessarily prevent one from losing his or job because of one’s “queer” identification. However, these policies and laws reflect legal and, to a degree, social acceptance of gay and lesbian sexual orientations in the northeast. Such protection is not guaranteed at the federal government level or at the state government levels in any of the states in which the educators who participated in this study live. Donna, as well as other interviewees, says that she does not fear being “outed.” The participants in this study tend to believe who they are, not only in terms of their sexualities, is reflected in how they live and work.

Donna connects her identification as a queer woman of color to the larger project of helping others; in this case, her students feel free to explore ideas and various aspects of themselves and others. She puts emphasis on creating “community,” based on respect, where free and open discussions can take place. She even asserts, “This is where I feel my particular story is most useful, most relevant.” She believes the most significant aspects of her life story are how she facilitates the development of relationships with and among students and how she encourages growth of critical consciousness. She does not feel that not explicitly coming out to her students is an obstacle to her forming relationships with students and teaching for social justice. Despite not being out in the sense of explicitly claiming a queer identity, Donna emphasizes that she is unafraid to discuss issues related to sexual orientation in her classroom.

Interestingly, Donna troubles the binary of in/out while many others who study gay and lesbian educators’ lives do not thoroughly question or theorize this dichotomy.

Judith Butler (1996) posits that the closet is a continual presence in many LGBTQ people's lives, no matter their level of openness. Moreover, being an "out" sexual minority has been conflated with one being "fully" who she or he is. Butler troubles this schema and sees the paradoxical, complex, and limiting implications of "coming out."

What or who is it that is 'out,' made manifest and fully disclosed, when and if I reveal myself as a lesbian? What is it that is now known, anything? What remains permanently concealed by the very linguistic act that offers up the promise of a transparent revelation of sexuality? If I claim to be a lesbian, I 'come out' only to produce a new 'closet.' ... Hence, being 'out' must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as 'out.' In this sense, *outness* can only produce a new opacity; and *the closet* produces the promise of disclosure that can, by definition, never come. (pp. 375-6)

Outness does not equal definitive empowerment and the expression of the full self. I argue that it is not possible to reach a phase or stage where anyone displays "one's full self" (Jackson, 2007, p. 141). First, this is because we are always in the process of becoming. Second, as Butler argues, there are always parts of the self that may never be fully disclosed for a variety of reasons. Third, disclosing oneself as an out LGBTQ person creates a new closet where one is placed into a "box" and labeled as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer. What does it mean to be out? Who gets to decide? As Donna says, "I don't believe in this whole coming out for the reason: if you're coming out, what are you coming into?" This space called "outness" is limiting since it suggests that expressions of sexuality are either/or, a part of one socially constructed binary or another. Thus, Donna asks a critical question. What are queer teachers in the South coming into when they "come out"? Donna offers the possibility of rejecting the decision

to be in or out. In other words, she refuses to participate in these socially constructed spaces of being in or out. Overall, being “out” does not necessarily mean any one thing, and its constructions are multiple, complex, and dynamic from situation to situation, from person to person.

Being Implicitly “Out”

Sharon, an experienced community college educator, thinks of herself as an open and honest person although she admits, “being out in the classroom seems so pointless to me. I mean if it happened, I guess I would be okay with it. I wouldn’t bring it up on the syllabus, a point we touched on every semester.” Sharon does not find being “out” to students meaningful; she is equivocally out to friends, colleagues, and others with whom she interacts on campus.

I have never been anything but an honest soul, so I have never gone in and substituted pronouns, never said, ‘he and I had a good weekend.’ I would never say ‘I’ when it was ‘we.’ In any class, I will say, ‘the woman I live with.’ I don’t make any allusions about it, but I am not explicit about it either. I would imagine that most people on this campus know although I have only told one person on this campus but everybody, I would think, most people know because [my partner], at least [at] ... the department parties, she always comes. I have talked about her routinely. People know she is important in my life.

Sharon constructs “the closet” much like what Sedgwick (1990) calls “the glass closet” or “the open secret” (pp. 79, 80). While Sharon does not directly state, “I am a lesbian,” she does speak of her partner, takes her to school events, and believes most people put two and two together. She says, “I just expected that people would come to know. That’s just always been how I’ve dealt with it. I can probably name on both hands the people I have

actually said to, you know, I am gay. Now you're on that list. It's probably under 20." Evans (2002) asserts, "The closet as a shaping presence means that standing in or out of the closet is not what is at stake. Instead, what is at stake is how the closet with all its paradoxes affects people's everyday lives" (p. 120). Indeed, in Sharon's life and work, outness is certainly paradoxical. She consistently remarks that "when I talk about that kind of stuff [teaching practices], I think, does my sexual preference have anything to do with that? I don't think so. . . . It's just part of who I am." Sharon's sexual orientation, she asserts, does not affect her teaching in any way.

To Sharon, teaching is about her students and their learning and is not about her personal life. She also remarks:

That seems like a detail about my personal life that I would never talk about with people I didn't know. And a class is basically a bunch of people I don't know. They don't deserve to hear it, and it's too important to talk about. Just like I wouldn't go in and talk about my spiritual beliefs. . . . So I wouldn't shy away from it, but I wouldn't make it come up.

For Sharon, the public/private dichotomy is clear, and her sexual orientation is in the private and important category, which is not up for discussion with others, especially students. Paradoxically, however, she also links her sexual orientation to many aspects of her job. For example, she explains that recently she has thought that one reason she does not teach literature is because she cannot relate to most fiction because it is written about heterosexual relationships.

You read all of this [about] relationships because you can say that they are all straight relationships, and it really doesn't interest me. . . . I suppose as a literature

major, I should say, of course, these are just about relationships. You know, it's universal. It could be Fred and Chuck. It could be anybody. But it's not.

She compares this lack of representation in academic subjects to what many African Americans experience. "I am sure it's like how African Americans feel about this dominant white culture, saying, 'get over it.' Every class you go into, there's white teachers, especially here; we have a vastly white faculty compared to our student body. Just being outraged that you're just not represented." While Sharon is not explicitly "out" at her college, she does believe representation is important and recognizes that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer people are often invisible in academic subjects and classes. Interestingly, Sharon compares the challenges LGBTQ people face with those that people of color face. That this comparison comes up more than once in Sharon's story as well as in other narrators' stories suggests that narrators see the interrelatedness of oppressions and that change may occur slowly but is possible, as much has changed for people of color over the last 60 years. Still this evaluation remains an uncomplicated comparison as she does not focus on the interactions of various forms of oppression. Cohen (2005) argues for a "broadened understanding of queerness . . . based on an intersectional analysis that recognizes how numerous systems of oppression interact to regulate . . . the lives of most people" (p. 25). Sharon's analysis is constrained by a single-oppression framework, discussing how various forms of oppression are alike rather than how they intersect and interact in ways that put particular groups of people at disadvantages while privileging others.

Nevertheless, Sharon develops assignments that encourage students to become more informed about and critical of the U.S.'s history of discrimination and prejudice against minority groups. There is a common theme to her assignments—a concern for social justice. Her students complete a project where they select an adolescent or children's book that has been banned, research why it was banned, interview a librarian if possible, and present their findings to the class. Some students have chosen books banned because they address issues of sexuality, and Sharon says they have discussed these issues in class. She says, "You never know what will come up in class." Sharon encourages students to be open and accepting of others; she also believes it is important to let students draw their own conclusions. She says that her sexuality "doesn't affect the way" she teaches. She contends that "If I were ... just a heterosexual feminist, I would have the same approach that I do." Yet here she replaces one label with another. She teaches just as a heterosexual feminist would; thus, while she does not make a direct connection between her sexuality and her teaching, she does make a connection between feminism and her teaching. In this way, gender, if not explicitly sexuality, affects how she thinks of herself as a teacher and political actor. Embodied in her teaching are feminist ideas of equity and social justice.

Questioning the Fixed and Authentic Selves

Susan, who has taught K-12 guidance classes but currently teaches women's studies at a university, echoes the uneasiness many such as Sharon feel about being solely defined by one part of their identity. She sees what has been called the "double bind" or paradox of being out in a number of contexts.

I really think people's evolving ideas are a very important part of who they are. That's not something you can describe with a one or two word identity. That's something that's really nice in the classroom to be a student-learner and a teacher-learner. So in some way to just interject an identity into that, it's a little two dimensional and easy. It's hard to reconcile with not wanting to be invisible. I think gay or lesbian or queer educators are invisible for very understandable reasons. They're not supposed to be there. They get fired a lot. You can't be queer and be with kids. We have a very recent history of that in our country.

Even if one is "out" in the traditional sense of proclaiming one's identification or sexual orientation, what are the implications of this? Is this to become what Jackson (2007) calls "a gay poster child," a person who challenges stereotypes about LGBTQ people and acts as a resource for the school community about queer issues? How can one person represent such a diverse group of people? Moreover, Susan argues that one cannot be essentialized to "a one or two word identity." Like Donna, Susan refuses to participate in the socially constructed ways of being either in or out. She has chosen a more critical path that may involve coming out at some point but on her own intentional terms. Still, many have argued that educators' being "out" helps gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and queer youth have positive ideas about themselves and queer people; this group of youth especially needs role models and support, as they often do not get support or acceptance at home (Evans, 2002).

While Susan is not "out" to her students by explicitly and consistently telling them she identifies as a queer person, she has supported students and mentions a specific situation in a guidance class she taught when a student told her a secret about "really" liking another girl.

You should never have to keep a touch a secret if you don't want to. And this little girl came up to me in the end, and she was like, 'Ms. Johnson, I have a secret.' And I was like, okay, and I thought she was going to disclose some abuse because that used to happen a lot. She says, 'I like this girl.' This was in second grade, and I was like, 'uhmm, that's fine.' She was like, 'no, I really like her.' I was like, 'that's really okay.' She was so excited about it, you know. . . . It was an interesting teaching experience for me. I told her that it was okay, and if anybody told her it was not okay, she could tell them that I said that they were wrong or something like that. . . . I thought in that moment if I said, I like girls too, I don't know if that's going to mean anything to her. I don't think this is about me; it's about me validating her feelings. I did want to give her a little something.

Like other narrators in this study, Susan has a student-centered approach to teaching and learning and, therefore, is reluctant to "come out" for her own sake—what being out can do for her. Moreover, she troubles the notion that teachers must be "out" in order to be supportive of students who are questioning their sexuality or experiencing same-sex desires. She uses her authority as an educator and someone whom students admire to validate a student's feelings. Susan sees meaning in giving a student acceptance rather than coming out to her. To Susan, coming out is not as meaningful as validating that her student's feelings are "okay" and that she need not be secretive about them. Further, that this young girl chose to share this information with Susan in the context of a talk about secrets and possible sexual abuse suggests that this girl already, at a young age, recognizes that having feelings for other girls or "really" liking them is abnormal and something about which one should be secretive. This reflects the socialization inculcated at young ages that same-sex desires are wrong; thus, one must not have them or must be secretive about them in order to avoid being ostracized by one's peers and communities.

On the one hand, LGBTQ teachers often feel as though they should come out to be positive examples of queer people and to educate others to be more open and accepting of differences of all kinds. On the other hand, being open about their queer identification is problematic because it suggests that these teachers are not only sexual beings but also ones that are considered “deviant” by our society. In the South, it has even been difficult for schools to gain permission from state legislatures to present comprehensive, honest sex education programs. Hence, in the South, open discussions about sexuality in schools are taboo. Evans (2002) contends, “The teacher-as-role-model discourse holds an interesting tension for queer teachers, particularly when juxtaposed against the queer-as-seducer-of-children [discourse]. What might it mean for someone deemed dangerous to be a role model?” (p. 44). “Confessing” such information that is deemed “private” calls into question the binary of public/private. Information about one’s sexual behavior is deemed unsuitable for classroom discussions; nonetheless, there is a double standard for the heterosexual person who may talk openly and frequently about his or her spouse or partner and children without others considering the sexual acts these facts suggest.

So how does one simultaneously negotiate being open about a part of oneself while also keeping in mind that we are always evolving? Susan does not think the answer to increasing visibility, critical consciousness, and acceptance of difference is simply coming out. She says, “But I don’t think that the response to that is like the Harvey Milk approach. Well, you just have to come out. You just have to be an out teacher, and that’s what you have to do. And I just don’t think so.” Susan, rather, believes that if and when

one “comes out,” it should be in such a way that recognizes that sexuality, like many other aspects of oneself, is fluid.

I don't think I would make any rules about [whether] I was or was not going to disclose my identity. In some ways, I am always disclosing my gender identity by performing it in feminine ways. I think that my goal is to do that in a way that is challenging. . . . I don't know exactly what that will mean, but I think it's important for me to figure it out. I don't think it is necessarily helpful to say, 'I'm a lesbian; I'm a queer woman.' That just supports that we really know what that means. I would use personal stories as an example as a way to challenge people's ideas of gender and sexuality as being fixed, but . . . I would try not to do that by explicitly identifying as something. And if I did, I'd want that to be in a really self-aware way.

Susan suggests we are always, to some degree, revealing various parts of ourselves by the way we look, by what we talk about, and through our ways of interacting with others. She also points out that we do not fully know what it means to identify as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer person. One's openly identifying as a queer person in a homophobic society frequently evokes stereotypical ideas about what it means to identify as queer. Therefore, in the classroom, Susan wishes to learn along with students and use her personal experiences in intentional ways that challenge these stereotypes and encourage critical thinking and the development of critical consciousness. As queer theorists argue, nothing is one thing; identities and performances of them are subject to change. Who we are is not fixed; thus, how can one claim any label now and forever? And if one does, this very possibly could limit one's ways of expressing who he or she is.

Outness as Authenticity

For some, outness is part of the process of self actualization and achieving a sense of being one's authentic self. One conceptualization of the authentic self is the "real self," something to be discovered within a person; another conceptualization of the authentic self is the potential self one must achieve. According to Kreber, Klampfleitner, McCune, Bayne, & Knottenbelt (2007), "on one level, 'authenticity' is understood as being somehow associated with a sense of empowerment, self-actualization, and individuation, and as such, linked to larger questions of human existence and agency in the world" (p. 25). The authentic self is, by this estimation, something to be reached through self knowledge (linked to mind and body unification and not opposition) that can be achieved through learning about oneself and the limits, possibilities, and potential of this self. Being open to these possibilities and striving toward meeting one's perceived potential results in one being able to be *authentically* who he or she is. Still others argue that an authentic self is not a final result of a process but a continual result of on-going processes (Cranton, 2006; Cranton, 2001; Dillard, 2006; Heidegger, 1927/1962; hooks, 2003). I agree that the authenticity of a self is in his or her becoming, recognizing his or her unfinishedness, and acknowledging one's positionalities in historical moments and in particular socio-cultural, political contexts. Hence, it is important to learn about one's evolving self throughout one's life in order to develop a sense of who one is. The extreme end of this spectrum is being totally immersed in oneself and being unable to understand or connect with others. This could prevent one from being able to acknowledge or to act upon one's responsibilities and to behave ethically in one's interactions with others. In

my estimation, the idea of a core self—a central self that is fairly stable—is not the same as an authentic self—a self that recognizes that it is always becoming and responds in patterned, ethical ways to social, political, cultural, professional, personal, and inner matters. “For poststructuralist theorists there is no true self that exists prior to its immersion in culture. Rather, the self is constructed in and through its relations with others, and with systems of power/knowledge” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 41). In this sense, an authentic self is a self developed through processes of living, interacting with others, and responding to various power relations, rather than simply an achievement. In other words, I contend that there is no “real” self, only a self in progress, affected by socially constructed norms and interactions with others, yet there is a self that is still able to make itself coherent if only contingently.

Skye, a university educator, constructs her “authentic” self as one attained through honesty with others. She felt an immense amount of empowerment and freedom when she came out to her family.

And so that summer, the first semester I was here [in the U.S.], I went back home, and I told my parents that I was gay. And that was, I think, the single most life changing decision of coming out. But my mom had always raised me that if you knew you were doing the right thing, if you were telling the truth, then fear nothing or no one. And so I knew I was doing the right thing. I was finally telling the truth. It’s almost as if I had been living a lie for so many years. And so I told my mom, and I told my sisters. I told my friends and everybody. And I promised myself that I would never go back into the closet after that. . . . So when that happened, it almost freed me in a way. And I came back here and I joined the [university’s LGBTQA organization] and started fighting for LGBT rights here. And finally I could utter those words. I could utter, ‘I am gay,’ and it frees you to say it out loud and to be not ashamed of it and not scared of it and not worried that my parents will never talk to me again. I was really scared that when I came out that my mom may not allow me to see my sisters. Growing up that was my

biggest worry because I am so close to my sisters. The idea that I would never be able to see them was scary.

Being open about her sexual orientation, despite the serious risks (i.e. estrangement from her family), led Skye to feel a sense of freedom that led her to pursue activism. She sees her “authentic self” as something achieved through being honest about her identification as a lesbian. In this way, outness was a matter of ethical behavior. Not being out is constructed as being dishonest while being out is “doing the right thing.” Evans (2002) argues, “Even though coming out is associated with confessing, it has also become synonymous with being proud, healthy, and happy—whereas not coming out holds implications of lying and hiding. In either case, the announcement constructs truth about the self” (Evans, 2002, p. 138). Skye’s confession is conflated with that which is the ultimate truth about her; Skye even describes coming out as the most “life-changing” event in her life and to being closeted as “living a lie.” Although one’s sexuality is only one aspect of a person’s life, for Skye, it takes on supreme significance in her life as she sees being closeted as living in an overall dishonest fashion. Those things which Skye has constructed as thinkable and unthinkable have changed for her as she traversed her coming out process. Coming out may have been unthinkable to her at one point in her life even though she later associated it with living in a dishonest fashion. However, not acknowledging her same-sex desires or lesbian identity has become unthinkable to her once she came out to the important people in her life.

Skye links outness to being authentically who she believes she is as well as to feeling a sense of freedom and empowerment manifesting itself in her participation in

activism for LGBTQ rights; she also sees her experiences as influencing how she relates to students. Skye is out as a lesbian in her classes and talks about being in relationships with women; however, she does not believe her outness affects the way she presents material in business and marketing courses.

I don't really think my sexual orientation has an impact on the teaching part of it because of the subject matter. . . . But I think it helps in the way I relate with students because . . . talking one on one with students about these issues helps me understand them and where they're coming from and their issues and not just for LGBT students. It has helped me understand all the students, and it just makes me more compassionate towards them. I feel more empathy, makes me more relatable. I show my empathy by listening, by being there. If they need somebody to talk to, they know they can trust me. They know that I will be there for them night or day, by helping them get to the resources they need to get to.

Because she is an open person, she thinks students are more apt to be able to relate to her and to reach out to her for help when they need it. In this way, she sees the usefulness of her lived experiences as a person who struggled with a significant aspect of her identity and who contends with people who are prejudicial and discriminatory against LGBTQ people. Being open about herself is, then, part of Skye's pattern of ethical responses to her environments. When faced with an ethical dilemma such as whether or not to be open about her sexual orientation or helping students in need, she responds with empathy and honesty. Her compassion and ability to relate to students come not only from being raised to behave in honest ways but also from her experience having to "live a lie," which she believes hampered her from living life more freely without fear of her sexuality being discovered.

Authentic Relationships: Counter Narratives

Kissen (1996) contends, “[Hiding] prevents them [educators] from forming authentic relationships, from turning to colleagues in moments of joy or distress, from feeling that they are truly known for the people they are. Most of all, it renders them invisible” (p. 56). Although Skye’s case illustrates how outness relates to responding in patterned ethical ways to others and to situations, educators who are not out in similar ways also respond in similar ways to students despite what some would call their “hiding.” The participants in this study are unlike those in Sanlo’s (1999) study whose “silence was extraordinarily powerful since it extended beyond themselves and affected their concerns for student welfare” (p. 124). Despite some of the narrators’ silence about their own minority sexual orientations, they still spoke about being advocates for all students in need of their support.

Wanda’s initial experience coming out while teaching at a middle school led her to be more guarded about revealing her sexual orientation to colleagues and reinforced her initial misgivings to be out to fellow school workers and to students. After a colleague tried to “set her up” with her son, Wanda told this colleague that she dated both men and women.

And finally I told her, you know, I just got out of something, and I have dated both men and women, if you know what I mean. And she was like, ‘stop right there. I wouldn’t go around telling people at the school this because that’s not something you tell people around here.’ And I was young and impressionable at the time, and I zipped my mouth the entire time I worked at that school. I didn’t tell anybody. And I know they all thought I was just this young girl who was sad and pathetic because she could never get a date when in reality I was in a very

happy and healthy long-term relationship with my girlfriend. And I was having a good time, but I couldn't tell anybody about it.

Wanda experienced homophobia, as her open admission of same-sex desires threatened the heteronormative environment where “that’s [having same-sex desires] not something you tell people around here,” and her colleague acted to police and punish Wanda for openly admitting dating women. Although Wanda now teaches at another middle school, she remains silent about her sexual orientation and feels as though people at her new school—where she has been for a year and believes most colleagues are accepting of LGBTQ people—may be upset that she did not tell them before.

But one thing I did gather from this new school is that everybody is very accepting. But I already dug myself a hole. I felt like I would have to come out all over again because you let it go by for six months and don't mention it and then suddenly you have to be like, I've been in this relationship for 2 ½ years, and I haven't told anybody about it. And that's a weird point, so my feeling about it is to just avoid it. I just don't bring it up. I personally think that stuff should be kept out of work to a certain extent, like at least from the kids, husbands or whatever. . . . At the same time, I hate hiding, and I hate being in a closet. I hate that I can't just go in and say just like anyone else would say, 'oh, my girlfriend came to visit this weekend, and we had a good time.' I'm not going to give them all the details. I just want to be able to tell them this happy thing happened. What if someone and I break up? I'm just going through a rough break up right now. That's a picture of my girlfriend on my desk, or I'm calling my girlfriend, but I don't do any of that. I don't know what I am going to do.

Thus, Wanda feels trapped because she has not “confessed” her identity as a sexual minority before. Her situation is much like the one Evans (2002) describes, “Coming out, then, can be read as a betrayal of who I thought you were (you're not the same today as you were yesterday!) and a confession of what you'd been hiding (you've been hiding

your real [bad] self!)” (Evans, 2002, p. 135). Wanda feels as though her co-workers, most of whom she finds to be accepting of LGBTQ people, would be insulted that she did not feel comfortable enough to come out to them earlier; however, she did not feel comfortable coming out when she began working at this school because, like many LGBTQ people, she needed to “feel out” the climate. Although she has done this, she feels as though it is too late to come out perhaps because it seems as though she was hiding something that some might think of as “bad” or “wrong.”

Others such as Kissen (1996) and Jackson (2007) have argued that being closeted prevents educators from forming authentic relationships with students, which would entail being able to ethically respond and relate to students. However, this does not seem to be the case in Wanda’s situation. She characterizes herself and the teachers with whom she works as “very loving people [with] big hearts,” which she believes are necessary to work with the majority of students at her school who are low-income and predominantly minority students. She says, “You have to work very hard with them every single day to get their attention to learn, behavior issues, and things like that. . . . It takes a very special big-hearted person to work with those kinds of students.” Moreover, like Skye, Wanda builds relationships with students by listening. She says, “If the kids are telling you something, then you listen and understand where they are coming from because we have a lot of students with academic issues, so anything they’re telling you, they [teachers] are taking that as a compliment that the student is telling them that.” This part of Wanda’s story provides a counter narrative to the assertion that teachers must be out to students in order to develop authentic relationships with students. While Wanda wants to be able to

share aspects of her personal life with colleagues, not being out to other teachers and students does not seem to impair Wanda's ability to be empathetic with students and to develop meaningful, caring relationships with students.

Additionally, despite Wanda's initial misgivings about being out to fellow school workers and students, she still strives to make LGBTQ issues visible in her classes by working with other teachers on student projects involving social justice issues and by ensuring the school's library includes books about LGBTQ issues and people. Prior to her coming to the school, there were no books about LGBTQ subjects in the school media center. "I think they get a lot of that from the books they read. The kids that I teach especially live in a really small world. We have students that haven't left the city. And so they don't know. So what they learn about the world comes from books, so I want that represented in what they read." Wanda displays these books in the media center and believes it is particularly important that all students see representations of LGBTQ people in the books available to them. Thus, while Wanda is not "out" about her sexual orientation as some would define being "out," she does not shy away from LGBTQ issues in her classes and provides students with resources for learning more about LGBTQ issues.

Outness as an Ethical Act

Outness has been seen as an ethical act in the sense that out educators may act as role models for all students of "well-adjusted" LGBTQ people. As nearly all the participants mention, out LGBTQ people are often perceived as resources for students who identify as LGBTQ people. Some accept this role while others are reluctant to be

tokenized or feel as though they must distance themselves from the “resource” role because they believe they cannot be out and open about their minority sexual orientation and remain employed. James, throughout his 30-year career as a college and university professor, has had many students reach out to him because he openly identifies as a gay man and discusses his sexual orientation in his courses.

If I have a pet peeve, it’s the homophobia of people who are gay pretending not to be, what some people refer to now as the “down low,” where they’re hiding in a heterosexual marriage. That grants them a kind of luxury to be like, ‘I’m not gay’ and all the while fooling around on the side. How I found about this is that a young man came to see me who was almost suicidal about the relationship because he was in love with a married man. Of course, the married man didn’t want the relationship to go too far or to go public because he didn’t want his wife to find out. It turned into something that seemed like a soap opera. And of course, the last person in the world the married man would want his boyfriend to talk to about it was me. Here he is pouring out his soul to me, and I’m very worried about him. This is not healthy; this is not good for you.

James is the foil to the educator who hides his homosexual behavior. While his colleague is “hiding” and taking advantage of his privilege as a perceived-to-be heterosexual (as James would characterize him), James is the person to whom the student comes to talk about his relationship problems because James is “out” at work. James’s colleague illustrates the ambiguity and fictional nature of performances of gender and sexuality. According to Sullivan (2003), “The construction of the other as ‘unnatural’ or aberrant functions to reaffirm the identity of the one who cringes, complains, protests, or attacks the other. . . . In short, identity functions as regulatory and regulating fiction” (p. 84). In other words, James’s colleague can perform a heterosexual identity, avoiding being labeled aberrant or abnormal, while also engaging in homosexual behavior, which he

separates from his public identity as a heterosexual, married man. This public performance is most likely enacted because of the societal pressures to be heterosexual in a heterosexist society that punishes and otherwise regulates those whose identities and behavior fall outside the normative constructions of heterosexuality.

James self-fashions his identity as genuine, rather than a social construction. He repeats his performances as authentically gay man by being a role model for younger gay and lesbians. In this way, ethicality becomes a part of his performance of what it means to be an openly gay professor. James provides support to this student about whom he worries. Throughout his career, gay and lesbian students gravitated toward James, and he finds satisfaction in being a mentor to these students. In the past there were few LGBTQ organizations in the university or larger communities where he worked, so James provided support for LGBTQ young people who did not have support systems or connections to organizations that exist now but that did not exist then.

Other educators, because of the cultures of their workplaces or communities and the ages of their students, still feel compelled to remain closeted in particular contexts. Although Gina is out to fellow school workers at the elementary school where she teaches, she does not think she can be open to students because of the morality clause in her teaching contract. As Blount (2005) has argued, any reference to one's being gay is automatically seen as a reference to sexual matters, which is a double standard since heterosexual teachers may refer to their husbands or wives without others automatically linking marriage to sex. According to Evans (2002):

This link between homosexuality and confession becomes evident when we consider the ways in which ‘coming out’ as homosexual is often conflated with ‘confessing’ one’s sexuality. Mentioning one’s opposite-sex spouse is not couched in such confessional terms. It is difficult to extract the revealing of one’s queerness from the sense that someone is confessing (a sin). (p. 40)

In the estimation of many administrators, being out to students as an LGBTQ person is tantamount to discussing not only sexual matters with students but “deviant” sexual matters that have the potential to be harmful to students. There are competing opinions as some consider being closeted the “professional” thing to do while others see being out about their minority sexual orientation as an ethical act.

[I’m] not out to students because there’s a clause. I’m not allowed to discuss [it]. Even if I was straight, I couldn’t come to school and talk about sexual matters. I could talk about my husband, but I guess I could say my partner. . . . But see, legally in [this state], there is no way for me to talk about my partner because it’s illegal to have a marriage, you know what I mean? If you’re gay, legally you aren’t married. But my principal knows; all the teachers at my school know.

According to Gina, teachers can only talk about sex and sexuality if it is in reference to heterosexual married couples. Therefore, the only way she could talk about a romantic relationship is if she were married, and since there is no same-sex marriage where she lives, she cannot get married and, thus, has no outlet to discuss her relationships that are considered illegitimate. While Gina is supportive of her students and demonstrates empathy and compassion in her relationships with them, she feels that she can only be a resource for students who are perceived to be gay or who are questioning their sexuality by preventing bullying and through encouraging words. One parent asked her for help because she thought her son might be gay. “But I did have one whose parent asked me for

help because she didn't know what to do. She didn't know how to talk to him about it. And I said, 'I can't talk to him about it when I'm his teacher.'" Nevertheless, she does find ways to talk to such students without "outing" herself.

I do get students who are picked on. I have one that got moved into my classroom at the beginning of this past year because the boys in his class were picking on him. And of course, put him in the gay teacher's room. She'll take care of it. I gave them a speech about why it's not okay to call people gay. Plus, I individually talked to those children and that child. I let him know that it's okay; there's people all over the world, people that you know, that you see every day [who] are gay. They just can't tell you they are.

Again, Gina's story provides a counter narrative to the script that "closeted" teachers cannot be supportive of students who identify as or who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQQ). While this may be seen as avoiding the issue, Gina directly addresses bullying and the isolation that the child who is picked on feels because others perceive him to be gay. In this way, Gina finds cracks and fissures in the system that silences LGBTQ educators through morality clauses in their contracts and that makes them think, perhaps rightly so, that they may be fired for coming out to students since some administrators, educators, and parents believe being "out" suggests sexual acts.

While Sharon does not openly identify as a lesbian at work, she believes she lives ethically. In talking about her teaching and life philosophies, Sharon reveals her approach to being a role model for students and to living in an honest way.

In my old office . . . it [a sign] said, that famous quote from St. Augustine, 'Preach the Gospel at all times, when necessary use words.' I think that's how I

believe Christian things in more general ways than anything. And that's one of those things, which is you live it out, and as people come to know you, they say, well, that wasn't so bad.

Sharon believes that there is an ethical element in how she lives her life; more specifically, she models behavior that reflects her philosophy of ethically and compassionately treating others. In the process of knowing Sharon, one cannot help but see the good works she has done and the respectful, responsive, and ethical ways she treats others, so when people find out she is a lesbian, they cannot simply dismiss her as an immoral or unethical person. Similarly, other participants in this study and others (Jackson, 2007; Kissen, 1996) report their need to “overcompensate” for their minority sexual orientation. In other words, they feel they must conduct themselves in irreproachable manners as teachers and people to counteract their being sexual minorities who are often prejudged as immoral or “bad.”

However, if it were not for “word” getting around that Sharon is a lesbian, many may not know about it. As she said, “I just expected that people would come to know. That's just always been how I've dealt with it. I can probably name on both hands the people I have actually said to, you know, ‘I am gay.’” Sharon does not feel as though she must verbally articulate her “self” or her identity. Rather, she believes the various aspects of herself are apparent by the way she lives her life. While she does believe her sexual orientation is an important aspect of her life, she also believes it is such an important aspect that it should not be a topic for discussion in her classes. It is a private matter, and as such, she does not want it or homosexuality in general to be up for debate in her class.

She admits that she would not know how to react if such a debate would occur; she remarks, “But part of me, I don’t want to hear them say that stuff. What do you say? That’s the stupidest thing I have ever heard?” Not wanting to have such a negative reaction to students’ disapproving responses to topics such as same-sex marriage, Sharon does not do anything to make such topics come up. This, too, is an example of how she lives and teaches in ethical ways. While some may see her avoidance of topics relating to homosexuality as missing teachable moments, she sees them as incidences when she may be unable to respond appropriately to students because of her strong personal connection to issues related to homosexuality.

Because Sharon sees herself as good and ethical person, she is particularly troubled by her recent demotion from an administrative position to a teaching position, which she connects to discrimination since she was given no clear or specific explanation for it. In this part of her story, she recognizes that some may have more recourse in fighting discrimination than others.

It does irritate me sometimes when I hear some black faculty members and staff members that think they have some inside track on prejudice, and it just pisses me off because you know, I think, if they fire you based on your race right now, that would be huge. But I am still not sure that they can’t fire me. There would not be as much recourse. You wouldn’t hear the public out cry and the awareness that that was just wrong. Even if you are a racist, you are smart enough to know that you can’t express that. But I don’t think we are quite there yet with homosexuality.

Sharon does not deny the prevalence of racism; however, she believes other “oppressed” groups do not always view oppressions as interrelated and interlocking. Kissen (1996) points out:

As they discuss the complicated issues of race and class, gay educators applaud efforts to promote diversity within their schools. Many have joined these efforts. At the same time, they resent the fact that lesbians and gays remain invisible even as schools acknowledge sexism and racism. (p. 37)

Sharon hopes that prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQ people will be recognized as being on par with discrimination against others based on race, class, gender, and ability. In teaching students about the ethical treatment of others, she encourages students to think through difficult issues related to intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination. As mentioned previously, she has students work on projects where they read books that have been banned and discuss why they have been banned. She also has students write research papers about the Civil Rights Movement. These projects have made students more aware of intolerance in their communities, in education, and in our larger society. She remarks, “That’s why it is great to teach. You can really make it about anything.”

However, Sharon has yet to discuss issues related to sexuality in her class. While she demonstrates caring and concern for her students as well as supports students who identify as gay, lesbian, and bisexual, she has not wanted to take a public stand on LGBTQ issues. When students approached her to be the advisor of an LGBT student organization or to help them get such an organization started, she declined their request

because she feared there would be repercussions for being a part of such a group and because she has little interest in becoming involved in students' extracurricular activities. Instead, she strives for "pretty good . . . arm's length relationships with people in my classes." For Sharon, the line between private and public is clear; her relationship with her partner and her sexual orientation fall into the category of private. However, this is not to say that this situation precludes Sharon from developing meaningful and caring relationships with students, but there is a limit to what Sharon is willing to share with students.

The Ethics of Outness: The Role Model versus the Token

Tom, who identifies, depending on the context, as trans, gay, or queer, believes he is often tokenized as a trans person at the university where he teaches.

We had a student on staff who came out as transgender. And my supervisor who was the one who the student came out to and said, 'hold on a second' and ran down to my office and said, 'you have to come in here.' I said, 'what's going on?' And the students know I am transgender, but no one else does. They want me to be this out queer person, so they can be like, 'look, we have a trans person; we can show you that we don't care that you are LGBT.' I am okay with doing, for instance, Safe Zone training. And I out myself at Safe Zone trainings and talk about being queer in my space, when I choose. But other than that, I don't want people to know because it becomes that thing that they think about when they think about me. They think, 'Tom, yeah, that trans guy.' And that becomes the focal point of my identity.

While Tom does see himself as a resource at the university where he teaches, he wishes to control his level of openness about his identity and choose when and to whom to reveal aspects of his identity. He says, "I'm mostly what's called 'stealth' within the trans community. That's when you're post-transition (whatever that means for you in regards to

hormones, surgeries, etc. and so on), and you keep your transgender history to yourself.” Tom faces the paradox of being out; on the one hand, he does want to be a resource and to help others who identify as transgender especially. On the other hand, he does not want to be tokenized. “I don’t like being the person that everyone thinks of when they think of trans stuff. I mean, I’m just a guy living my life. I may be a teacher, but it’s not always gotta be my job to teach you what it means to be trans, or what it means to ‘not’ be transphobic.” Tom makes a significant point about the problematic situation of being a resource to a school community. While being out can be seen as an ethical act, it can also be an oppressive act because it can lead to tokenization, and no one can be representative of an entire group, especially one as diverse as LGBTQ people. Moreover, as Tom remarks, being a “teacher” puts one in a position of having to teach about a variety of matters. Thus, there may even be a greater chance of tokenism with teachers than with other groups since there is an expectation that teachers should educate others, even though they may not embrace this role in all contexts and with all topics.

In addition, being a person who identifies as transgender, a minority within a minority, positions him as someone who may have political aims to challenge normative conceptualizations of gender. However, as Sullivan (2003) contends, this is not something we should assume.

It may be worth briefly raising the question here of whether or not it is the intention or the desire of most transsexuals to challenge patriarchy and heteronormative notions of gender, and whether or not it is right of us to suppose that transsexuals should desire to undertake such tasks. (p. 106)

As is evident from Tom's comments, he does not wish to be positioned by others as "the trans person resource." While in his life as an activist especially he has challenged normative notions of gender and sexuality, he wishes to be a resource on his own terms and does not want others to expect him to take on this role as an educator about transgender matters at all times. Additionally, it is important to mention that Tom never describes himself as a transsexual, and transsexual and transgender are not synonymous. According to Namaste (2005):

A lot of transsexuals take a critical distance from the term *transgendered*. . . . 'Transgendered' people will see their bodies, identities, and lives as a part of a broader process of social change, of disrupting the sex/gender binary. . . . But many transsexuals do not see themselves in these terms. They would situate themselves as 'men' and as 'women,' not 'gender radicals' or 'gender revolutionaries.' (p. 6)

Although Tom identifies as a transgender, as with transsexuals, we should not assume that he wishes to dedicate his life to being a transgender activist or to challenging the binaries of man/woman and gay/straight constantly.

Coming to Terms with Queer and Teacher Identities: Internalizing Homophobia

Some may argue that the reason some gay, lesbian, and queer educators are in the closet is that because they have "internalized" homophobic attitudes that pervade discourses in our culture. According to Sanlo (1999):

Teachers who are aware that they do not match society's standards may internalize these perceptions. It is also likely that such reactions lead to silence about who they are. This response pattern could then negatively affect their views of themselves, their classroom performance, and their ability to interact fully with students, colleagues, and administrators. (pp. 2-3)

Homophobia inevitably affects queer educators psychologically, socially, professionally, and personally. It is very likely that this internalization does affect how queer educators behave in any number of contexts. Although Greg, growing up in a conservative and Southern Baptist home, internalized homophobia, his performance as a teacher was only enhanced by this internalization, rather than negatively affected as Sanlo suggests, because Greg—like several other educators in this study—felt he must be “the best teacher” that he could be to prove his worth as a person and a professional.

Like others in this study, Greg is not explicitly “out” to all his colleagues and is not “out” to any of his students because of their young ages and limited understanding of sexuality and identity politics. Greg is a pre-K and Kindergarten teacher. At the beginning of his career, Greg went through what many queer educators have gone through: having difficulty seeing the possibility of being gay and a teacher. This resulted not only in Greg’s continual denial of his desires and feelings that he was gay but also in Greg’s need and desire to be perceived as an outstanding and effective educator. Greg focused almost entirely on being, what Jackson (2007) has called, a “super teacher.” Kissen (1996) observed from her interviews that

many others feel they need to be outstanding in order to be seen as equal to their heterosexual colleagues. ... Being implicitly or explicitly out, instead of passing or covering, does not remove the pressure to be a model teacher; if anything, educators whose colleagues know they are gay feel even more pressure. (p. 42)

Being a “super teacher” put intense pressure on Greg, but his focus on teaching allowed him to direct his energies and emotions toward his career, avoiding his feelings about being gay.

When I finally graduated from [university], I decided I was going to be the best teacher I could be. I didn't... at that time, I didn't think being a teacher and being gay could coexist at the same time. I had to be the best teacher I could be. I couldn't acknowledge the gay part of myself. I would try to work to be the best teacher I could be. I stayed late at school. I worked hard. I got different awards and things for teaching. I really didn't have any social life. I did my national board certification. All this... I was trying to prove to myself and others that I was a good teacher.

For many years Greg did, indeed, get validation from his success at a teacher. After nine years of teaching, however, Greg was burned out and decided to quit teaching. He returned to teaching after several months of being unemployed but was still conflicted about his sexual orientation's compatibility with his career choice. After beginning involvement in a gay and lesbian teacher organization at the age of 34, he began to develop confidence in negotiating his self as both a teacher and a gay man.

Greg had feared repercussions for being openly gay because of the inaccurate stereotype of queer people, especially gay men, being pedophiles.

I think one of my big concerns especially as a teacher and being a male also has been I always felt like I had to be very careful because I didn't want anyone to get the wrong impression like I was one of the priests in the Catholic Church. I always made sure that my assistant who has always been a female did anything related to bathroom type things or anything like that.

Although it probably is not possible to totally overcome one's anxiety about being both queer and a teacher, Greg has increasingly become more comfortable in his identifications as gay and teacher. Having positive experiences coming out to colleagues, friends, and family, Greg began dating and coming out to more people in his life. "People at my school know. Not everybody knows, but all of the people I interact with pretty much know that I am gay. My principal knows. My assistant knows. It really hasn't come up with parents. No parent has ever asked me, and I haven't said one way or the other." Greg says that while he would have denied being gay in the past, he would be honest with parents if they asked him now if he were gay.

Greg's increasing comfort with living his life as a gay man has influenced his teaching. For example, he talks with his students about gender roles and encourages them to avoid having rigid ideas about what it means to be a boy or a girl. "If one of my kids says, 'he can't play with that because it's a girl's toy,' or the boy says, 'you can't play with the truck because it's a boy's toy,' I address that and say, 'why can't he play with that? There's nothing that says this belongs to a boy or this belongs to a girl.'" Greg's situation problematizes how many scholars have constructed being gay and being a teacher because his students are between the ages of four and five, so his being "out" to them probably would not have the same meaning as it would for older students. While I am not arguing that there are not age appropriate lessons about sexual orientation for elementary school students, the focus of these lessons would probably be more about genders roles and diversity of family configurations rather than the complexities of identifying as queer.

Conclusions: Coming Out as Confession

Outness is frequently configured as confession. Confession is “one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing the truth” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 40). However, there are power differentials between the listener and the confessor; the listener becomes someone with authority who “requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile” (p. 62). Moreover, these narrators challenge the master narrative of “confessing,” as they do not seek absolution. According to Evans (2002), “Confessing an act, one can be absolved, particularly if one agrees never to engage in that act again. Confessing the self, however, is different than confessing an act” (p. 76). One’s motives for “confessing” the self are various and diverse as the people who confess or narrate their life histories, yet in these narratives, confessing one’s LGTBQ identity to at least some people in one’s life is configured as obligatory, for keeping one’s sexuality a secret is considered by some narrators as tantamount to lying. This script is played out in these narratives about “coming out” as all the participants have come out in some ways; however, their stories also trouble the universalizing script or dominant narrative that coming out necessarily leads to empowerment or self-actualization or is a once-and-for-all matter. Rather, how and whether one is out is highly dependent upon context. However, such telling or confessing is configured by some of the narrators as “truth-telling” whereas others, such as Donna and Susan, question whether or not one is fully revealed by being open about her or his sexual orientation. Additionally, as Butler (1996) and Sedgwick (1990) point out, the closet is a continual element in one’s life, not a simple or one-time revelation.

The closet and outness are conjoined as one always necessitates the other in order to be intelligible; the line between them, what's more, is blurred because no one can really come to a definitive conclusion about what is revealed by the act or processes of coming out; moreover, as Donna does, one can refuse to participate in the socially constructed binary of the closet and outness. Thus, being in or out is not as compulsory as it has been constructed by dominant narratives about the closet and outness.

As previously discussed, the act of coming out can be seen as an act of confession, which positions the researcher, me, as both an authority because I am conducting this research and because I am the listener-authority with whom they are sharing this information. However, my positioning myself as a queer person myself necessarily affects this dynamic of confessor-confessor relationships. Interestingly, "confessor" both means the person doing the confessing as well as the person listening to the confession. In the context of these interviews, narrators do not confess in order to be absolved but to validate their experiences and reconcile their past experiences with their present experiences as LGBTQ people. I believe this dynamic of the narrator-listener relationship changes as I, the researcher, am positioned as a confessor in both senses of the word, and taking on this dual role, I am part of the "collective selves" they develop as members of LGBTQ communities and as a fellow educator. Our shared experiences of being out and struggling to come to terms with minority sexual orientations place our stories within the dominant discourses of what it means to be out, but as Bamberg (2004) has argued, our stories are always a part of dominant discourses; even when we counter these narratives with stories that challenge dominant narratives, we are still telling stories

in relation to master or dominant narratives. I cannot emphasize the importance of context enough in these stories; in particular, these narrators share stories about coming out in the unique environments in the South, which is also affected by the dominant narratives about what it means to live in the South and to be a Southerner. Again, these narrators both challenge and reinforce these stereotypes of what it means to be an openly LGBTQ person in the often-conservative environments of schools, colleges, and universities in the South. I discuss the context of teaching and living in the South further in chapter five.

CHAPTER IV

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE IN SCHOOLS AND LIFE

Heterosexist and Homophobic Language in Schools

Among the most frequently cited reasons for LGBTQ educators to be open about their sexual orientation at work is for students. Adams and Emery (1994) contend that LGBTQ educators come out for reasons of “honesty, integrity, providing a role model for gay students (or straight ones), busting stereotypes, promoting cultural awareness, or any of the endless other positive objectives that responsible self-disclosure can help a teacher achieve” (p. 27). While some of these reasons are directly related to what being out can do for a teacher, many of these objectives are related to benefits for students. However, out teachers who act as resources cannot be schools’ only strategy for promoting less homophobic and heterosexist environments. Creating more accepting environments in schools is a challenge because schools are hyper-heterosexist spaces. The overwhelming majority of educators and school administrators are in or have been in heterosexual marriages (Jackson, 2007), and nearly all students surveyed over the last 20 years have frequently heard staff and other students use anti-gay slurs at school (Jackson, 2007; Lipkin, 1999). Most of the time teachers do not address homophobic comments made in their presence (Carter, 1997). Even gay and lesbian educators report that they avoid confronting students who make homophobic comments out of fear of being asked if they are gay or lesbian themselves (Jackson, 2007; Sanlo, 1999; Woog, 1995). Evans (2002)

and Sanlo (1999) posit that part of the reason for LGBTQ educators' avoidance of addressing heterosexist and homophobic comments made by other school workers or students is their own internalized homophobia due to living and growing up in environments where many people view homosexuality negatively or even as the worst thing one can be. Additionally, the severity of homophobia in schools is evident by the high percentages of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth who commit or attempt to commit suicide (Lipkin, 1999); of educators who report that they have prejudices against LGBTQ people (Sears, 1992); and of youth who experience physical, psychological, and verbal abuse for being perceived to be an LGBTQ person (GLSEN, 2005; Lipkin, 1999).

That's So Gay: Addressing Homophobia and Heterosexist Language in Schools

Unlike the participants in other studies, many of the narrators in this study discussed how they addressed prejudicial language use with students such as the use of "gay" in the popular phrase "that's so gay," meaning something is "stupid" or negative in some way. These narrators recognize that "language has long been used to categorize and devalue human lives and lifestyles" (Hall, 2003, p. 54). Along with this recognition, they challenge the commonly accepted ways of using language to denigrate others. According to Wanda:

I really get on the kids for their language. You know, we have regular discussions about thinking about the language you use. And that's something that is the direct result of me suddenly being offended when people call other people gay. And so I use that as a teachable moment in my classroom—words you don't say. You don't say 'gay'; you don't say 'ghetto'; you don't say 'retarded.' I don't like the word

‘retarded’ anyway, but that became a thing I consciously teach them because I got offended when they call people gay.

When issues related to prejudice based on race, class, and ability are discussed, some educators, like Sharon, feel as though these forms of discrimination and prejudice are considered unacceptable while discrimination against LGBTQ people is often legal and condoned. Wanda sees oppressions as interrelated and instances of prejudicial language use as teachable moments when teachers and students can discuss why some language use is hurtful and how to be more empathetic towards others.

Gina harnesses students’ understandings of other forms of prejudice and discrimination relating to race in an attempt to encourage students to be reflective about their language use. She also may inadvertently reinforce negative connotations of terms such as “gay.” She explains:

Like we’re not supposed to use the word ‘gay’; in my room unless you represent that yourself and you’re willing to stand behind that. The way I explain that to my kids is, if you call someone ‘gay’ that happens to be gay, then there’s a negativity associated with that. If you’re like, ‘man, you’re gay,’ then you’re not saying that for positive reasons. When you’re using the term, it’s typically in a negative way. So I explain it to them like this: If you were a white person, it is universally unacceptable to use the n-word toward a black person. Most people would assume if a white person were to call a black person the n-word—I don’t even like to say the word—that there’s a derogatory meaning to that. But a black person can call another black person the n-word as much as they want because to them it doesn’t have that same power. When a white person uses that word against a black person, there’s a negative type of power associated with it. It’s an assertion that I am better than you are. When black people use that word around each other, it doesn’t have that same negative connotation. So if you hear a black person use that word toward another black person, they’re okay with that. A black person can call another black person that all day long. Nobody gets upset. . . .

So gay people can call each other gay all day long because that's okay. It's not negative. And it's done in a joking manner, really making light of the ignorance of other people. So if you are gay and you want to call somebody else gay that is gay, that's fine. . . . If you're gay and you want to call somebody else gay, you better make sure that you're gay first because if you use the word gay, somebody's going to think you're gay because only gay people are allowed to say it. So my kids don't say it. They do a little bit in the beginning of the year. And I'll hear it, and I will say, 'Oohhh, what are you trying to say? What are you really saying?' And they'll be like, 'Oh yeah, sorry. I didn't mean that.' I don't know any other way to explain that to fifth graders.

As Sharon does, Gina compares homophobia to racism since many students have been taught that racism is wrong while they have not been taught similar lessons about homophobia. Perhaps this comparison is even more apt in the South where people are especially conscious of the region's history of racial discrimination and government-condoned racism. Gina also encourages her students to think about the negative connotations and power of words as well as acceptable language use in context of one's identifications and of the solidarity among groups of people. Gina explains to students that they should not denigrate others through language. However, there is also the problematic issue of discouraging students from using the term "gay" because their usage of it would suggest that they are gay themselves. This is unlike the situation where students avoid using racial epithets because they recognize racism is wrong or at least socially unacceptable. Thus, students avoid using "gay" perhaps not because they believe homophobia is wrong but for fear of insinuating that they are gay themselves, which would be an undesirable outcome, yet this is the way she has found best to discuss and deter the derogatory use of "gay" with her elementary-age students. Although her explanation may be problematic, it may also be the best starting point for her particular

groups of students to discuss and begin to understand issues of power, oppression, and prejudice.

Teaching elementary students, Greg has also struggled with how to explain issues of sexuality and language use with students. Even students in kindergarten, he has found, have negative notions about the meaning of “gay” and are able to articulate them although they do not fully understand the complexities of sexuality and identities.

There’s also this poem I read every year. We have this poem of the week, and there’s this poem we read about elephants, and it’s called *Holding Hands* . It talks about the elephants holding the tail of the elephant that is in front of it, like walking in a line. It says something like, ‘elephants work and elephants play; elephants walk and feel so gay.’ And it doesn’t happen so much now, but when I was teaching kindergarten back in the 90’s, it never failed. I always had two or three kids that would go, eewww when I read that part, ‘they feel so gay.’ I would stop and ask, ‘why are you saying that?’ They would say, ‘because that’s so gross; two boys kissing each other or two girls kissing each other,’ something like that. I said, ‘it just means that the elephants are happy.’

It is telling that children as young as five years old already have negative ideas about what “gay” means, and this reflects the virulence of homophobia and heterosexism in our society. Furthermore, this situation reveals the socialization—through parents, other peer groups, and the media—that occurs before students even begin formal schooling. At young ages, at least some students are exposed to negative notions of what it means to be gay; in this case, being gay is aberrant and undesirable.

Donna, too, confronts homophobia in the classroom by using students’ comments as a springboard for teachable moments about language use. However, she does this by having an open forum about language use, specifically about the “that’s so gay” phrase.

A group of students at Duke University who, I think it was early 2000, started a campaign to point to the slogan ‘that’s so gay.’ So they created t-shirts to counter [this] that say, ‘Gay? Fine by me.’ . . . So through the years, students where I work have participated in that campaign, so as a result of that, there are all kinds of opinions [and] who is supportive and those who don’t.

One student I had came out in class that she was bisexual and that she had always been bisexual and that there was nothing wrong with that. . . . I think one of the students said, ‘that’s so gay,’ and it happened to coincide with when this campaign was going on. She spearheads the conversation and is comfortable enough to come out. Then another student said, ‘if I were homophobic, I would kill myself.’ In response, another student said, ‘if I were gay, I would kill myself.’ We had this sort of conversation that was very organic, that I did not direct, I did not probe, I did not say, ‘now, let’s talk about being gay’ because life doesn’t happen like that. And as a teacher and based upon how I have been trained, I have come to regard everything as a teachable moment and everything as text, so I let them just go with that, where it went.

Donna explains that she creates a classroom climate where students “can disagree with their neighbor, with me, but it has to be respectful.” Although this discussion became controversial, by creating this space, students feel comfortable enough to breach the private/public and confession/secret binaries as well as to pursue meaningful threads of learning. Because of the work Donna does with students to create classroom communities where students direct learning and where Donna positions herself as a fellow learner, she does not have to direct discussions but can instead facilitate respectful communication about language use. In this example, students disagree and even go to extremes in their disagreement by saying that they would commit suicide if they were homophobic in one case and gay in another; however, Donna allows this to unfold organically as a text where students negotiate their disagreements instead of simply being shut down for disagreeing

so vehemently or for going off topic. Often conflict is seen as harmful in our society whereas much can be learned by engaging others who may disagree with us.

By allowing students to disagree and dialogue about their conflicting points of view, Donna opens up space for students to develop their own knowledge by engaging in sensemaking. Sensemaking is using one's evolving knowledges, perceptions, and previous experiences to understand situations, concepts, behaviors, and relationships. How one "makes sense" of the world is directly related to that person's socialization in a specific culture or cultures. Although we all engage in sensemaking in our own ways and have different perceptions, sensemaking is also a collective endeavor dependent upon common understandings of language and situations. There can be miscommunication and sensemaking conflicts within groups if they do not come to at least some common understandings about situations or problems the group faces. In this situation, Donna's student comes out as a way of humanizing LGBTQ people, which could have a conciliatory effect for students who have differing opinions and could help the group come to some common understandings about how to treat others who differ from themselves. In encouraging students' participation in the campaign against the negative phrase, "that's so gay," Donna faces the challenge of finding "innovative ways to promote collective action" despite differences among group members (Bess & Dee, 2009, p. 866). Part of Donna's role as a leader in sensemaking is recognizing the multiple perspectives of those whom she teaches; she does this by allowing students to share their perspectives, no matter how controversial, and to think through contentious and challenging topics and issues collectively.

Labels and Identities

In addition to students' language use, labeling oneself was an important aspect of language use discussed in nearly all the narratives I collected. According to Cross and Epting (2005):

Labeling has individual, social and political implications that are neither all good nor all bad, nor do those implications exert the same influence on all individuals, with the same effect. Labels can obliterate or wipe out possibilities and crush creativity. They may also provide a ready-made solution, option, or answer to a puzzling question. Labels can become platforms from which to make new meaning, in this sense acting as a launching ground for creativity, defining a new, unique, and whole self.

The participants in this study used the labels trans, queer, lesbian, and gay to describe themselves. As Cross and Epting argue, labels have political purposes; moreover, label use reveals multidirectional power relations, as Foucault (1976/1990) contends. Labels have power on individual, social, and institutional levels. According to Sullivan (2003), "Identity categories are never discrete or self-contained" (p. 116). In other words, identity categories are not simply or clearly defined; there is always the potential for alternative definitions and ways of thinking about and living out identity categories. Additionally, there are multiple dimensions and sites of contestation for any socially constructed identity category. For instance, one may or may not accept the label imposed on them by others due to its associations with particular behaviors or with particular groups of people. Moreover, labels have the tendency to discipline desires and behavior, yet as is evident from these narrators' stories, labels can also empower individuals to act in ways that encourage empathy and solidarity. These narrators often report that this act of

claiming an identity and label empowers them because they see their claiming a label as the result of their recognition of an essential truth about themselves. In other words, claiming a label and identity, according to some, reveals some important aspect of oneself that was previously repressed until that person acknowledged and disclosed it to others. Additionally, these narrators discuss the “weighting” of labels or identities; some of the labels they claim are more important to them than others, even as they recognize that members of society may weigh aspects of these narrators’ identities differently than they would themselves.

The Bisexual Label

As mentioned previously, none of the participants currently identify as bisexual. However, this is not to say that these narrators deny opposite-sex desires or avoid romantic relationships with opposite biological-sex individuals. All the self-identified women in this study identify as lesbian or queer or both. However, they all, save one, reported that they identified as bisexual at some point in their lives. Gammon and Isgro (2007) contend, “the category of bisexuality has been variously noted as absent, under-recognized, and more recently, as central to conceptualizing sexual identities” (p. 160). There are many reasons for this phenomenon. On the one hand, bisexuality may be significant to conceptualizations of sexual identities because people who are bisexual call into question the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy. On the other hand, bisexuals are often ostracized by people who identify as gay and lesbian as well as those who identify as heterosexual. Traditionally, anyone who has a non-heterosexual identity has been placed in the category of “homosexual.” However, those who identify as gay, lesbian,

and/or homosexual frequently reject bisexuals as potential partners because they believe bisexuals can and should choose to be either heterosexual or homosexual. Additionally, bisexuality has been configured as “bisexuality chic,” or in other words, behavior one engages in for the sake of being “trendy” or “popular.” Bisexuality chic, however, is more applicable to women than to men in most contexts, likely due to the popular discourses regarding the heterosexual male fantasy of having sex with two women at the same time; bisexual men tend not to evoke similar fantasies for heterosexual women in dominant discourses (Gooß, 2008; Yoshino, 2000). Furthermore, bisexuality has been central to models of sexuality since such models often focus on continuums of sexuality/desire where no one really exists at one extreme or the other; thus, all people are in some ways bisexual, defined as being attracted to biological men and women (Gammon & Isgro, 2007).

The disapprobation and trivialization of the bisexual label could be one reason no one in this study identified as bisexual. This situation, however, is more complex. Bisexuality, as in the attraction to both narrowly defined biological sexes, presupposes that there are two genders whereas this is not the assumption of some of the narrators in this study. Tom remarks, “I never was comfortable with ‘bisexual’ because it presumed that there are two genders. You could be attracted to both of them. And I . . . don’t feel as though that’s true.” In rejecting binary gender, Tom does not feel as though it is accurate to claim a bisexual identity because such an identity hinges upon reification of the categories of man and woman, defined by innate characteristics, and the denial that these are socially constructed and historically contingent categories. While some

transgender and transsexual people have been accused of “far from challenging gender norms, [they] reinforce them” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 106). Tom does not fall into this generalization. While he does say, “I’m just a guy living my life,” he troubles and challenges binary views of gender and sexuality, formulating more fluid views of these frequently essentialized categories.

Although Wanda sees gender in terms of the binary: male/female, she recognizes the advantages of identifying as lesbian, rather than bisexual.

I feel like you can like both men and women. I do think there is a big prejudice against bisexuals. People think you are just messing with people’s heads, or you can’t make a decision, or you’re gay and just don’t want to admit it. I think if that’s really your inclination to enjoy both genders and you date both genders, I think there’s nothing wrong with that. And I think that, especially for myself, I tend to think of long-term relationships. So if I fell in love with a man, I guess then I would go with that. I wouldn’t fight it because I’m gay now and I can’t fall in love with a man.

While Wanda currently identifies as a lesbian, she does not believe she has “disciplined” her desires in such a way that forecloses the possibility that she may date a biological man at some other point in her life. She defines bisexual as someone who is attracted to men and women at the same point in his or her life. She says hesitantly, “I guess if you look at the whole span of my life I am [bisexual].” However, she also says, “But once I started having feelings for women, I realized they were a lot stronger than my feelings for men.” Wanda views sexuality as a continuum. Wanda admits to being attracted to both men and women, but her attraction and “feelings” are stronger for women than men. Further, she resists the label “bisexual” because of the social script she evokes when

talking about the “prejudice” against bisexuals: the stereotype that bisexuals are confused about their “true” sexual orientation and need to simply “make up their minds” about being gay or straight.

Wanda explains her currently chosen label of “lesbian” by stating that she is currently in a relationship with a woman and that she has stronger feelings for women than men. On the one hand, she remains complicit in the script she refers to about bisexuals being “really” gay by claiming the “lesbian” label herself. On the other hand, she challenges traditional ways of defining sexual orientations as either/or by claiming a more fluid lesbian identity where she does not foreclose the possibility of becoming involved in a romantic relationship with a man. In this way, Wanda makes claims about herself in regard to the script, or dominant narrative, about bisexuality. As Bamberg (2004) argues:

Speakers never totally step outside the master narrative, but always remain somewhat complicit and work with components and parts of the existent frame ‘from within.’ . . . The question has shifted to *how* they create a sense of self and identity that maneuvers simultaneously in between being complicit and countering established narratives that give guidance to one’s actions but at the same time constrain and delineate one’s agency. (p. 363)

In some ways, Wanda does not step outside the dominant narrative about bisexuality; however, she does counter the dominant narrative about lesbianism—lesbians only date and are attracted to other women—by being open to the possibility of a contingent self and sexual orientation. She speaks of her present, past, and future selves. While she currently identifies as a lesbian, she states that if one were to “look” over the span of her

life, she is bisexual and may claim this label at a later point in time. However, even this qualification about dating men later is contingent. She says, “I don’t foresee that I will have attraction to men again, but maybe I will.”

Heteronormativity and Choosing a Label

The claiming of a bisexual identity seems to be a tentative decision in the literature about LGBTQ labels as well as for the participants in this study; “bisexual” is a label that will do until one decides to claim a heterosexual or homosexual identity. As previously mentioned, people who claim to be bisexual are frequently ostracized by the lesbian and gay community as well as heterosexuals; they are often questioned about why they do not simply choose to be either gay or straight. Thus, their refusal to be a part of the heterosexual/homosexual binary is subversive in some ways, yet there is also the possibility of simply turning a binary into a triad: heterosexual/bisexual/homosexual. On the one hand, choosing the bisexual label may give people freedom to explore their sexuality. On the other hand, some may think that the potential for a bisexual to “become” a heterosexual is like an “escape hatch;” such people, it may seem, can simply choose to be in heterosexual relationship if same-sex ones are not successful or are too challenging in the face of social pressures to be heterosexual in a heteronormative society.

These are some of the values, beliefs, and assumptions regarding the claiming of the bisexual label. However, Hall (2003) makes an important point about interrogating these values and beliefs associated with these categorizations.

The question for . . . queer theorists today, is how presuppositions behind commonly used terms often remain wholly uninvestigated and, more specifically, how categories of language convey values while denying their socially constructed nature. (57)

In the case of all social identities, societal forces define and regulate particular categories such as bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, queer, and transgender, and even those who claim these labels seldom question their basis as social constructions. In this way, categories are naturalized and essentialized instead of investigated in terms of how dominant societal ideals define these categories often narrowly with little questioning on the part of those who claim to represent these sexual minority labels.

Gina, who is currently in her early thirties, felt these societal pressures acutely in her early twenties, as she did not wish to claim a non-heterosexual identity or label. For several years, Gina did not identify as bisexual or lesbian although she was in a long-term relationship with a woman. She called the relationship she had with her college roommate “just practicing” for when they both would be in relationships with men; however, once she slept with a man, she realized that her relationship with her roommate was not “just practicing” but was an actual relationship. Despite this, she continued to reject being labeled lesbian, homosexual, or bisexual.

And I still called it ‘just practicing.’ For about four months, we were just practicing because I didn’t want to be a homo. And I didn’t want anybody to call me a lesbian, and I didn’t know what the hell was going on. I just knew I loved doing this, and she seemed to like it too. And so we called it practicing for guys because then we’d know exactly what to do. We’d know what our bodies liked and all this stuff. So then, I was like, okay, and then I had sex with a guy. She left for the weekend, and I had sex with a guy. Of course, it was gross and just awful. I was like, ‘This is so sick. How could I even do this?’ And so I called and told

her, 'So I did it. I had sex with a guy. And it wasn't the greatest.' . . . Basically, she's like, 'You can never do that again. . . . I'm in love with you, and I don't want you to do that with anybody but me.' And I'm like, 'This is weird.' So we never talked about whether we were lesbians. We were together for two and a half years, and my plan was to be with her forever. I just never had that with anybody else.

Both women engaged in "homosexual behavior," even having a loving and committed relationship, but because of the pressure to be heterosexual, they still did not identify as lesbians. In fact, they avoided the topic of identification. They were, instead, "just together" even though Gina thought that "this was weird." Hall (2003) argues, there is a need for many individuals

to preserve the appreciation of the powerful limitations socialized within individuals who may not be able to break easily from 'herd' behaviors, ones that might be seen more generously as mundane manifestations of deep-seated, desperate, and understandable (if not at all laudable) desires for general social approval and sanctioned, relatively secure meaning. (p. 59)

Gina and her partner sought social acceptance, and neither wanted to be labeled as a homosexual, lesbian, or "other." In fact, it took years for Gina to accept the labels "gay" and "lesbian." To an extent, she has overcome societal pressure to claim a heterosexual label. Still, she does not thoroughly interrogate how she defines what it means to be a lesbian and how and why this conflicts with her community's definition of "lesbian."

Today, Gina claims the labels "gay" and "lesbian;" however, her identity is at odds with the "typical" lesbian she encounters in her daily life and at LGBTQ events or gay bars. Gina says, "I'm afraid of lesbians. Yeah, they scare me. When they hit on me, I'm afraid, especially if they look like men." However, she claims that "hot women" (i.e.

feminine-looking women) “don’t ever come up and approach you, you know what I mean? . . . Where are all the hot lesbians? In hiding? All that’s left are these truck drivin’ women.” Since her first relationship with her roommate ended—because her roommate did not want to be an out lesbian and eventually married a man—Gina has not been in what she would call “a substantial relationship since [she has] been a teacher.” She attributes this to lack of opportunity as well as lack of attraction to the lesbians in her community. “There’s nobody here. There’s nobody in my town. There is nobody worthy because there are some lesbians in this town; they’re just not my type at all.” According to Gina’s schema, most lesbians are more “masculine” than women to whom she would be attracted. The lesbians with whom she comes into contact reify the stereotypes about lesbians being “masculine” women, which Gina equates with being unattractive. “We operate as disciplining agents on each other and ourselves through our expectations of ‘normal’ behavior and out sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, communications of disapproval” (Hall, 2003, p . 65). Therefore, Gina sees lesbians as falling into one binary category or another: feminine/masculine. Perhaps she is attracted to more feminine women because they can more easily pass as normal (i.e. heterosexual) while women who are perceived as more masculine, whom she disapproves of as “unworthy,” challenge normative behavior and appearances for women and, thus, are more likely to be subjected to discrimination and to defending themselves as women and lesbians.

The Fluidity of Sexuality and Gender

Although Susan is currently in a relationship with a man and is still attracted to women, she identifies as a queer woman or a lesbian, not bisexual. “I don’t think it is

necessarily helpful to say, I'm a lesbian; I'm a queer woman. I don't think that's helpful. That just supports that we really know what that means." Like Wanda, Susan is uncomfortable with the bisexual label but believes strongly that sexuality is fluid and questions what is at stake personally and socially for individuals to accept particular labels. She sees these acceptances and rejections as a part of people's "evolving" selves. In her story, she reflects upon how she came to her current, tentative identifications. While in high school, Susan dated a woman who identified as bisexual, yet upon reflecting on her earlier recognition of her same-sex desires, she sees "little bits of repression."

Because for a second I could remember thinking, I really like hanging out with Cathy a lot, but that could mean I'm bisexual. I can't be bisexual. Nope! I wouldn't think about it for months. Then finally I had to talk to her about, and I am like, 'I am not gay. I do not like girls. I think it's just you.'

Eventually Susan came to identify as lesbian and continued dating women in high school and college. Despite identifying as a lesbian, she developed a "flexible" and "fluid" way of thinking about gender and sexuality partly as a result of attending a women's college in the South where she found a "strong queer community."

That was really helpful for me to be around people that were in same-sex relationships and were open to the fluidity of sexuality and gender and expressed genders and sexualities in ways that were different than what I had been previously exposed to. But also they were just really flexible and not policing anybody else. I miss it a lot. I wish every place could be like that. It was really positive.

Perhaps Susan, upon tracing the roots of her conceptualizations of gender and sexuality, misses this community at this point in her life due to the challenges she has faced being in a relationship with a man while still identifying as queer and lesbian.

In particular, her family had much difficulty with her dating a man. They first asked if the person she was dating was “biologically male” and why she came out as a lesbian in the first place if she were attracted to men.

On several occasions my . . . younger sister and my mom both asked me, not does this person make you happy, not where do you guys go out, what do you talk about, but is this person a biological male? The reason they told me they asked that is that they didn't want to be shocked when they met him. They thought I was dating a transgender person. And clearly this transgender person was going to be grotesque, and they were not going to know how to react. And at the time, I just wanted to be understanding, but I wish I would have been sassier. Would you like to know what race they are too? Would you like to know their ability level? Would you like to know any weird birthmarks they have, so you don't look shocked when you meet them?

Susan attributes her family's reaction to the “social script” that “fluidity is upsetting.”

Her family, like society, feels the need to categorize people, and when Susan or the person she dates does not fit into the socially constructed categories of gay/straight or man/woman, they are “upset” and confused by Susan's flexible way of seeing and performing gender as well as sexual identities. Because Susan challenges not only binary notions of gender but also categorization in general, she has experienced criticism from her family and others in her life. Although she was hoping for understanding from her family and others, upon reflection, she is indignant by her family's questions and sees them as “rude.” She recognizes that many are troubled by a fluid view of sexuality and

gender because of how much value is placed upon people being easily categorized. On the one hand, she wonders why her family thinks mostly about whether or not the person she is dating is a biological male, so they can prepare for meeting him. On the other hand, she wonders why they do not ask questions about other aspects of the person she is dating.

Susan, unlike her family and many others, can accept that “identity is not wholly stable, sexuality is never firmly fixed, and possibilities are never foreclosed” (Hall, 2003, p. 105). However, Susan is a social being who must contend with social scripts about what it means to be a man or woman or gay or straight. She says this situation has made “things very complicated.”

It’s not a very comfortable situation, not because I don’t like him. I think he’s really great but because that complicates my own identity in ways that are complicated to me but are even more complicated for the people around me like my family. I think as someone who wants to, you know, challenge people about gender and challenge myself, it’s not always clear how to do that. I traditionally embody femininity, which I’m okay with, but as someone also dating women, it’s also challenging. How do I queer whatever that is? I think that is very complicated to do.

Susan finds claiming labels particularly difficult because they act as disciplining mechanisms that could influence one’s behavior as well as one’s social status.

Additionally, as a person who identifies as queer and lesbian, Susan finds how she “does” gender challenging because she performs her gender in feminine ways, which may be seen as going against the grain of how some construct the meanings of being queer or lesbian. As Sullivan (2003) contends, “identity is never simply a process of self-

authorship” (p. 149). Susan must also contend with how others define her, even though she may not agree with these definitions, categorizations, and labels. Hence, Susan feels a tension between her views of sexuality as contingent and fluid and society’s views of what it means to claim and perform particular identities.

Nevertheless, Susan, too, is complicit in the social scripts about how to perform particular identities because “we are always, as Foucault would claim, implicated in the production of meaning and identity, and hence are both agents and effects of systems of power/knowledge” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 189). By claiming even an “outsider” identity, outside in the sense that it challenges norms of dominant culture and gay and lesbian subcultures, Susan has accepted that labels and the socially constructed identities that go along with them are necessary descriptors in order to be able to navigate social situations as well as personal predicaments. Admittedly, she finds difficulty in “queering” how she does gender and sexuality; more specifically, she is confounded by trying to imagine potential ways of troubling her seemingly heterosexual performance—by the standards of many who identify as LGBTQ and heterosexual—of both gender and sexuality.

According to Butler (1993), “Performativity is . . . not a singular ‘act,’ for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates conventions of which it is a repetition” (12-3).

Although Susan is an especially self-aware person in thinking about and in performing gender and sexuality, she, too, participates in reiterating norms of claiming labels and identities through her performance as a feminine woman and person who identifies as queer. However, Susan examines the meanings of these performances instead of simply

repeating them in ways that conceal the conventions of these performances. In this way, she does “queer” both sexuality and gender as well as challenges herself and others to think more broadly and flexibly about identifications and labels.

Tom also makes claims about his identity and the labels he chooses as being contingent and fluid, depending on the context, based specifically on who his audience is at particular place and time.

When I am in the room with a bunch of straight people, I identify as gay. When I am in the room with a bunch of gay people, I identify as queer. When I am in the room with a bunch of queer people, leave me alone, and I will let you know if I am attracted to you. I feel like if you go into a room, and I am generalizing, if you go into a room, full of straight people, and you say you’re queer, they’re gonna, ‘but, but, but, but, but, it’s a dirty word.’ Whereas if you go into a room full of gay people and say, ‘I’m gay,’ they’re going to say, ‘you’re just like us.’ Whereas if you say you’re queer, then you’re kind of like us but not exactly. It gives me that space to play around with people’s expectations and to have them really look at me as who I am.

Tom is “juggling several story lines simultaneously” in claiming identities and in articulating his self (Bamberg, 2004, p. 363). What all these story lines all have in common is that Tom labels himself in ways that are oppositional and relational to the expectations of the people with whom he finds himself. Hines (2006) found in her study of transgender individuals’ narratives that “these narratives suggest that identity is a relational process, understood and practised within social contexts. . . . When I asked how do you defined your gender identity several participants replied that their answer would depend upon who was asking the questions” (p. 61). Like Wanda, Tom is never outside the dominant narratives about identity labels; he only refuses a label when among queer

people. He believes there is a “who I am,” yet none of the labels fully describe him or only describe him in particular contexts; thus, who he is is contingent upon whom he is around. Using the “gay” label among heterosexual people, Tom avoids using the often-seen-as more subversive “queer” because of the negative connotations of the term “queer.” “Queer” is seen as a “dirty word,” a word to demean usually people who identify as or are perceived to be gay or lesbian. However, in order to differentiate himself among other people who claim the “gay” label, he uses “queer” to disrupt gay people’s expectations of him. However, Tom does not specify how he identifies among other queer people; he simply states, “leave me alone, and I will let you know if I am attracted to you.” This suggests that how he identifies socially is connected not only to relating or not relating to other people but also to attracting or not attracting others. Identity is, indeed, quite a juggling act for Tom. In articulating his self, he evokes discourses about being out to straight people, claiming labels in particular contexts, resisting labels, and embracing labels. However, his end goal is for people to learn more about him, rather than being fixated on the label he uses. He says, “That’s kind of my whole point. I want people to see me, not my label. I mean, I’m more fluid.” Nevertheless, Tom does choose to use labels, which inevitably will influence how others perceive him, so despite his desire to transcend categorization, he is still complicit in using labels to define himself in a world that demands categorization.

Race, Ethnicity, and Labels

LGBTQ educators of color frequently feel a sense of double consciousness and oppression. Double consciousness is a “particular sensation ... of always looking at

oneself through the eyes of others” (Du Bois, 1897, p. 196). Thus, educators of color have insider perspectives regarding prejudice and discrimination. They have visions of themselves—who they see themselves as—but they also have visions of who they must appear to be through their consciousness of how to maneuver and navigate their minority identities within a white supremacist culture. This sense of double consciousness could lead LGBTQ educators of color to remain closeted in order to avoid being a double minority—or in the case of women, a triple minority—subject to discrimination, prejudice, and violence not only because they are a racial or ethnic minority and/or because they are a woman but also because they identify as a sexual minority (Lipkin, 1999). In a study by the Human Rights Campaign (2009), interviews with LGBTQ people of color frequently revealed this sense of being a double minority. One woman said, “You have no idea how it is to be a minority among minorities” (p. 39). This feeling was echoed by a man who said, “It’s rough living in a heterocentric world. It’s rough being a double minority” (p. 39). These educators not only have to worry about rejection from their own communities but also rejection from heterosexual people in their lives as well as from LGBTQ communities that are still mired in and confronting racism. Between the double consciousness LGBTQ people of color experience and the tensions they feel as a double minority, LGBTQ educators of color have legitimate misgivings about being “out” at work or in public because they fear they will not be supported; moreover, in some cases, when they do come out, they are not supported by their own ethnic communities and local LGBTQ communities (Human Rights Campaign, 2009).

Gay and lesbian issues seem to be formulated with white middle- or upper-class people in mind (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2005). This alienates people of color—and people who are not middle- or upper-class—and is a reason why educators of color are less likely to be open about their sexual orientations. Kissen (1996) posits, “For gay and lesbian teachers of color, working in a profession whose members are overwhelmingly White is often as important—in some cases most important—as the struggle to be a gay teacher in a heterosexual world” (p. 25). Struggling to be heard in overwhelmingly white and often racist environments takes up much of what Evans (2002) calls the “emotional energy” of educators of color be they heterosexual or LGBTQ. Moreover, this situation compounds the alienation LGBTQ educators of color feel; they see their concerns rarely addressed at their places of employment as well as in the larger LGBTQ movements.

One of the reasons why race, ethnicity, and racism are not treated as significant issues is that the majority-white organizations within the field of education as well as within LGBTQ movements do not see race as an issue. “Queer” has been touted as an umbrella term that is all-inclusive of sexual minorities, recognizing multiple and interlocking forms of oppression. However, as Cohen’s (2005) analysis reveals, “queer” has not lived up to its radical potential and instead focuses on a single oppression framework. She suggests that “we must, therefore, start our political work from the recognition that multiple systems of oppression are in operation and that these systems use institutionalized categories and identities to regulate and socialize” (p. 43). Unfortunately, many white LGBTQ educators do not recognize the significance of race and class especially in the formation of identities and in the emotional work done by

LGBTQ educators of color (Evans, 2002). Jackson (2007) reports that in her study of gay and lesbian educators, consisting of only white participants, interviewees said that race is not an issue for them in their personal or professional lives. According to Jackson (2007):

Whereas participants frequently cited personality as influencing gay teacher identity development, other internal characteristics, in concert with external factors, played roles in gay teacher identity formation, but participants did not name race as one of them. Although previous researchers acknowledge race as an important factor and criticize research samples that are all white, the participants in this study, for the most part, did not bring up race as a factor. (p. 92)

Thus, white educators, even LGBTQ ones, tend to deny the importance of race because they take for granted their privilege as white people and whiteness as the norm and standard for those in their profession. There is a disconnection between white educators and those of color. Being white, these LGBTQ educators have the privilege of not noticing how race plays a role in theirs and others' lives. However, their lack of recognition contributes to a lack of understanding of the issues that educators of color, especially LGBTQ ones, face. Moreover, because so many studies do not include LGBTQ educators of color, this situation continues and little light is shed upon why LGBTQ educators are not out and open about their sexual orientation and what challenges they negotiate in working in a profession dominated by white people.

Race, Identity, and the Collective Self

Two of the participants in this study identify as people of color, and like others' studies, the participants who identify as white do not discuss race extensively. However,

Donna, an African American woman, discussed how race played a significant role in developing her identity as a lesbian and choosing specific labels.

Coming into my sexuality identification, I very much wanted to be vested in the African American community at the college where we were at. It was coming out and learning for me. My coming into my sexuality was guided by a very highly politicized environment where I was at this particular time. In order to be gay, or identify as lesbian, or identify as queer, you had to be this radical, shave your head, you know, manifest what society had stereotypically associated with white-identified lesbian politics.

What Donna was exposed to during her initial coming out process affected how she thought of being an out lesbian. Attending a majority-white institution, Donna tended to associate with white students and identified and performed her lesbian identity in what she describes as white ways. Klein (1986) observed:

Women of color are given a very difficult choice if they think of coming out as lesbians: to be true to their racial identity or to their sexuality. . . . If a [black] woman makes the difficult choice to live openly as a lesbian, she had, until recently, been forced to rely on a white lesbian community. . . . The most visible lesbian culture today was developed by white women for white women, and the lesbian of color is faced at every turn with ignorance, racism, and her own invisibility. (as cited in Sears, 1991, p. 325-6)

Because there was a community of white lesbians where she attended university, she more readily was able to identify with this group; however, Donna did not wish to choose between her lesbian and black identities. Instead, she sought to reconcile these two aspects of herself by finding a black lesbian community and ways of being a lesbian outside the models established by the white lesbian community, which often reinforced societal stereotypes about what it means to be a lesbian. Donna quickly began to become

uncomfortable with this situation in which the community (black lesbians) she sought was invisible; she began to notice the segregation at this university, which troubled her.

Overall, she described this institution of higher education as being highly segregated in terms of race and culture. Students who identified in various ways were grouped together, especially in housing. First-year students were housed together, for example, and African American students, among other minority groups, had opportunities to live together in housing specifically for their particular racial or ethnic group. Although Donna initially identified as a lesbian in terms of what it meant to be a white lesbian, she quickly dissociated herself from this vision of what it means to be a lesbian. She hoped to find an African American LGBTQ community.

So this was all very precarious for me. It caused a huge . . . I don't want to say break down for me, but it just didn't jar with my outlook about how people interact. You had all of these structures, physical, and aesthetic structures and space that interact in a segregated way. So I never found the community I was searching for, African American students on campus.

As a result of her experience seeking community and not finding it, Donna transferred to a historically black women's college; still, she did not find the community she sought until she met her current partner of 14 years who is also African American.

Donna currently uses the terms "woman-identified" and "same-affectionate loving" to describe her and her partner's sexual orientations, breaking away from the tradition terms "gay" and "lesbian."

I think as our relationship has come to be and continually evolve, there's not necessarily fixed roles that we have. . . . There was none of this, I think I'm bisexual. The fact that both of us have had experiences with men sexually and otherwise was because that is what we knew. Once we knew where we were and what we wanted, we no longer projected or attracted that. . . . I am who I am via whom I am with, and we are going to do what we're going to do. That's pretty much how our life is.

Donna, at the beginning of the interview, claimed the label "lesbian" but also said, "I am lesbian, but I don't like to use the term. I like 'queer.'" Initially, she saw "gay," "lesbian," and "queer" as white constructs because, as she claims, she was in a white environment that influenced how she thought about these identity markers and what it meant to claim one of these labels. Once she achieved some notion of the "collective self," a self developed in relation with others who identify similarly, she was able to break away from these labels even though she finds them politically useful in particular contexts. She remarks, "I have come to understand what the meaning of the word 'queer' is, or queering or queerness, as in motion and not as a stagnant thing, which is politically useful as a description, term." She sees her relationship, like her identity, as always evolving. However, identity is not an individualistic concept as others, particularly the white participants, have described it. This collective self that Donna describes is achieved by her creating a sense of community with others and in her case specifically with her partner. Throughout her story, Donna describes how in coming to understand herself, she sought community with others, particularly other African American lesbians, but constantly felt like an "outsider" because her ways of thinking did not mesh with the white LGBTQ community or with the African American communities with which she

interacted. However, this aspect of her story is a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative found both in African American and LGBTQ communities that African Americans must choose to emphasize either their Black or homosexual identities.

I never found that connection I wanted back to African American identity. That was important to ground anything in my African American identity because I do come from this school of thought that the first thing people see in me is that I am African American. And so none of my identifications do I think are fragmented. So that should in turn work in tandem with who I am sexually, who I identify with on a mental level or whatever the case may be.

Donna theorizes her identification based on what people perceive her to be first, which is African American. Thus, this first, or primary, identification must intersect with the “other” aspects of her identity such as her sexuality. Coming to her identification, she does not see the parts of her identity as “fragmented” but instead intersecting and interlocking, although she gives some priority over others because of their primary potency in terms of how society views her. James Tinney (1986) observed:

To maintain comfortability in the Black community, particularly in those places that cultivate Black culture and Black solidarity, many have felt a need to downplay their homosexuality. . . . And in order to maintain comfortability in the gay community, others have felt the need to downplay their Blackness. (p.72-3)

Donna refuses to do either of these things by seeking out a community where people identify as both black and gay.

Searching for and Creating Community

Struggling to find a sense of community, Donna attributes the lack of a black lesbian community, at least partially, to the climate in many African American communities today and links it to tendencies in black churches.

Because the African American community in general, not as a generalization, has issues with dealing with homophobia and embracing people who don't fit the heterosexual norm. I think there's a lot of literature that supports that. I think the African American community is nestled in the institution of the church. The black church, I think the literature supports this, makes it okay to talk about certain issues from the pulpit that are acceptable, palatable but not everything. And I think homosexuality is that last bastion in the black church that has yet to get air time. So I think a lot of African Americans I interacted with in this environment came with that idea that homosexuality is wrong, you're going to hell. And it was an all-female HBU, so my objective in that was to further push myself to find a community as a lesbian woman. And I thought that I would in fact find that, but it was almost as though I stepped out of the frying pan into the fire. I encountered more homophobia, a more heightened sense of homophobia at a predominantly African American environment than I did in a majority white environment. I didn't expect that. So that is probably my own naiveté and also being in the South.

Although she sought out a black lesbian community by attending a historically black women's college, she was not able to find this community until after she graduated and became involved in her current long-term relationship. Her sense of self and identity hinged upon her developing a collective self, a self and identity she could share with others. This sense of self in concert with others is part of collectivist cultures found in African American communities. In other words, collectivist cultures emphasize group members' interdependence and the group's concerns. In contrast, the dominant white culture emphasizes individualism—the prioritization of individual identity and action

over communal identity and action. Although several studies have found that African Americans display no more homophobic views or attitudes than whites do (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Herek & Capitani, 1995; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992), the collectivist tendencies in black communities may magnify the personal significance of the homophobia LGBTQ people of color experience because of the primary importance of their communal identity.

The position of black women in American society is another important element of this part of Donna's narrative. One participant in Sears's (1991) study attributes the lack of black lesbian communities to the culture of the South as well as the social status of black lesbians within larger society and within African American communities: "In the South, being black and lesbian is looked at harsher than being gay. I don't think that there are no black lesbians. I just think that they are more afraid of being ostracized. It's a social caste type thing, it's not really accepted" (p. 325). From this perspective, black women are on one of the lowest rungs of the social ladder, being black and women; moreover, being a lesbian in addition to being black and a woman places the black lesbian even lower on the social ladder and subjects her to ostracism in both African American communities as well as in larger society. This, in turn, discourages black lesbians to come out and to seek or create black lesbian communities.

Donna, however, found that she could not "find" this community of black lesbians because the homophobia in the larger African American community and in the South, and thus, she had to create the community for herself. One of the ways she created

community was through reading about the experiences and ideas of lesbian women of color.

I have found guidance in that [queer] theory, you know, in how I conduct my life. Those are the people I go back to: Audre Lorde, Anzaldúa, without a doubt. Cheryl Clark, she hasn't had so much new theorizing, but certainly 'Lesbianism as an Act of Resistance' was probably at the time was the most pivotal piece that made me accept my identity as a lesbian. I think that trying to figure that out pushed me to the extreme side of stepping into the foot prints of a radical white lesbian, which is not me. Still even though this is what pushed me over the threshold, I didn't have a real life model in the flesh that I could really be in community with.

Again, Donna emphasizes her search for community and her inability to find this community that she sought. Not finding a community of black lesbians or satisfaction from a white radical model of lesbianism, Donna relates to the voices of lesbians of color she discovers in print. Reading these writers encourages her to envision ways of being a lesbian in relation to her black identity.

"Community" is also a central concept in Donna's description of what she tries to accomplish in her high school classroom. Part of the reason community is so important to Donna is because of her struggles to create or find the community in which she felt a sense of comfort and belonging.

And I have been intentional about creating that sense of community because it was never deliberately done for me as I recall when I was in high school. And I think by doing that, by being intentional, being specific in that intentionality that allows me to have more personable communication with students one-on-one and in small groups about whatever the case may be if they get to the point where they decide to talk to somebody because they don't know how to process their own social identity or gender identity formation. . . . I've had some conversations, and I have been able to steer students in the direction to get more information and

have more conversations. I have also in that intentionality of creating classroom community been able to allow students to talk about stereotypes of gay, queer people in society and push some of them as far as why are certain things acceptable for the heterosexual community but not for the gay community.

While Donna is not explicitly out with her students, she believes she is “out” in other ways with her students such as having “safe space” signs on her doors and discussing issues of sexuality in her science classes. She links her teaching effectiveness to being a resource and educator who is supportive of students and creates classroom communities of interdependent learners. Not having found the community she sought as a young person in high school and in college, Donna sees this as her particular strength as she recognizes the importance of feeling a sense of belonging.

Being Gay First

The other participant who talked at length about seeking community in relation to her identity is Skye, who also happens to be the other person of color in this study.

However, the community Skye seeks is not specifically related to her ethnicity.

When I moved here to U.S.A. [from India] and started coming out, I started meeting gay people for the first time. And I felt this sense of community that I had never felt in my life, this sense of belonging, this sense of ‘these are my people.’ And so I guess I know a lot of people of different . . . ethnicities will identify first with the ethnicity or with their race and then with their orientation. But for me it is kind of the opposite. I see myself as a gay person or a lesbian first and then I guess, you know, as a brown person. So my people have been the gay folks and not so much the Indians. So when I came here to [this state], I started looking for gay coffee shops or gay bookstores. And I didn’t find any. I joined HRC, and I started going to the meetings, the steering committee, and then got involved in more stuff. . . . And then I came across other LGBT organizations in the community.

Skye tends to associate with white LGBT people more than LGBTQ people of color; for example, most of her recent relationships have been with white women rather than Indian women or other women of color. In some ways, she reifies the dominant narrative that one must choose either a gay identity or a person of color identity. Skye says that she can relate better with LGBTQ people than she can with other Indians; she has found a sense of community by joining the LGBTQ organizations and participating in activism for LGBTQ rights. Nevertheless, Skye, an upper-middle class person, does not make the link between whiteness or class and lesbian and gay rights issues. Many have remarked that gay and lesbian rights issues seem to be formulated with white middle- or upper-class people in mind (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Rimmerman, 2008). For example, the gay rights movements seem fixated on fighting for marriage equality while ignoring housing discrimination, lack of funding for AIDS/HIV research and services, unfair immigration laws, and disparities in healthcare.

Both Skye's and Donna's assertions about their primary identifiers suggest the additive model of oppression where one chooses the identity for which they believe they are most oppressed as their primary identifier, and other labels for which one may be oppressed are similarly hierarchically placed. As Anzaldúa (1991) contends, "Identity is not a bunch of little cubby holes stuffed respectively with intellect, sex, race, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a process" (p. 252-3). In other words, one's identities intersect and "inflect and/or infuse one another" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 72). The results of these intersections, experienced through lived experiences, are at times contradictory as well as complex and are neither stable nor

consistent throughout individuals' lives. For example, as Barnard (1999) posits, "race and sexuality are not two separate axes of identity that cross and overlay in particular subject positions, but rather, ways to circumscribe systems of meaning and understanding that formatively and inherently define each other" (p. 200). The identities that one claims intersect and interact rather than add up to a particular degree of oppression. Indeed, they are mutually informing, rather than simply being distinct aspects of one's socially constructed identity.

Primary Potency and the Influence of One's Sexuality on Her Teaching

Both Donna and Skye discuss the labels they claim as primary identifiers. While Donna claims her black identity first, Skye claims her identity as a gay person first and as a "brown" person second. Sharon believes that in American society the labels that go along with minority sexual orientations receive "primary potency" in terms of descriptions of people. However, Sharon's story provides a counter narrative to the larger dominant narrative that one's sexual orientation is the most or one of the most important identifiers for a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer person. Nevertheless, Sharon's story does not provide a queer "rejection of the belief that the subject is autonomous, unified, self-knowing, and static" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 41). Sharon believes who she is has remained relatively stable throughout her life, and she has thorough self-knowledge about her self and identities. In her story, Sharon emphasizes consistently her averageness (i.e. normality) rather than her sexual orientation. She attributes a certain amount of this to her upbringing in the Midwest where people are "accentless." She grew up in an upper-middle-class family and does not talk in-depth about her childhood; she

simply says, “It just seemed so all-American pie kind of stuff, so plain and ordinary.” Working at a college where the majority of students come from working-class backgrounds, she believes her ordinariness contributes to her teaching effectiveness as she is “not a drama queen or a diva in that room.” However, she does not believe her sexual orientation has anything to do with her teaching; for her, the two are unrelated.

An intensely private person, Sharon emphasizes throughout her story that her approach to teaching is not influenced by her identity as a lesbian.

It doesn't affect the way I teach. If I were a feminist, just a heterosexual feminist, I would have the same approach that I do. I don't know. I haven't been anything else my whole life. . . . I am not a very open person. I would never give people in the class my home phone number. I would never do that no matter what. I would never share too much of me.

Her approaches to teaching are influenced by her interests in social justice, which she does not connect with her sexual orientation. She believes her sexual orientation is simply an incidental aspect of her life and not something she says she thinks of on a daily basis. Despite this, two recent events have caused her to think more about her sexual orientation and its relation to her job. First, she has realized that she does not wish to teach literature because of the relationships depicted in texts tend not to represent lesbian and gay people. Second, she links her recent demotion, after more than 15 years of positive evaluations, to her supervisor's homophobia. Rather than fighting her demotion from an administrative position to a teaching position, she has chosen to remain at her place of employment for a short time until she is able to retire. “I want to get out of this as soon as I can, not because of the work. I like the work. I like the people. I don't like the

administration. They seem so heartless. I am a good person. I don't want to work for them.”

After discussing her demotion, Sharon substantiates both her views of herself as “a good person” as well as a competent administrator.

You know, you can do a lot of good work as an administrator because someone has to value teachers. That's what I regret most about not being in the role. I think the faculty respect what I was trying to do. We were a team. I never felt like I was in charge. I was just running interference all of the time. And I guess that's why they thought I was such a contrarian. I always put faculty first. If you put faculty first, they'll take care of the students. The students end up being first.

To Sharon, someone who is a good administrator values those who work for her and the work they do. Sharon practiced a collaborative leadership where she intentionally worked to make conditions better for both faculty and students. Sharon describes several of the projects and initiatives she led, which increased faculty satisfaction and student success. However, she comes back to her assertion that her sexual orientation or identity has nothing to do with the way she has led her department or taught classes.

When I talk about that kind of stuff, I think, does my sexual preference have anything to do with that? I don't think so. If you say a string of adjectives before someone's name, left-handed, blond, lesbian, tennis player, guess which one is the primary label, primary potency, not being left-handed or red-headed, or a tennis player.

Sharon illustrated throughout her story that identities and the labels that accompany them have different social weights and meanings to different people. For Sharon, her sexual orientation is incidental; she compares it to other personal characteristics such as hair or

eye color. She says, “I don’t feel like gayness has ever been a big part of this. I mean it’s just like saying, so your hair is brownish-gray. How does that have an impact on what you do? It doesn’t. Maybe I am naïve. It just has never been a part of any of this.”

Sharon provides a counter narrative to the dominant discourses that assert sexual orientation has, as she argues, “primary potency”—where one’s sexual orientation becomes one of the most important defining characteristics of that person. While this may be true of how American society sees sexual orientation in relation to identity, Sharon herself resists this discourse, not attaching much significance to her sexual orientation in her everyday life and career. Several scholars have argued that there is a “post-gay” life stage when LGBTQ people reject their sexual orientation as their primary identity (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Jackson, 2010). However, Sharon’s assertion is that her gayness has never been a part of how she teaches; thus, this is not so much a stage she has reached but rather her long-standing stance about her sexual orientation’s significance in her work and personal lives.

Despite believing sexual orientation has no role in her work as an educator, Sharon does believe it played a role in her demotion after more than 15 years as division head. This is probably the most prominent story or event that Sharon narrates. This is partly because the demotion happened just a few months before this interview; moreover, this event has greatly changed her career. Because she was given little reason for this demotion, other than the college was reorganizing and the administration did not believe her leadership philosophy was in line with that of the college, she wonders if it was related to the homophobia of the college’s president. While this situation clearly bothers

her, she embraces returning to her role as a full-time educator. Transitioning from her demotion from administrator to educator, she says, “It’s okay. I love teaching, and I will be perfectly content to be in the classroom.” Sharon extensively discusses her teaching philosophy and strategies. She embraces her identity and work as a teacher; “teacher,” it would seem, is currently the label that has the “primary potency” for her.

Conclusions: Language Use in Teaching and in Constructing the Self

Several of the educators in this study discuss how they have dealt with language use related to sexuality in the classroom as well as how they have developed evolving senses of their identities/selves through personal experiences and socially constructed categories and ways of being. In particular, these educators strive to help students be mindful of the language that they use and avoid homophobic remarks. However, these strategies are also a part of their making sense of themselves. Their students’ degrading “gay” people in particular is something that these educators find offensive and that places them in a position where they can help students unlearn prejudice. Nevertheless, this has remained a challenge for these educators since homophobia and sexism are instilled at early ages, as is evident from Greg’s story about kindergarteners’ understanding of “gay” as “gross.” These educators themselves have “unlearned” homophobic attitudes as they have struggled to come to accept their identities as sexual minorities. For instance, Susan recalls bits of “repression” where she avoided thinking about the possibility of being bisexual, only for these thoughts to reoccur and for her to confront them finally. She denied this possibility to herself, thinking, “I can’t be bisexual;” at the time she could not integrate this notion into her sense of herself.

Perhaps because of the type of person who volunteers for studies about LGBTQ people, these narrators do not engage in what Cross and Epting (2005) describe as “self-obliteration,” which is when one’s homosexual identity is not compatible with “the core values or constructs that principally define who that person is” (p. 57). Such cases of self-obliteration lead to one denying and repressing his or her same-sex desires and, in extreme cases, to suicide. This is not to say that taking on a label of a sexual minority and coming to terms with one’s same-sex desires are not difficult for the participants in this study. Rather, through their struggles to construct their selves in often homophobic and heterosexist environments, they claim LGBTQ identities that validate their experiences and senses of self. However, this is not always the case. For example, Sharon does not believe that her sexual orientation, and the lesbian label that goes along with it, is as significant in her life as others have made it to be in their own lives, yet this does not mean that Sharon is “less evolved” as a person, only that she does not weigh her identification as a lesbian as heavily as she does other aspects of herself, such as her identity as an educator. As Harrison (2000) found, “[some] gay people expressed their sexuality and formed gay relationships but did not necessarily construct their whole life around their sexual orientation” (p. 39).

Nonetheless, one’s identity is a social matter, and despite which aspects about oneself that he or she wishes to emphasize, American society at this historical moment is fixated on sexuality and on defining people with minority sexual orientations primarily by their sexual orientations. Upon contemplating what would happen if she were to come out to her students, Wanda remarks:

If I told them I had two cats, that's not something they're going to talk about. That's not interesting. But, she's a lesbian? It's because it's sexually related, and that's the tidbit they're going to focus on with me. Right now, I'm Ms. Jones the cat lady, and then later, I will be the lesbian. There's more to me than that.

Part of the reason Wanda and others are not out in particular contexts is because they do not want to be thought of only in terms of their sexual orientation. As Wanda says, "there's more to me than that." However, as Donna and Skye discuss, claiming a sexual minority identity and emphasizing this aspect of oneself can also lead to a greater sense of belonging and community. Cross and Epting (2005) point out, "gay identification, subsequent feelings of alienation and estrangement from mainstream heterosexual life choices, can give rise to feelings of belonging" (p. 60). Both Skye and Donna seek out community with other LGBTQ identified people, and in both their cases, they have become involved in activism, working for social justice and equity for LGBTQ people.

Overall, claiming a label has many purposes. It can be for self-affirmation and integration of oneself. As Donna states, none of her identities are "fragmented" but are interlocking aspects of who she is even though she identifies first as an African American woman because she believes this is what people notice first about her. Claiming labels also has political purposes; one can "fight" for rights for people who identify as LGBTQ, or one can make a political and personal statement about the fluidity of gender and sexuality via the label he or she chooses. Still, what such labels signify is not always what those who embrace them intend for them to signify; moreover, how one defines him or herself does not always mesh with the views of people from our larger society or even LGBTQ communities. For example, Susan believes how she identifies has been

“complicated” by others’ reaction to her dating a biological man after she has already come out as a lesbian and queer woman. Despite the many challenges they face, all these narrators are able to articulate how they have come to identify as sexual minorities. I believe this common thread reflects the importance of coming to accept oneself and one’s sexual orientation.

CHAPTER V
QUEERING THE SELF: TEACHING AND LIVING IN THE SOUTH

Being “Out” in the South

Part of the project of this study is to examine the context of being an LGBTQ educator in the South. The participants in this study both challenge and reaffirm stereotypes of the South. Unlike the participants in Jackson’s unpublished pilot study and in Sanlo’s (1999) study focusing on educators in northeast Florida, all the participants consider themselves out in ways they define. Moreover, most of Sanlo’s interviewees reported that they feared job loss and refused to sign their real names on confidentiality forms. However, none of my interviewees expressed concern that they would be identifiable in this study, and while I have changed all participants’ names and have striven to protect the identities of participants, several of my participants were willing to allow me to use their real names. I think there are several reasons for the differences between my study conducted in the South and the other two I have previously mentioned. First, while several participants grew up in rural areas, only one teaches in a rural area. This may suggest that educational institutions in cities may be environments in which people are more accepting of differences because of the diversity found within these settings. Second, only about half of the participants in this study grew up in the South. This may affect their perceptions of living and working in the South; however, all of

these narrators spoke of choosing to live in the South, despite others' stereotypical and negative views of the South.

Stereotypes about the South

In writing about the context in which these educators teach, I do not seek to reinforce stereotypes about the South being a place where people tend to be ignorant bigots. However, this is not to say that there are not bigots in the South but that any particular place in the South may or may not be an environment that is hostile to people who identify as LGBTQ. According to Sears (1992), "Those harboring negative attitudes about homosexuality are more likely to have resided in the Midwest or the South, to have grown up in rural areas or in small towns, and to be male, older, and less well-educated than those expressing more positive attitudes" (p. 38). Although populations in urban areas in the South are growing, the South consists of mostly rural regions, some of which are not near metropolitan areas ("The South," 2010). Because of the many rural regions in the South, among other factors, Sears (1992) ponders if people who live in the South are more homophobic than people in other parts of the country. "The South, perhaps more than other regions of the United States, openly practices one of the few remaining forms of socially accepted bigotry: homophobia. ... The South is a lonely place for a boy or girl blossoming into adulthood as a lesbian, bisexual, or gay man" (p. 61). While I believe that LGBTQ educators may face more challenges being out in the South where there is relatively little protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, I do not believe that we can make sweeping generalizations about people who live in the South. As I mentioned previously, there are many "transplants" in this study as well as

living in the South generally. The South is one of the fastest growing areas in the United States in terms of population (“Introduction,” 2004; “The South,” 2010). These dynamics inevitably affect the environments in which the educators in this study live and work.

Another important dynamic in this study is the inclusion of college and university educators; most studies regarding LGBTQ educators tend to focus only on K-12 educators. Four of the narrators in this study teach at either the college or university level. Since these educators work with adult populations and tend to work in more liberal environments, they may be less likely to experience discrimination than K-12 educators who are more often positioned as role models and who sign contracts with morality clauses.

Further, religiosity is an important factor in this study. The South is known as the Bible Belt and is home to many Fundamentalist Christians and Southern Baptists. In fact, the Southern Baptist Convention boasts the most members compared to any other Protestant sect and is also one of the fastest growing (“Southern Baptist,” 2010). This dynamic could also play a role in the attitudes of people living in the South since religiosity has been found to be associated with prejudicial attitudes toward LGBTQ people (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Herek & Capitano, 1995; Negy & Eisenman, 2005). However, religiosity is not always indicative of one’s harboring heterosexist and/or homophobic attitudes.

Moreover, related to both the environments at universities and homophobic attitudes in the South, Baunach, Burgess, and Muse (2010) conducted a study in which students at a large urban university in the South responded to questions to gauge their

attitudes about homosexuality as well as their contact with people who identify as gay men and lesbians. They found that these students reported less homophobic attitudes than those who participated in national studies. This could be indicative of more accepting attitudes of people who attend universities, of the higher likelihood that people who attend universities have contact with gay and lesbian people, and/or of the changing attitudes of young people over the last 20 years in regard to homosexuality. However, at many colleges and universities in the South, there are no antidiscrimination policies to protect LGBTQ faculty members or students, and many non-tenured faculty members fear coming out before gaining tenure. Interestingly, the two participants in this study who believe they have been discriminated against in promotion/demotion situations were both educators working in higher education.

Challenging Stereotypes about the South: The Value of Tradition

Susan, who grew up in the South, is annoyed when people think of the South in stereotypical ways, characterizing Southerners as unintelligent bigots.

Growing up in a rural area was important to me. I feel like I have a strong connection to where I'm from even though it's really conservative. My home town has a very strong connection to Civil War history. . . . It was not always easy to grow up or to teach there, but I think there are these little pockets of resistance, or not resistance, just things you wouldn't expect from a place that is labeled small town and Southern and military influenced. I think there are a lot more liberal ideas and quote, unquote liberal practices there than people would think.

Even though it is not a place I would choose to keep myself anymore, I always feel protective especially when people from the West Coast or New England are talking about the South. Well, of course, it's really homophobic; it's the South. Of course, people are uneducated or ignorant. It's a big pet peeve of mine when people will do that thing in order to sound uneducated or stupid, they will take on

a Southern accent. That's what you do to sound uninformed, stupid, racist, or homophobic.

Although there may be some reality in stereotypes, as Susan points out, it is important to avoid completely accepting them. Being an openly LGBTQ educator in the South may or may not be as challenging or affirming as being one in other parts of the country. The South in particular is becoming more urbanized, as metropolitan areas are growing and the population is shifting away from being mostly rural ("The South," 2010). However, as Susan mentions, even in rural areas where people tend to have conservative ideas and Fundamental Christian beliefs, there is resistance to homophobia and heterosexism. Understandably then, even lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer Southerners are "protective" about what they see as the rich heritage of the South and resent the stereotypical views people who live elsewhere have about the South. Certainly, the changing population of the South from the influx of people from other parts of the country and the growth of urban areas will affect the environments in which students learn and teachers teach. Again, it is also important to note that in this study the majority of educators teach in urban areas and have had both positive and negative experiences as a result of their being out in various ways at their places of employment.

A Precarious Situation

While Sharon makes only indirect connections between her experiences as a self-identified lesbian and her teaching, she does make a direct connection between her sexuality and her recent demotion after more than a decade in an administrative position and 15 years of positive evaluations from her supervisors.

Because of all that has happened, I wonder sometimes if our president whom I am confident as I am sitting here is a terrible homophobe, if that didn't factor into my being demoted, which is basically what's happened. I mean there's really no earthly reason to have done it except that he didn't like me. ... It sounds so self-serving and poutish, but I think it is a factual statement. I think if you ask many people around here, they just can't believe this has happened.

Although Sharon is not explicitly "out," she believes most of her colleagues and other administrators know she identifies as a lesbian and has a partner. She is fairly certain that her sexual orientation did play a prominent role in the decision to demote her since "there's no earthly reason to have done it" and since she has been well-respected on campus for her work as an administrator and educator.

I don't know. I don't know if that factored in, but I do know when the college drafted its diversity statement, I was relieved to read that sexual preference was in it. I thought, if anything ever happens to me, I will wave that in their face. But I also knew the way that this state system is structured, you could be let go at any time for any reason. You really don't have any recourse.

Sharon does not feel she has any recourse to fight the demotion because there is no legal protection for discrimination in employment for people who self-identify or are perceived as LGBTQ in the state where she lives. In fact, as she points out, in the state where she lives in the South, one can be fired for any or no reason at all, and the employee has no legal recourse unless he or she can prove that it was due to discrimination based on a protected category such as race, ethnicity, age, or sex. Even though the school has an antidiscrimination policy, she believes she would experience negative repercussions from suggesting that her sexual orientation played a role in her demotion.

But I am still not sure that they can't fire me. There would not be as much recourse. You wouldn't hear the public out cry and the awareness that that was just wrong. Even if you are a racist, you are smart enough to know that you can't express that. But I don't think we are quite there yet with homosexuality.

Like other narrators in this study, Sharon compares homophobia to racism. While most people consider racism unacceptable, the same is not the case for homophobia and heterosexism. Sharon mentions several times that there is little "recourse" for her or for others who believe they have been fired or demoted for reasons related to their minority sexual orientation; thus, being close to retirement, she has chosen not to fight what she sees as an unfair and discriminatory decision to demote her. Moreover, she recognizes that in many contexts it is still commonplace to discriminate against LGBTQ people in both explicit and implicit ways. According to Sears (1991), both the research that he has conducted about gays and lesbians in the South and that he has reviewed "repeatedly [has] shown the South to be less tolerant than other regions of the country on political and social issues" (p. 10). Sharon's experience suggests that, even late in the first decade of the 21st century, homophobic attitudes may very well color hiring, demotion, and promotion decisions, especially at educational institutions in the South.

Sharon's story illustrates the precarious situation in which educators find themselves, teaching in the South where there is little social or legal support for fighting discriminatory employment practices. Certainly, fear of losing one's job has frequently been cited in the literature about gay and lesbian teachers as a reason for not being "out" at school or in public. Kissen (1996) contends, "The most worrisome part of hiring and firing decisions, as many teachers point out, is that it is not always easy to know whether

a decision has been based on a teacher's sexual orientation" (p. 74). This fear and "worrisome" doubts are poignant in Sharon's story because of her experience being demoted; before this experience, she says she did not fear being fired. "Up until two months ago, I would say, what are they going to do, fire me? Now I don't know."

Sharon's identification as a lesbian seems to have influenced her teaching and career even though she claims it does not. Perhaps this is her hope; it is a hope many of us have, that we will be recognized for the good work we do because we are good teachers, which it would seem, may not have anything to do with whom one chooses to have sex, to love, and/or to desire.

Tenure at Southern Universities

Before coming to the Baptist university where he began his career, James read an article about being an openly gay academic that gave the advice to avoid teaching at religious schools or schools in the South. James accepted a job that was both at a Baptist university and in the South. However, he promised himself that he would not lie about his sexual orientation.

In 1972, the notion of being an out professor was still pretty far out. There were no courses in women's studies or gender issues and stuff like that, but I said I am not going to be in the closet. If somebody asks me a question, I am going to answer it, but pretty quickly students, particularly gay students but even straight students, identified me as gay professor. So I think the word was out pretty quickly.

James did not find the city where he lived and worked to be very gay friendly, and there were no gay and lesbian organizations or bars in this city at the time. He spent much of

his free time traveling to a nearby city to go to the local gay bar there and did “the two things that are going to get you in trouble at a Southern Baptist school: drugs and sex.”

While James struggled to find a gay community and a committed relationship, he thrived at the university where he taught; however, he did not shy away from controversy. He taught a course in literature and sexuality in the mid-seventies, which he describes as “pretty advanced” because there were no courses on topics related to sexuality at the university at this time. While he received support from colleagues, he did experience some negative reactions to the course.

I got into some trouble with some friends for teaching the course. I think I have been fairly naïve about the negative reactions people are going to have to things. I had a straight couple who were friends, who said they needed to talk to me after I had put this in the catalogue because I was going to teach this course. And they started to tell me that they were very worried for me for teaching this course that I might get in trouble for teaching this course. And I said, ‘Well, what kind of trouble could I get in?’ And they said, ‘Well, people could find out that you are gay.’ ‘A lot of people already know that I am gay, and I am gay, so I am not going to worry about that.’

They kept questioning me about it. And what they were really questioning was whether a gay person could talk about sexuality at all because my slant on the whole of sexuality was so warped and slanted that I should have entitled my course, ‘a gay man’s vision of literature and sexuality’ because I had planned to deal with the issues [of] what is heterosexuality, what is homosexuality and bisexuality and even transgender—even though we didn’t have a word for that yet. There was this moment when I realized I am confronting homophobia right now. I am fine as long as I don’t publicly acknowledge myself or publicly speak of issues of sexuality.

And what they really didn’t like about it was that I was treating heterosexuality as neutrally as homosexuality. The point of this class was not to prove that heterosexuality was better than any other kind. It was just there are lots of different sexualities. . . . It was a real wake-up call to me that people that seem to be liberal were often not liberal about sexuality. It broke our friendship. I couldn’t be friends with them anymore.

James realized that homophobia is not isolated to particular groups of people such as conservatives but is prevalent even among those who would consider themselves liberal. Upon reflection, James interprets his friends' behavior as homophobia. They do not believe he has the authority to speak about matters of sexuality because he is gay. The unspoken assumption, as James points out, is that people who do not fit into the socially defined category of heterosexual cannot understand sexuality from that perspective, which is the dominant one, and, therefore, are limited to speaking only from the perspective of LGBTQ person. James believed this was too narrow of a perspective. As Sharon argues, while there may be teachable moments or other times when it is appropriate to claim one's perspective as a sexual minority, it does not make much sense to constantly claim this positionality when teaching; she says, "I can't imagine going into the classroom and saying, you know, these memos, from a gay woman's experience. It is hard to imagine." Such qualifiers used unintentionally may draw students' and others' attention away from the topic at hand rather than illuminate anything about the content the teacher is trying to teach or about the teacher him or herself. While James's sexuality may have influenced him to teach the course, James does not see his sexual orientation as the dominant factor in how he addressed questions of sexuality in the course.

James also recognizes that his sexual identity as a gay man is acceptable only in the context where it is for the most part ignored. In fact, James mentions that his friends believed he was in danger of getting into "trouble" for teaching this course although they were not able to articulate what kind of trouble, other than exposure of his sexual orientation, which was not a concern for James. However, his friends apparently think

that it is unsafe and even harmful to reveal such information about himself perhaps for his career or for him personally. There is another possibility or contributing factor to these friends' seeing outness as dangerous or leading to trouble; in the South, traditionally there is a line drawn between that which may be discussed publicly and that which may not, and sexuality is not to be discussed even if it is widely known that some is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer (though most heterosexual people would shy away from using this term). Sears (1991) contends, "the legacy of the Old South . . . is Southerners' fondness for polite conversations and their unwillingness to confront (or tolerate) private behavior in public" (p. 185). However, all over the country there is a "don't ask, don't tell" policy in many communities where everyone knows who is queer, but no one wants them to "flaunt it," or in other words, be open in any demonstrative way about their LGBTQ sexual orientation. "The term 'flaunting' is associated with having an agenda in that someone who 'flaunts' is an exhibitionist, desiring to be noticed, to make a statement of sort" (Evans, 2002, p. 47). As in most regions in the United States, heterosexism persists, and anyone who in any way alludes to their homosexuality is said to be flaunting the fact that they are gay whereas heterosexual people alluding to their lives as sexual beings by mentioning their spouses or partners are not said to be flaunting their sexuality. Thus, there is a double-standard at play here as well as hyperbole in the sense that "flaunting" connotes extremeness and being confrontational while such flaunting may be simply having a rainbow sticker on one's car or mentioning one's partner in a conversation. No matter how minimal the expression of one's non-

heterosexual identity may be, as Towle and Morgan (2002) argue, “Societies hardly ever allow individuals to transgress their norms freely and publicly” (p. 487).

Later, when James came up for tenure, it was not granted. He believes this was a result of his being openly gay.

I knew my job was not going to continue at [the university]. . . . I know from hindsight that every person who had been identified as gay had been targeted. They had to find some way of getting rid of this person. With me, it was [the university] was going to change what kind of school it was and enter the big time. So they told me that my scholarly work was not up to snuff, and I would not be getting tenure, a tenured spot, and I knew this several years before I finished teaching there.

Nevertheless, James did not do poor work for the remainder of his time at this university despite his knowing he would not be granted tenure. Instead he was determined to work hard in order to “make them regret their decision” and to obtain a recommendation from his supervisor to help him find another job. He did, indeed, earn such a recommendation, found another job, and has worked at the women’s college where he currently teaches for more than 30 years. However, even today, LGBTQ professors, especially in the South, worry they will not be granted tenure.

Skye, too, talks about colleagues at the university where she works staying in the closet because they fear they would not be granted tenure if they are open about their sexual orientations with students and co-workers.

I have no idea why [others are afraid to come out] because my department chair hired me. She’s not homophobic, but she is religious, and she does consider me as a fornicator, which she told me to my face. Yeah, we were discussing gay marriages, and gays should be married. And she believes in the Bible, and she

believes gays should not be married because it's a sin, and we are fornicators. It is surprising that she manages to keep her religion out of her work. And if I bring it up, she will tell me her opinion on it, but I have never felt discriminated against.

Although she admits that the university where she teaches is not as “gay-friendly” as other universities where she has attended or taught, she believes the people in her department are accepting. She is not sure why others are afraid that their being out would affect their chances at tenure. However, her colleagues’ fear of being out may be well founded as the department chair’s opinion that gays and lesbians are “fornicators” could be seen as homophobic and even as evidence as her intolerance of LGBTQ people.

Although Skye optimistically believes people can separate their values and beliefs from how they conduct themselves on a daily basis, one should wonder to what extent the department chair keeps her strong religious viewpoints “out of her work,” as these views likely consciously or unconsciously color how she interacts with and treats LGBTQ colleagues and students. Moreover, Skye is in denial about the department chair’s homophobic attitude. She concludes that her being hired indicates that the chair cannot possibly be homophobic. Her denial may be the result of her own internalization of homophobic attitudes as “normal.” What this situation reveals is “the oppressive nature of ‘the normal’” (Hall, 2003, p. 116). In the South, such religiosity is common, and in many settings it is considered normal to have heterosexist and homophobic views. Being defined as a “fornicator” definitely positions one outside the categories of both normal and religious as well as is a sign that the chair is not accepting of Skye because of her sexual orientation.

Being Trans and Teaching in the South

Before going through his full transition, Tom completed his student teaching at a middle school where he faced many challenges beginning before the term even began. His principal saw him on television speaking at a LGBTQ rights rally. He was told, “You can do whatever you want in your private life, but just know that parents will call and will complain, and there will be an issue if you keep doing this activism stuff while you’re teaching.” Tom ceased his activism activities while teaching but still experienced harassment from students during his student teaching. One student accused him of touching her; another wrote signs, calling him a “dyke;” and one parent would not even look at him during a parent-teacher conference. Now that he has transitioned fully, he does not believe he will be able to work in the K-12 setting, particularly in the South, and has instead decided to continue working as an educator in a university setting.

I think it’s damn near impossible to get a job as a gay, trans person because there’s no way I can hide that I’m trans, not at a job. I had my teaching license changed, but if they do any background checks on me, my finger prints are in the system as female. I still want to teach. I love to teach. I’m not saying there aren’t transgender teachers out there; I’m just saying that it’s hard to be in the classroom. It’s hard to get into the classroom when you’re trans.

If schools are not accepting and/or intolerant of gay and lesbian educators, Tom believes they are even less accepting of transgendered individuals. He cited several examples of transgendered teachers being fired in various parts of the country. In particular, Tom mentioned a story about a transgender teacher in the Midwest who lived in a state that has anti-discrimination laws which protect transgendered people from being fired because of

their gender identity. According to Tom, the school found a way around this law by waiting a few years after the teacher transitioned to fire her; this way they could claim it was not due to her gender identity.

Tom believes transgendered teachers in the South have even less recourse since no state in the South has gender identity as a required protected category in equal opportunity statements or anti-discrimination laws.

There's no recourse. There's no recourse for it, and that's the part that irritates me the most. It's like, wait a second. You can just say you don't like who I am, even though it doesn't impact my teaching at all? You liked me just fine before you found out. I mean, I can't even imagine dating someone who worked at a public school because they would have to be so secretive about that relationship. And even if they were out, then everything we did would be scrutinized by the people in the community. As much as I love as teaching, that's not healthy. And if you're not healthy, you don't teach very well. I will probably stick with teaching at the university unless there is some sort of revolution and the rules change, but I don't see that happening for a while.

Tom, like the other narrators in this study, describes LGBTQ educators as having “no recourse” for being fired due to their sexual orientation and is frustrated with that status quo in the South in particular where one can be fired for being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer without any laws being violated. *Morris v. State Board of Education* (1969) limited schools' ability to fire teachers because of real or perceived minority sexual orientations or homosexual behavior; schools must prove that the teachers' behavior directly and negatively affected their performance in the classroom. However, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1985) supported employers' right to terminate employees for identifying as LGBTQ since sexual

orientation is not a legally protected category at the national level (Blount, 2005; Jackson, 2007).

Further, Tom associates being “secretive” about one’s sexual orientation with being “unhealthy,” which provides a counter narrative to the dominant narrative about homosexuality being abnormal and unhealthy. In Tom’s view, being open about one’s minority sexual orientation provides catharsis as well as allows one to usurp the power of the secret; having confessed this secret either implicitly or explicitly, one may still fear repercussions but no longer fears being found out. Medical, religious, judicial, and educational discourses also emphasize “confessing” as a form of unburdening oneself from an oppressive truth. As Foucault (1976/1990) contends, “The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth lodged in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface” (p. 60). As discussed previously, such confessions and declarations also discipline our desires and identities, reinforcing that coming out is definitive and a result of our revealing our “true” selves. Still, within the master narrative of confession is the promise that once one has revealed her or his secrets, and perhaps gained absolution or validation, she or he is freed from “hiding” a secret that supposedly has had harmful and damaging effects upon the psyche of the person who has kept the secret; thus, telling such a secret, or at least not hiding it, provides catharsis to many people perhaps because of the dominant discourse of “the truth setting one free.” In this way, Tom reinforces the dominant discourses—supported and perpetuated by the literature about gay and lesbians’ lives as well as within

LGBTQ subcultures—about what outness can do for individuals, suggesting that withholding certain secrets leads to being unhealthy psychologically, which in turn affects one's effectiveness in the classroom. However, the secret/confession dichotomy has its power only when a secret has some social and personal significance; in this way, context is important. For example, a heterosexual person's sexual orientation would not be understood in terms of secret needing confessed.

The power of these dominant discourses of confession/secretcy and healthy/unhealthy that demand and deter confession exert contradictory forces. The desire to live openly as an LGBTQ person may or may not be as strong as or stronger than the desire to be on the offensive, hiding one's sexual orientation for the purposes of safety from discrimination, prejudice, and even violence. In the South, there is a tradition of keeping one's idiosyncrasies or "eccentricities" to oneself, even though these may be "open secrets." Sears (1991) posits:

Masterful dancers around the truth, Southerners are great preservers of appearances. There is a respect for an individual's privacy or, less gingerly, an unwillingness to confront private idiosyncrasies in public. The whole town might know about Cousin Randolph's fondness for men; but as long as these behaviors are kept to himself, no one will publicly acknowledge them. This storehouse of collective private knowledge, in part, is what identifies a Southern community. (pp. 190-1)

The Southern community plays a role in keeping the secret, as one's minority sexual orientation is not a topic of "polite" conversation, even though it may be a topic in private conversations, yet LGBTQ educators, as Tom points out, still must contend with their behavior being scrutinized by the community and with the potential consequences of such

scrutiny. The community has such an influence and power over an individual's private and public behavior that Tom does not believe he could even date another LGBTQ person who teaches in a K-12 setting. While surveillance of teachers' private behavior may be seen as a thing of the past, when teachers' behavior was strictly controlled by teaching contracts, even today communities monitor teachers' public and private behavior. For example, Gina's principal told her not to buy beer in the county where she works as she may be seen by students or their parents.

Nevertheless, Tom sees things changing for LGBTQ youth in Southern K-12 schools; he believes there are more support systems of these youth than there have been previously.

I just feel like even though the schools are getting better about having students that are queer or LGBT. They're getting better at having the support structures in the schools for those students, [but] they aren't creating those same structures for the staff. They are saying, 'We don't discriminate against students for being gay, but we would never hire a gay teacher.' It's disingenuous to me. It's like, you can be gay, but we're not going to give you any positive role models. You're just gonna have to figure that out on your own.

These schools are increasingly seeing the need to prevent bullying based on sexual orientation perhaps because of the increasing media attention to students committing suicide due to being bullied for their sexual orientations. However, this situation is paradoxical, as Tom points out; he believes schools are making strides in discouraging prejudice, intolerance, discrimination, bullying, and violence, yet they do not put these same efforts into making workplace environments more accepting of minority sexual orientations and gender diversity. National studies have found that both LGBT educators

and students report that K-12 environments are unsupportive of LGBT people (Sears, 1992). Smith, Wright, Reilly, and Esposito (2008) conducted a national study in which K-12 LGBTQ educators reported that they rarely hear educators intervene when they hear homophobic comments; more than half fear losing their jobs if they are out to students; 63% have experienced negative repercussions for being out; and the vast majority of respondents reported that their school environments are hostile to LGBTQ students and educators. To date, there have been no studies focusing on the level of homophobia and heterosexism in K-12 educational environments in the South. However, other narrative studies in which educators from the South are included have found that these educators experience a considerable amount of harassment due to their being openly gay or lesbian or simply being perceived as gay or lesbian; nevertheless, some of these educators also received a great deal of support from other school workers as well as students in the aftermath of incidents of homophobia (Jennings, 1994; Sanlo, 1999).

Religiosity and the South

Greg's story illustrates the profound effect the internalization of homophobic attitudes, especially in the context of the South, have on individuals and their quality of life. Greg, an elementary teacher, says that coming to terms with being gay has been the hardest thing he has dealt with in his life and that his being brought up in a Southern Baptist Church compounded this difficulty because he was taught being gay was wrong. Shortly after moving away to attend university, he began withdrawing from the church and his family following his sister's death in a car accident.

That really upset me because in many ways I felt like that was punishment for me for being gay and having these feelings. From what I had learned growing up from going to the Southern Baptist Church, who I was was wrong. I felt like her dying was God punishing me for being who I was.

This intense guilt and inner conflict continued to plague Greg for much of his young adult life, negatively affecting his perception of himself as a spiritual being and preventing him from acknowledging his same-sex desires.

Ironically, experiences at churches encouraged him to seek resources and to come to terms with his gay identity.

I can remember the pastor who was an elderly gentleman, and he slammed his fist down on the pulpit, saying, 'if I ever see two guys or two girls kissing on the news again, I think I'll just vomit.' I know I was clutching on the pew very hard, and my blood pressure was boiling at that point. ... It was at that point after that weekend that I began seeking out resources to see if there was anyone I could talk to.

His anger at the intolerance and even intense hatred of LGBTQ people at the Baptist churches he attended encouraged him to seek resources and come out to a few people he met through a gay and lesbian teacher organization. However, he was still hesitant to come out to his family. Once again, an experience at church gave him courage to come out, this time, to his family.

They talked about Easter as an earthquake and about how it was an earth-changing experience and about how it got people out of their comfort zones. I felt like the person was really speaking to me; the pastor was speaking to me. And someone was being baptized that day, and he read this statement about he didn't think he was perfect. He tried to be as good as he could be, but he knew he made mistakes. But he still felt like he was loved by God. I was just crying during the whole service. I guess that's what I needed to hear at that time.

After this experience, Greg came out to his mother first and then his other family members. He realized not only that being Christian and gay was not impossible but also that it was possible to be both gay and a teacher.

Family and Religiosity in the South

Gina also grew up in a religious household, and her story reflects the religiosity of many who live in the rural South. Her family was Southern Baptist until her mother became a Jehovah's Witness and began raising her children as Jehovah's Witnesses. Although in many parts of the country there is prejudice against Jehovah's Witnesses that Gina attributes to their door-to-door proselytizing, Gina says that there was not this same prejudice in her community because nearly everyone was active in their respective Christian-based religions. Growing up in a rural area on a farm, Gina describes her family as well as most of the other families in their community as religious. Although Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs differ in many ways from other Christian sects in the South, Jehovah's Witnesses have strict codes of conduct similar to Southern Baptists and other Christian Fundamentalist sects. Unlike other sects, Jehovah's Witnesses' faith requires them to engage in organized activities related to their religion daily. According to Gina:

We just went to church all of the time. If you're a Jehovah's Witness, you go to church every day except Wednesday. You go to service on Sunday; you have Bible study on Monday; on Tuesday you have a book of the Bible study at somebody else's house; Wednesday we have the night off, and that's just because of breaking conformity. Most other denominations of churches go to church on Wednesday. It was their night. Jehovah's Witnesses didn't go that night because God forbid you are dressing up to go to Church on a Wednesday and that makes you Baptist or Methodist. They just didn't go to church on Wednesdays. Thursday was theocratic ministry school where you went and learned to go door to door. You practiced, and you had to come up with these skits. Really it was beneficial

in that if you were a poor reader, you had to learn to read. But you would watch other people practice approaching others. There would be a topic, and you would have to create this skit with another person how you would present the information in way that somebody who wasn't familiar with it, the Bible, could understand it. And Friday you did some type of service. You might help clean the Kingdom Hall, or if someone who was part of the congregation needed something, you would offer your help. And Saturday you went door to door.

For Gina, church was her life from the time she was in seventh grade, when her family converted to Jehovah's Witness, until her first year of college. Her family, her mother in particular, demanded that she participate in the daily and weekly regimens that were dictated by their faith. Gina resisted in the ways she could this regimented lifestyle and resented having to follow the dictates of her family's new religion.

After we became Jehovah's Witnesses in seventh grade, you weren't supposed to watch things on TV. You're supposed to wear dresses and have long hair. Yeah, it pretty much sucks because I'm a tomboy. I didn't like wearing dresses, and even before they became Jehovah's Witnesses, I would wear shorts under my dress to church, and when we got in the car, I would take it off.

As she got older, Gina increasingly began questioning the teachings of her faith community. To her, the behavioral codes and guards against "worldliness" in particular were the most oppressive. She did not like the narrow gender roles she was forced into by her family, as she challenged gender norms such as wearing dresses and other "girl" clothes. This was a constant source of tension between her and her parents.

During her senior year of high school, Gina decided she wanted to attend college after graduation.

I was in high school. I was looking for my birth certificate, so I could apply to colleges, and I technically, according to my [parents], should not be doing that because they were Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jehovah Witnesses don't go to university. They don't go to college because that creates a chance of worldliness. It opens you up to bad influences and things that are not godly. . . . At that point, I was like, I have got to get out of here; I've got to go to college. That was my way out: college.

Although Gina strove to continue following the Jehovah's Witness faith her first year of college, she quickly turned away from this religion when she realized many of the things she was taught by her religion and family were not meaningful to her anymore; she found these truths to no longer be true for her anymore.

So I guess when I went to college is when I really started realizing that I could make my own decisions, that I could do whatever I wanted to do. All of my friends were doing things that God said they would die for. And they weren't dead, so I realized that was just a load of bologna. . . . But if you tell lies, or the biggest one is if you have sex before you're married, you'll go straight to hell. If you get tattoos, you'll go to hell. The biggest one though is if you have sex before you're married, you'll go straight to hell. And then I went to college, and all my friends were doing it. And I was like, do you go to church? And they were like, yeah, I go to church every Sunday. And I was like, okay, which I think shows how really naïve I was because I took a literal interpretation of that. You would just be stricken dead in the act. You would die, and everybody would know what you were doing. So I just avoided that at all costs. . . . And I tried a lot of things, and I don't regret it because I'm not afraid anymore. I am not afraid of God. There's a difference in having a Godly fear that's healthy and a fear that is not healthy, one that keeps you from growing as a person.

The binary of healthy/unhealthy can be applied to both relationships with God and one's sexuality. Being taught that one would literally die if he or she participated in ungodly acts, Gina was very fearful. In particular, sexual acts were configured as the most heinous by her religion; sexuality was not a topic of conversation other than saying that it was

wrong outside the confines of marriage; anything else is ungodly, unhealthy, leading ultimately to death. In this way, Gina was not taught that sexuality was something to be explored or to be enjoyed but rather something for procreation only. Her mother even told her it was something that women must *learn* to like. Gina also says that one can have a healthy or unhealthy fear or relationship with God; she defines this by how one's relationship impedes or empowers one to grow as a person.

Being exposed to peers' engaging in premarital sex and other behaviors that she was taught would send one "straight to hell," Gina began rebelling against her faith's teachings, although she did not abandon her belief in God. In exploring her sexuality, Gina had relationships with men that she found unsatisfying emotionally and sexually. Later, she and her roommate, who was a woman, began having a relationship, although both denied that they were lesbians or even bisexuals. Once her sister told her mother that Gina had been having a sexual relationship with another woman, Gina's mother reacted according to her faith's dictates.

Believing that faith without works is dead, elders of the Jehovah's Witnesses impose a strict code of ethics upon their fellowship, ranging from traditional behaviors of males and females to sexual practices. . . . Violation of these strict moral and doctrinal beliefs result in 'disfellowship' in which other Witnesses, including family, are barred from any interaction with these 'eternally damned' persons. (Sears, 1991, p. 61)

Homosexual or bisexual behavior, in addition to sex outside marriage, constituted acts for which Gina would have been "disfellowshipped;" however, because she was not a

practicing Jehovah's Witness, this did not happen. However, her family did cut off contact from her.

It was a big deal with my family. They pretty much told me not to come visit them anymore if I was going to be a bisexual because that's what they said I was. If you're going to be a bisexual, then don't come visit anymore, and I was like, great! So much for that unconditional love you're always preaching about. They told me God didn't love me. Pretty much I wasn't raised that way and I was goin' to hell because the Bible says men who lie with men won't inherit the kingdom. I can quote you all that shit they used to quote to me: that it isn't natural. . . . I just said that God created me, and he will judge me, and I'm sure he's proud of everything he created.

Despite her family's claim that she could no longer have a relationship with God because she was in a relationship with a woman, Gina still kept her faith that God did love her.

She still considers herself spiritual although she does not associate her beliefs to any particular denomination or religion. Although it took several years, Gina is now in contact with her family, though they do not discuss her sexual orientation. She attributes at least part of this reconnection to her family no longer being Jehovah's Witnesses.

Black Churches and the South

Donna speaks about the influence of Black churches on African American communities and their levels of acceptance of LGBTQ people.

I think the African American community is nestled in the institution of the church. . . . And I think homosexuality is that last bastion in the black church that has yet to get air time. So I think a lot of African Americans I interacted with in this environment came up with that idea that homosexuality is wrong; you're going to hell.

Despite the prejudices of some Black churches, Donna still maintains her beliefs about God and spirituality while recognizing the power of the church to dissuade or encourage LGBTQ people to participate in organized religion and/or to pursue their spirituality.

While church attendance is the highest in the South, religion's influence, as Donna points out, is strong throughout the United States and world.

I think, from my perspective, from tracing how I have come to be and accept who I am, there's other institutions that are out there that so large and so enormous. The church, I think, whether you are in the North, South, East, or West, continues to be a huge blind spot that impacts people's ability to be comfortable in their own skin whether they're HIV positive, whether they're LGBTIQ identified, whether they're poor. It's huge, and I'm not atheist. I'm not agnostic. I personally, and I think is one of the strengths in how I was raised, my grandmother let me know, you can have church any where you are. That God or however you assign the identity of what resides inside of you is most meaningfully expressed in what you give back to others.

Although Donna was brought up attending black churches, her grandmother encouraged her to view her spirituality as unconfined by the walls of church buildings and as something within her that is also reflected in her outward actions, in this case, giving “back to others.” In developing her spiritual beliefs and integrating them with her coming to consciousness of her sexual orientation, she is able to negotiate these two aspects of herself—because of her upbringing—without experiencing the discomfort others do. However, Donna also recognizes the tendencies within many black churches to denigrate and alienate black LGBTQ churchgoers. Since church attendance is highest in the South, this situation is likely more acute in the South than elsewhere (Rupe Eubanks, 2010).

While Donna has been able to reconcile her black, spiritual, and queer identities, she has faced many challenges along the way because although she has friendships with diverse people, she has continually sought a sense of community with other African Americans and black lesbians in particular. Not finding that community after two years of attending a predominantly white university, she transferred to a historically black women's college in the South where she eventually earned her undergraduate degree. At this private historically black institution, she experienced "a heightened sense of homophobia" in comparison to the mostly white university that she attended first. She attributes this to the beliefs, inculcated by many black churches, that homosexuality is wrong, sinful, and a mostly white phenomenon.

This whole notion of in order to be gay, lesbian, or whatever the case may be, you have to come out, that was something that was new and not necessarily par for the course for me, so I never really did come out. It was who I was publicly and privately. I am very consistent in all spaces. I tried to be transparent in that. I am not going to pretend to be who I am not in private spaces and not reflect that in public spaces. So I got a lot of backlash from that, a lot of negative name calling and public displays of people praying over your trash. They hope they can pray the gayness out of you.

This environment made Donna feel as an outsider, especially in a religious sense because her identity, as she expressed it, was considered "sinful" and as something that could be overcome through prayer: others' and hers.

In its telling 2009 report, the Human Rights Campaign found in their national study that

religious attitudes are a major source of sexual prejudice. For LGBTQ people of color, many of whom are regular churchgoers, the conflict is acute. More than half of the LGBTQ people of color interviewed feel treated like sinners by their ethnic and racial communities, and faith communities are among the places LGBTQ people of color feel least accepted. (p. 6)

Because of the importance of religion and cultural communities in many educators' lives, many educators are hesitant about being open about their sexual orientations because being out could possibly threaten their standing and participation in these communities. Being out for many LGBTQ educators is a threat to the communal and spiritual aspects of their lives (Kissen, 1996; Lipkin, 1999). In other words, there is much at stake when it comes to being out, especially for LGBTQ people of color. Specifically, in the case of many black faith communities, Johnson (2005) claims, "As the black church has been a political and social force in the struggle for the racial freedom of its constituents, it has also, to a large extent, occluded sexual freedom for many of its practitioners, namely gays and lesbians" (p. 144). Johnson contends that the black church must extend its mission to working for freedom and equality for LGBTQ people as well. "Those in the pulpit and those in the congregation should be challenged whenever they hide behind Romans and Leviticus to justify their homophobia. We must force the black church to name us and claim us if we are to obtain any liberation within our own communities" (p. 149). As with many other denominations and faith communities throughout the United States, homosexuality in particular is often demonized, and LGBTQ people are excluded either

explicitly or implicitly, as is evident from the sermons repudiating homosexuality that many LGBTQ people report hearing.

However, it is important to note that the potential isolation from ethnic and religious communities not only stems from homophobia in those communities and the resulting internalized homophobia for LGBTQ people of color but also from historical race relations and ways of thinking of homosexuality as “white” (Garcia, 1998). Mayo (2007) posits, “This isolation may be more the result of perceived identification with white gay norms rather than specifically an indication of levels of homophobia in communities of color” (p. 88). In addition, as Lipkin (1999) argues in the case of African American communities, African Americans respond negatively to homosexuality as a reaction against stereotypes reified by our white supremacist society. “Some African Americans compensate for the myth of black hypersexuality by denouncing homosexuals as perverse and oversexed” (p. 123). In this way, rejecting and disparaging homosexuality is a defense against oppressive forces that people of color feel and experience. Nevertheless, not all black faith communities are the same, and these communities have been and are currently undergoing much change. Stambolian (1984), writing more than 25 years ago, asserted:

Prejudice does exist in the Black community. A great number of progressive Blacks want to think that if Black people are gay, it’s because Whites made us that way. . . . But today those ideas are changing, partly because the Black church is changing. Black ministers are beginning to say that homosexuality is part of what people are and that it need not be castigated[,] being a legitimate form of human sexuality. (p. 135)

Although Donna experienced first-hand that many African Americans still see homosexuality as a white phenomenon and many black churches condemn homosexuality, this tendency is shifting, albeit slowly, as black churches respond to changing times and attitudes toward people with minority sexual orientations.

Activism in the South

Donna, Skye, and Tom actively work for social justice in their communities despite there being no antidiscrimination policies or laws protecting LGBTQ people at their places of employment or in the states where they live. While fear often keeps LGBTQ people in the closet, these narrators express their fearlessness and bravery by challenging homophobia and heterosexism not only at work but also in their larger communities. Because there are no legal or policy protections for these educators, reflecting the conservative environments in which they teach, these educators put themselves and their careers at risk by their involvement in LGBTQ activism in their communities.

Donna remarks, “This is a blessing and a curse; I don’t have the normal censoring mechanisms in my brain, so I don’t fear repercussions for telling you I am black; I’m a lesbian. I don’t mind you using my name. I don’t have issues with that.” Although Donna is not explicitly out to her students, she is involved in activist projects with them; for instance, she has supported students’ starting a gay-straight alliance at the private religious high school where she works. This project has met with resistance from the school administration and has been challenging for both her and her students. Additionally, Donna is involved in a leadership capacity in a lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender, queer, and ally (LGBTQA) educator organization that has influenced public school policy in the county where Donna lives. For instance, this group worked with the county's school leaders to create and adopt a non-discrimination policy including sexual orientation. However, since Donna teaches at a fairly conservative private high school in the county, and not a public school, this policy is not in effect where she works.

Skye, too, is involved in activism. She frequently lobbies state and federal legislators regarding LGBTQ issues. She has found that many of these legislators are unresponsive to this lobbying, but she considers it important, nonetheless, to educate and present these issues to lawmakers.

One of the proudest moments in my life is [lobbying] senators and congressmen. And you go to them and say, these are our issues. We want you to vote this way, and this is my story, and this is why I want you to do it. . . . I mean you read about politics and democracy, but it was actually seeing democracy in action, which is one of the reasons why I love U.S.A. so much is because you can actually practice it here.

Most of them [representatives] are at least open to listening, which is important, because even if we don't change them, their minds now, we are making some sort of a dent, you know, in their thinking. At least they can't say with a straight face that there are no gay people in my district because we used to hear that earlier. This doesn't happen in my district. Or there are no transgendered folks in my district. But then when you talk to them and say this is my story and I am from your district, they have to admit, okay, there are at least a few people there.

While Skye has had some negative experiences lobbying for LGBTQ rights, she emphasizes the importance of the democratic process in which she strongly believes. In fact, before moving to the South from the Southwest, she contemplated whether to move

to the South or to the Northeast. She finally settled on the South because of the work she believes needs to be done here.

You know, honestly, I am the kind of person who roots for the underdog. And the South requires more work, and I am here to do work. If you go to Massachusetts, everything is already there, already in place. We already have the right to marry. It's nice, but this is where you need to do the work, in the South, in the Bible Belt, change minds one at a time.

On the one hand, by seeing the South as a place in need of change, she acknowledges that the South is a more conservative and less accepting region than others in the United States. On the other hand, like the other activist-educators in this study, Skye is energetic about making changes in the South, and instead of seeing the South as “backward” or simply slow to change, she sees it as a region of opportunity for LGBTQ activists and, therefore, an important place to do activist work.

Tom, likewise, has taken on challenging tasks as an activist. As mentioned previously, he was told by the principal where he did his student teaching to avoid activism, as it would cause problems with parents and students. Though he ceased his involvement in LGBTQ activism for the duration of his student teaching, he immediately began his activist work again after finishing student teaching. He participated in activism throughout the South, traveling to colleges and universities, most with religious affiliations, that barred LGBTQ students from attending. During this time, Tom began transitioning from female to male, and his experience engaging in activism gave him courage to complete this transition.

And that was two months of Bible study followed by two months on the road, going to these places and basically defending yourself to every person that you meet. And the more that I did it, the more comfortable I felt doing it. And at the end of it, I'm like, hell, there is no reason for me not to [transition] because if it's just going to be like this, I can handle this.

Tom conflates his identity, as one in transition, with defending himself as a queer person as well as defending queer people in general. In this way, he foresees his future life as one in which his identity as a transgender person who identifies as queer will be constantly challenged and in need of "defending." What does it mean to feel as though one must constantly defend him or herself? As Towle & Morgan (2002) argue, "Our identities are consistently contested. In our communities and discussions we experience conflicts that do not seem to afflict these other individuals, who, we assume do not argue about their identities, which are fixed" (p. 489). I contend that this reflects dominant discourses about what it means to be an "outsider" who challenges norms and the status quo; according to such discourses, he or she who challenges norms necessarily will face antagonism. As the principal told him when he began student teaching, being an openly LGBTQ educator will most likely result in conflict with students, parents, and/or other school workers. Further, being a queer activist means aggressively questioning and challenging normativity and what is considered natural. "Queer revels constitute a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural. The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny" (Case, 1991, p. 3). Activism puts one into the heart of conflict because acting against the grain attracts purposeful attention to what some do not want attention attracted to: in this case, sexuality. However, even those who are not

involved in activism recognize that openly identifying as a sexual minority sometimes results in conflict; this conflict is frequently something people, including some of the narrators in this study, wish to avoid by being selectively out to some people in some contexts but not in others. Thus, this “defensive” pose is part of a counter narrative about daily life. For most heterosexuals, such a defensive pose—at least in terms of their sexual orientation—is unnecessary, yet for many LGBTQ people, being on guard is a part of their daily lives since at any time others could knowingly or unknowingly denigrate or challenge their sexual orientation.

Nevertheless, Tom currently wishes to be involved in activism on his own terms; he does not wish to be in a constant defensive pose, although this is where he often finds himself, as he is often tokenized by even those who are themselves are activists or who consider themselves liberal-minded. While Tom is involved in educational events concerning gender diversity and sexual orientation, he does not always refer to his transgender identity during these trainings or at educational events. “So I’m mostly what’s called ‘stealth’ within the trans community. That’s when you’re post-transition (whatever that means for you in regards to hormones, surgeries, etc. and so on), and you keep your transgender history to yourself.” Thus, Tom finds both his life as a transgender person and an activist in the South challenging; however, through “practice” he has learned to respond to those who have conservative and often prejudicial views about homosexuality and queerness.

Teaching and Living in the Rural South

Unlike the other narrators in this study, Gina teaches and lives in the rural South. Because she has been accepted into the community and has a privileged status as an elementary school teacher—someone with a college education—in her community, she does not believe she has experienced much discrimination at her school. She is out to her fellow school workers although not her students.

Being a school teacher here is middle class, so that is good. You are looked at with some kind of respect. I mean if they only knew what school teachers were really like. But it's a good job. It's like, wow, you're a school teacher. Score, you don't pluck chickens at Tyson, not that there's anything wrong with that. Those people work way harder than I do. But there's a different type of prestige for a school teacher; you've gone to college.

According to Gina, “This county was the most uneducated in [the state] or it might have been in the southeastern United States.” She attributes at least part of her standing in the community to her college education and position as an educator and middle-class person. Having a college degree is seen as quite an accomplishment in her community where few people have achieved this level of education; in fact, she contrasts her work as a teacher with that of the typical worker in her community: a working-class person whose labor is different than her own.

While she is out to the adults in her life, she has found that they ignore her sexual orientation as part of her identity; this reflects what I have argued previously about the tendency in Southern culture to accept personal eccentricities and to respect others'

privacy, especially those of people of high standing in the community or higher socioeconomic status than most others in the community.

It's weird. I've been accepted into the community, so they're just like, 'That's just Ms. Smith. That's just Gina. She's not gay. That's just her.' We don't talk about it. Some people will ask. If they're close enough to ya, they will. Then when I started working at the school, these women would all [try] to set me up with their son or nephew or brother. Then this woman said, 'well, what's wrong with ya? Can you not cook?' And you know what, it's so funny because this woman is as sweet as you can be, and she ended up being like my mom at school. She just kind of accepted me. I think she was just being funny, but I didn't realize it at the time. I was like, 'Actually, I can cook. Now if any of you have any daughters you want to talk about, maybe I'll stay and talk about that.' But they all said, 'ha, ha, ha,' and just thought I was funny. . . . They refuse to believe I'm gay. You don't look gay. Well, what does gay look like? Because I think if you're gay in this area, you're like a butch, bull dyke woman. So me, they just refuse to believe it. 'She's just the sweetest little thing. She can't be gay.' Uhh, yes, I can.

Because Gina does not fit the stereotypes of what lesbians should look like, many at her work and in her community do not take her seriously when she comes out to them.

Understandably, this situation frustrates her. There is a significant amount of willful ignorance on the part of the other teachers to whom she is out. Gina openly identifies as a lesbian and even refers to her dating women. This is what some would call "flaunting" her sexual orientation, but because of her "feminine" looks, she believes she is not taken seriously and is, instead, referred to as "cute" and "sweet" and, therefore, "straight-looking." Gina connects this willful ignorance not only to her looks but also to the fact that she has been accepted into the community, suggesting that this acceptance supersedes her claiming a lesbian identity because one such as she cannot possibly be gay and be one of them.

Conclusion: Being an LGBTQ Educator in the South

James Sears, in his study *Growing Up Gay in the South* (1991), argues, “Gay identity, like Southern identity, is an elaborate social fiction” (p. 428). Although fictions, these identities have real social consequences for those who identify as gay, Southern, or both. Granted, because of the changing population in the South—the influx of people from other parts of the country and the increasing urbanization of the South—it is difficult to make generalizations about Southern culture, schools, and people. However, there are patterns in the behavior of people who live and grew up in the South, and there is such a thing as Southern culture even though it is changing. The context of the South and its ties to Fundamentalist Christianity and conservative values undoubtedly affect the living, learning, and teaching of the narrators in this study. These narrators recognize both the challenges they face as queer educators in the South and their agency to help change prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices. However, change happens slowly especially in the South where in many places, particularly in rural areas, tradition runs deep, but as recent studies show, attitudes about homosexuality are changing with younger generations (Baunach, et al., 2010). In fact, Skye talks about how she sees the South changing, specifically in terms of the increasing acceptance of LGBTQ people. She believes these changes will occur as the younger generation begins to take on leadership roles in government. “It’s just a matter of that generation really dying. They are going to die some day, and the younger generation is going to be on the right side of history. This is like the Civil Rights Movement. These are the people who are gonna be remembered like the people who were against the black liberty and civil rights.” Comparisons to the

Civil Rights movements are particularly apt for the South, as much has changed over the last 60 years in the South regarding race relations; moreover, there is potential for more change to occur so that LGBTQ people are no longer ostracized and are given first-class citizen rights even in the often-conservative South.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I begin to analyze what it means to be a queer educator in the South. By no means do I think my analyses and the stories shared are representative of all queer educators in the South. According to Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2008):

Narrative research . . . converges across its differences, not so much in its political interests, but in the possibility of having microsocial and micropolitical effects through the local knowledges that it produces. These knowledges may be particular, but they can enter into dialogue with each other and produce . . . larger and more general, though still situated narrative knowledges. (p. 12)

I believe these narratives do have larger political implications for schooling, curricula, and understanding the LGBTQ educators' lives, relationships, and work. My analyses also suggest that an examination of context is essential to understanding queer educators' experiences in the South. Moreover, I believe we should rethink the glorification of being out to students, colleagues, friends, and family as well as the insinuation that those who are not "out" in overt ways are less effective teachers, less evolved as educators and people, and less true to themselves. The knowledges co-created in this study demonstrate the situatedness of identity expression and meaning in the United States. Being "out" does not have the same meanings or consequences everywhere in the United States or even in particular contexts such as K-12 versus university settings. Moreover, the ways of being out in the South, and I suspect in other regions as well, are multiple and complex.

Internally Persuasive and Authoritative Discourses

What can be generalized are the conflicts both within individuals and in their external environments. Becoming a self is complicated, no matter one's sexual orientation. We are always unfinished, always becoming. Inner conflicts about the multiple aspects of oneself are not unique to queer educators. In fact, those whom I have interviewed attempt to negotiate the numerous competing and complicated understandings of what it means to be an ethical human in our own sociohistorical contexts. Bakhtin (1981) argues that we all confront the conflicts between "authoritative" and "internally persuasive" discourses. On the one hand, authoritative discourses are those such as legal, religious, educational, and parental, which are privileged in society and have power over us in physical and psychological senses. Internally persuasive discourses, on the other hand, are those that are in part authored by us while also being influenced by others' discourses and authoritative discourses. According to Bakhtin (1981):

Both authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word—one that is simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive—despite the profound differences between these two categories of alien discourse. But such unity is rarely a given—it happens more frequently that an individual's becoming, an ideological process, is characterized by a sharp gap between these two categories: in one, the authoritative word (religious, political, moral, the word of the father, of adults and of teachers, etc.) that does not know internal persuasiveness, in the other[,] internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, nor by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code. The struggles and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness. (p. 342)

In other words, in our co-authored (with ourselves, others, and society) construction of ourselves, there are constant tensions between those discourses we adapt to our own idiosyncrasies and those that have “authoritative” status and power over us. In particular, there is tension between being a teacher—one who is supposed to be an “authority” in terms of subject matter and leading classrooms—and being a sexual minority—one who predominantly lacks legitimacy in our society. This is not to say that gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer educators lack agency. As Foucault (1976) argues, power is multi-directional and not always repressive. Weems (2007) asserts, “All claims to knowledge involve relations of power and . . . it is precisely these relations of power, in circulation, that authorize the speaking subject to both invite and resist domination and submission in big and small ways” (p. 200). This tension between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses is what helps educators to navigate and formulate identities. Their integrating queer and educator identities help them to bring together internally persuasive discourses that aid in their acceptance of themselves while also reinforcing authoritative discourses that give them power as educators to teach others to question that which is taken for granted, stereotypes, and the status quo as well as to be accepting, compassionate people with open minds and hearts. In this way, and probably in others, authoritative and internally persuasive discourses (and the conflicts between them) shape who we are and how we think. These discourses are constantly in dialogue with one another. Indeed, this study as well as the discourses with which the participants and I speak are dialogic; they interact and speak with one another in order to create new meanings, new ways of seeing what it means to be an LGBTQ educator in the South. I

hope that this dialogue will continue as more scholars interrogate the complex relationships between identities, regions, and discourses.

Power and Agency

Queer theorists and pedagogues would see empowerment and liberation as effects of power and, further, would not see power as simply oppressive and repressive but, as Michel Foucault argues, as productive as well. According to Foucault (1979):

If power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe we should manage to obey it? What gives power its hold, what makes it accepted, is quite simply the fact that it does not weigh like a force which says no, but that it runs through, and it produces things, it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces discourse; it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than a negative instance whose function is repression. (p. 36)

A central project of this study is questioning power relations as well as power creations. What kinds of power do educators and students exercise? What does this power produce and how? How does particular people's power affect others' power? As often mentioned by Foucault, where there is power there is also resistance. What are the possibilities for undermining repressive power within and outside formal education? The participants in Sanlo's (1999) study of gay and lesbian educators in Florida "lacked an understanding of what to do to improve conditions; they all described an immense sense of powerlessness" (p. 124). In interrogating power relations and issues, the educators in this study do recognize their power/agency and the possibilities for its uses. Wanda uses her position as a media specialist to order books about LGBTQ youth and LGBTQ issues. Donna participates in initiatives to make her school and others in her region more accepting and

supportive of LGBTQ students. She also creates supportive environments in which students feel comfortable sharing information about themselves and talking about issues relating to sexuality and gender. James has created courses about sexuality when no such courses existed where he taught. Tom and Skye participate in activism to support LGBTQ rights. Greg encourages students to avoid narrowly defining what it means to be a boy or girl. Sharon creates assignments that address issues of social justice, discrimination, and prejudice. Susan encourages her students to view gender and sexuality as fluid, contingent social constructs. Gina actively discourages and addresses bullying and confronts homophobic language in her classroom.

Although they may feel powerless in some regards, particularly relating to the security of their employment, these narrators also report that they feel a sense of empowerment vis-à-vis their claiming gay, lesbian, queer, or transgender identities while at the same time such claims also place them in the category of “Other.” To many in our society, LGBTQ people are deviant, abhorrent Others who should not be in positions of authority or even interact with children. Thus, the power dynamics in claiming identities and living in ways that espouse specific philosophies about openness and fluidity in regard to gender and sexuality gain currency in some contexts and not others. Despite the “discomfort” some of the people in their lives feel about their sexual orientations, many of these narrators find ways to resist the oppressive powers of educational, religious, and legal discourses and institutions. They do this by being out in a variety of ways that do not always entail “confessing” their sexual orientation. Some, like Sharon, Donna, Susan, and Wanda, create assignments and learning environments in which students and other

school workers learn about social justice and that affirm the acceptance of LGBTQ people and the importance of the issues and challenges they face. Others, elementary school teachers Greg and Gina, consider themselves out since they are out to people in their personal lives as well as to fellow school workers, although for multiple reasons they do not feel as though they can discuss their sexual orientation with their students. Greg challenges traditional gender roles not only for students who think toys or particular colors are only for girls or boys but also in his school by being one of the few men there who teach elementary school and the only man who teaches kindergarten and pre-kindergarten. Gina is a resource for her school community and often finds that students who are considered “outcasts” are placed in her classes because she is known for her understanding and for developing tolerant classroom communities.

As queer pedagogues, these educators are not the only ones to claim power in the classroom. Their pedagogies are queer in the sense that they call into question power relations in the classroom and their usefulness to students’ learning in these contexts, and they focus on unlearning and disrupting traditional ways of educating that consistently position students as objects, rather than subjects with their own agency, or even as the oppressed as Freire (1970) has argued. Donna in particular strives to create a sense of community in her classroom in which students lead discussions and learn to disagree in respectful ways. She takes an “organic” approach to teaching, taking advantage of teachable moments as they arise. Susan also positions herself as a fellow learner with students, allowing her and her students’ learning to evolve as they follow their interests. Although Wanda must follow a state-mandated curriculum, she also finds ways to allow

students to pursue their interests by encouraging them to write about topics that are important to them and that may even be controversial. Sharon avoids being a “diva” in her classroom and insists that what happens in the classroom is about students and not her; she centers all her teaching on the needs of her particular groups of students.

Learning and Unlearning

In constructing their senses of “self” out of language, these narrators participate in processes of both learning and unlearning; moreover, they participate in these processes as educators, helping others learn some things and unlearn others. Britzman (1998) poignantly argues:

For interpretations to exceed the impulse to normalize meaning and certify the self, reading must begin with an acknowledgment of difference as identity and not reduce interpretation to a confirmation of identity. The question a reader might ask is: Who am I becoming through the interpretive claims I make upon another and upon myself? The exploration becomes one of analysis of the signifier, not the signified, and hence, an analysis of where meaning breaks down for the reader. Reading, then, as an interpretive performance may be a means to untie self knowledge from itself if the self can be examined as split between recognition and misrecognition and if one can expose that queer space between what is taken as the real and the afterthought of recognition. (p. 225)

Although Britzman refers to the process of reading in this excerpt, the same can be applied to narrating one’s life since such narration is a text in itself. In other words, we can “decenter” ourselves as narrators, analyze the ways we “normalize meaning” and think about difference, question how narrating our lives and selves changes us and how we think of others, and reflect upon how we make sense or do not make sense of what we have experienced. Davis, Sumara, and Kapler (2006) posit, “A knower’s knowing is

subject to constant modification; yet at the same time, one's sense of the world is curiously adequate. In spite of the partiality of knowing, one is typically unaware of gaps in understanding and perception. That is, knowing has a certain sort of vibrant sufficiency" (p. 16). Resisting our perceived adequacy, we can begin to examine how and why our knowledge seems sufficient and interrogate our gaps in understanding. These gaps provided narrators with a way to queer how they told their stories through resistance to dominant narratives or social scripts—not simply focused on understanding but also on what they refuse to learn/unlearn and why.

While telling one's story is about the self, I do not think it is not only about the self. Perceptions of the "Other" must be critically and carefully thought through. As educators and people, these narrators consider how they view others and the extent to which their gaze is an affirmation and reaffirmation of themselves. In essence, their stories reflect what is at stake for them in identifying or not identifying with others and indeed, what is at stake in any identification. Their narratives suggest how identifying or not identifying with others allows them and influences others to see themselves/them in certain lights. In particular, the narrators in this study address how they see others and how these visions of others both confirm and trouble their senses of self. Gina does not identify with other lesbians who appear or seem "masculine" in traditionally defined ways, and this has influenced her decisions about associating with other lesbians. Susan has struggled to "queer" how she does gender and sexuality in the face of criticism from family members and others. Wanda "feels" out the climate, created by other school workers and students, where she teaches before reaching any decision about being out to

co-workers. James cannot relate to others who are in closet and hiding in heterosexual relationships because he sees this as dishonest and in opposition to his consistent openness in regard to his sexual orientation. In coming to identify as a gay man, Greg sought resources through various LGBTQ organizations in order to learn more about himself and gain support for his coming out to others in his life. Tom claims different labels depending on the context of how others with whom he associates identify. Donna has developed a sense of self through creating communities with others who identify similarly; in particular, she has sought community with other black lesbians. Sharon believes she lives her convictions, and through this, others come to know her as a whole person and not simply through labels such as “lesbian” that receive “primary potency” in our culture. Overall, otherness plays an important role in this study as outness is inevitably related to one’s relationships with others; for instance, all narrators discuss how their minority sexual identities influence how they interact and what they share with others.

These narrators engage in unlearning and learning about what it means to identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, man, or woman from their earliest socializations up until the points when they told their life stories. Nearly all the narrators discussed that they were taught that homosexuality was “wrong” as children, and parts of their stories consist of their struggle to unlearn the notion that who they are, at least in part, and how they identify is “wrong” or even the worst thing one can be. They narrate their processes in coming to identify with that which was previously “Other” to them. Furthermore, even after they develop affirming self-knowledge about their same-sex

desires, several of the participants struggled with “labeling.” They resist such categorization because they see their sexual orientation in more flexible, socially constructed terms than how dominant culture and even LGBTQ subcultures view it. For example, Wanda, Donna, Tom, and Susan resist the “bisexual” label for multiple reasons. For Wanda, “bisexual” has many negative connotations and does not mesh with her current vision of herself as someone who is primarily attracted to women. For Tom and Susan, claiming any signifier related to one’s sexual orientation is problematic because it presupposes that there is an agreed upon definition of what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer and that there are only two distinct genders to whom one can be attracted. For Donna, her identification is the result of seeking community through which she develops a “collective self;” her identity hinges upon her immediate experiences with her partner and not with past relationships with men. All of these processes are the result of learning and unlearning. While I question whether one can totally eradicate the internalization of homophobia in our virulently homophobic society, one can actively work towards being anti-homophobic and anti-heterosexist. Specifically, the participants in this study discuss how they have, at least partially, unlearned heterosexist ways of being and thinking by resisting dominant narratives about love, desire, and relationships.

Moreover, these educators also help students to unlearn prejudice about LGBTQ people by discussing language use with them and explaining why it is hurtful and unacceptable to bully and/or discriminate against people who profess to be or are perceived to be LGBTQ. While several studies have found that most teachers, including

LGBTQ ones, avoided addressing homophobic language and even the bullying of students who are or are perceived to be LGBTQ (Carter, 1997; Jackson, 2007; Sanlo, 1999; Woog, 1995), nearly all of the participants in this study discussed how they confronted students' homophobic comments and bullying. Additionally, most of these educators do not focus on only issues of social justice relating to sexual diversity but also issues of social justice for all oppressed groups. In this way, these narrators have an integrated vision of oppressions as interlocking and interrelated. Similar to their experiences growing up, they see that their students struggle with understanding issues of sexuality because they are frequently not discussed or are only discussed in terms of heterosexuality. Therefore, students' knowledge about heterosexuality and the wrongness of homosexuality affects their willingness to learn about alternatives to heterosexism and compulsory heterosexuality.

Davis, et al. (2006) argue, "Knowing always spills over the perceived boundaries of the knower" (p. 7). These boundaries—outside which knowledge is often either unaccounted for or is dismissed—are in many ways constructed to maintain the status quo and even to sustain our ideas about who we believe we are and who we want to be.

According to Schlasko (2005):

Ignorance [is] a form of knowledge. By noticing areas where we and our students are ignorant, we can learn something or at least make guesses about what it is that we/they already know, although we might not have been conscious of that knowledge. We can anticipate that new knowledge or information may pose a problem for students and ask how this knowledge will challenge students' preconceptions about the topic, or about themselves, and what they will need to reconsider or even unlearn in order to learn it. (p. 129)

Anticipating and recognizing ignorance is no easy task for educators, students, or people in general. However, the educators in this study who address issues of sexuality, sexual orientation, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression in their classes inevitably also had to address students' current knowledges, their consciousness of this knowledge, and how these knowledges led them to resist or accept new concepts. Further, these educators challenge their co-workers and students' initial perceptions of and often limited perspectives about LGBTQ people through their teaching strategies and, for some, through being role models of LGBTQ people who defy a variety of stereotypes about people with minority sexual orientations. Moreover, in their stories, they discuss how they became conscious of their limits, how they confronted their own ignorances (resistance to particular knowledges), and how they acted upon their newly developed awareness. Their resistance often took the forms of denials to themselves and others about their same-sex desires. However, as they began to participate in various LGBTQ communities and/or to develop relationships with other LGBTQ people, they were better able to accept themselves and not see claiming a minority sexual identity as a negative life "choice," but rather an integral part of who they are and how they live their lives.

Implications for Further Narrative Research

Narrative research is an important area of inquiry that can potentially work well with other quantitative and qualitative research methods. While it is beyond the scope of this study to use multiple methods simultaneously or in succession, further studies could combine methods, gaining layered insights about what it means to be LGBTQ educator in the United States and what these findings can mean for curricula, schools, policies, and

educators and students of all sexual orientations. Admittedly, most narrative researchers' works I have read are resistant to other forms of inquiry because many qualitative and quantitative methods reduce people to numbers or responses without contexts. Narrative research challenges the dominant paradigms for thinking about and conducting research as well as for applying research findings. There are serious tensions between research methods; nevertheless, I believe narrative research can add another important layer and multiple dimensions to other methods and types of inquiry. Conflict is often seen as negative in our society; however, conflict offers opportunities for change, for adaptation, and for re-envisioning research methods and paradigms. Bess and Dee (2008) describe "multiparadigm research" as inquiry that simultaneously or in succession uses methods associated with various paradigms. Researchers can begin with one research approach and use others to further their understandings of their initial results or conclusions. Or, researchers can use methods and assumptions of diverse paradigms relatively equally to study a variety of research questions. Further, researchers can use "metaparadigm theory building" in endeavors "to transcend the initial 'starting-points' of the respective paradigms and generate new conceptual frameworks by weaving together insights from multiple paradigmatic traditions" (p. 78). This approach focuses on creating new knowledges, theories, and approaches to research, helping us learn more about various phenomena, tendencies, organizations, cultures, societies, and human beings as well as imagine possibilities for more humane and socially just futures.

Implications for Education

In a time of increasing dehumanization (standardized testing and curriculum, larger class sizes, and reduced funding) in formal education (K-12, college, and university), narrative research offers alternatives for studying what happens to people through and during formal schooling and other educational processes. Many educators have begun to resist the dehumanization and alienation that occurs through the decisions and subsequent actions of teachers, educational leaders, law- and policy-makers, and other education stakeholders. Many of these decisions and actions reinforce heterosexism, homophobia, and other oppressive practices in schools. Narrative research has the potential to support efforts to facilitate “authentic” learning, not simply focused on what those in power consider important but what is important and meaningful to students and what will facilitate students’ growth as life-long learners, open-minded people, and responsible citizens. The voicing of alternative narratives from those who are often unheard such as LGBTQ educators can contribute to the development of alternative ways of schooling and education as well as encourage solidarity among those concerned with the state of education in the United States today. Through stories, we realize that we are not alone, and we can learn about others who may be quite different than us.

By focusing not on triangulation, validity, or reliability, but on authentic research—defined by its efforts towards more humanistic and ethical research—researchers are freed from having to be “right,” which is a contingent, social construct in any historical period or context. While I do not argue that narrative researchers should strive to always have happy endings (or sad ones for that matter), I do believe the

publication and use of authentic narrative inquiry offers opportunities for growth of solidarity among people and commitment to social change. Perhaps most importantly, authentic narrative research presents the opportunity to view history from a variety of perspectives and allows us to more closely examine how people construct meaning through their lived experiences. Through such research, educational researchers can further explore the questions: How can teachers and students make learning meaningful? How can they resist the alienating and oppressive tendencies in formal education and other forms of socialization? How can educators, students, and administrators learn to be more accepting of differences of all kinds? How can they and we co-create knowledges? What is ethical teaching and learning? How are the ways learning is demonstrated representative or not representative of what students learn in school? Learning more about the lives of both LGBTQ teachers and students and how their lives intersect with their work and educational experiences has the potential to facilitate the development of alternative ways of designing curricula and schooling experiences so that they do not reify homophobia and heterosexism but rather teach empathy and solidarity.

Final Thoughts

Narrating the self is about confronting the limits and possibilities for individuals. Confronting our limits and ignorances is often uncomfortable; however, it is also an opportunity to recognize our partial and incomplete understandings of everything, our ethical obligations to ourselves and others, and our complicity in dehumanizing others by not challenging normative ways of reacting to difference. The narrators in this study recognize their ethical obligations not only to their students but also to themselves. They

discuss how they have negotiated their identities in ways that are meaningful to them and that contribute to, what they see as, their effectiveness as educators. Davis, et al. (2006) assert, “How one speaks cannot be separated from how one thinks and act. Knowing and doing are not different phenomena” (p. 6). In the curriculum of life and of formal education, we should recognize that thought and action are not simply causally related; these narrators speak through what they do and through what they do not do. For example, many of the participants in this study construct being out, in diverse ways, as an ethical act. They see their ways of being out or simply being themselves in their classrooms as helping students become more empathetic people and critical thinkers who feel comfortable with themselves no matter their sexual orientation.

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