‘Miss, are you bisexual?’ The (re)production of heteronormativity within schools and the negotiation of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual teachers’ private and professional worlds

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Emily M. Gray
Dedication

To those who told me their stories, and for those who could not.
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Abstract

This research offers an analysis of the experiences of twenty people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) and who are teachers within their professional lives. It aims to illustrate the ways in which the continuing (re)production of heteronormative discursive practices impacts upon their lives both within the private and the professional realm. The research deploys a two-tier methodological framework in order to gain insights into the lives of LGB teachers, an often invisible social group. The research is underpinned by a theoretical framework which draws upon poststructuralist feminist/queer theories but which also is data, rather than theory, driven. School is the major site of analysis within this thesis and participants’ reflections upon their own school days are put under the lens as well as the way in which they experience schools as teachers. As this research is concerned with the intersections between participants’ private and professional lives it also offers an analysis of the process of becoming (Phelan, 1993), of the notion that one does not possess an inherent LGB identity, rather this is something one achieves through the recognition and adoption of certain social, cultural and aesthetic cues. The way in which LGB identities constitute an ‘invisible presence’ within schools is also explored throughout the thesis. The thesis addresses a gap in the literature on the experiences of LGB teachers and sheds new light on the ways in which location, community and subjectivity can impact upon the experiences of this social group.
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Introduction

Section one: Overview of the thesis

This thesis, entitled ‘Miss, are you bisexual?’: The (re)production of heteronormativity within English schools and the negotiation of lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers’ private and professional worlds’, aims to address a gap in the literature on sexuality and schooling by focusing explicitly on the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) teachers working in schools within England. It takes as its starting point the following seven questions:

a) How do LGB teachers understand and experience the use of the word ‘gay’?
b) To what extent do LGB teachers feel that they are ‘outsiders’ or intruders upon the heteronormative space in which they work?
c) To what extent does being a LGB teacher demand a negotiation between private and professional spheres?
d) In what ways do participants perceive the way in which macro policy changes have impacted upon their lives at the micro level?
e) Is there space within the compulsory educational institutions to challenge or queer the dominant discourse of heteronormativity?
f) How do LGB teachers understand their subject positions in relation to their jobs?
g) What do coming out stories tell us about the way in which gender and sexual identity is played out in varying social contexts?

These questions were devised in order to underpin a two-tiered methodological framework as well as to provide a framework for analysis. The thesis explores the lives of twenty participants who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual and are teachers within their professional lives. It should be stated here that I had originally intended to include teachers who identify as transgender within this research, however I was unable to recruit any transgender participants and so analysis is limited to the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers.

I understand heteronormativity to be a set of discursive practices that act to normalise and uphold hegemonic versions of heterosexual relationships. These discursive
practices also limit the possibilities of heterosexual relationships because they posit ‘heterosexuality’ hegemonically and therefore fail to acknowledge the range of sexual and emotional relationships that heterosexuality, as a sexual identity, encompasses (Berlant & Warner, 1998). Heteronormativity dominates social institutions such as school and ‘others’ non-normative identities by deploying a regime of sexism, homophobia and heterosexual (male) masculinity. In addition, heteronormativity achieves its dominance by dichotomising identity categories and positioning identities within hierarchies that subjugate the ‘other’. Because of the way in which heteronormativity operates, this thesis deploys the term ‘(re)produce’ in order to reflect the way in which heteronormative discursive practices are continuous, multiple and shifting.

A poststructuralist feminist/queer theoretical framework underpins this research and has allowed me to engage reflexively at every stage in the research process. Feminist research methods encourage researchers not to stand outside their field of interest as a detached observer, but rather to be part of it, to study those things that are close to us. This precipitated something of a ‘methodological turn’ within the social sciences (Walkerdine et al, 2002) that made the claim that a researcher’s biography contributes to the research process in significant ways,

Politics can influence the research process – also a researcher’s personal biography, their prior commitment to particular beliefs and values and the nature of field relations can influence the choice of research topic, the means of information gathering and the presentation of substantive findings (Devine & Heath, 1999, p.7).

My ‘personal biography’ profoundly influenced the choice of research topic as well as the means of information gathering for this thesis. After graduating my bachelor’s degree I worked for two years in an inner city secondary school in Birmingham and for one year in a secondary special school. I was alarmed at the frequency of which pupils used homophobic and sexist pejoratives, particularly the word ‘gay’ to describe anything that they did not like or found distasteful, including each other. Staff rarely seemed to challenge this, and in several instances that I witnessed, used such language themselves in order to ‘relate’ to pupils. It seemed to me, and is well documented in
research, that such language use has become integrated into classroom banter and that homophobia and sexism are part of the institution of school (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Rivers & Carragher, 2003, Thurlow, 2001).

I had first hand experience of such institutionalised homophobia at the school in which I worked directly after graduating my bachelor’s degree. The head teacher called me into his office to ask me to consider undertaking a Graduate Teacher Programme and I told him that the decision to commit to this was not just mine as, at the time, I had a partner who lived elsewhere. I told him that she and I were planning to live together but had not decided upon a location. He asked me, after some time had elapsed, “did you just say she?” and, when I replied that I had, he proceeded to interrogate me about my life as a lesbian-identified woman. When did I ‘know’, when did she ‘know’, do my parents ‘know’, and what do they think? Don’t tell anyone, don’t pigeonhole yourself, don’t talk to the pupils about it and finally, “schools are conservative places, and that will never change”.

Through an analysis of the (re)production of heteronormativity I have been able to theoretically validate my own life and experiences within a wider social and cultural context. This was the initial reason for my undertaking this PhD research. For me, it is important to be a part of the research, to investigate the social realities in which I participate, as Lofland and Lofland argue, ‘much of the best work in sociology and other social sciences…is probably grounded in the remote and/or current biographies of its creators’ (cited Devine & Heath, 1999).

In addition to my personal experiences in the field, schools were chosen as the site of research because although schools as institutions separate themselves from the private domain of sexuality, schools as social spaces are places in which a great deal of work is carried out on the production of gendered and sexual identities (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). It follows, therefore, that schools are exciting institutional settings in which to carry out research because they reflect larger social concerns about morality, identity and the hierarchical organisation of the social world.

It is important that reflexivity is understood as an analytical tool that influences the research process in a profound way. I am well aware of the arguments surrounding the
researcher/informant binary and the steps that we must take to ensure that this is addressed within the research framework. However upon meeting participants I felt that I was able to establish a good rapport with all twenty of the people that I met. I made sure that I met with participants in a safe place of their choice, usually their home or a café or pub where we could talk uninhibitedly about our lives. So many of their experiences of coming out, of working in schools and in living in a world where one’s life, desires and loves are so often feared or misunderstood were common to my own and I felt that it was both appropriate and proper to share with them as they did with me. Therefore I did not feel that I presented myself, or was thought of as ‘the researcher’, or that I positioned participants as ‘informants’. The twenty people whose experiences act as narration to this thesis are participants in a profound sense, this research is co-constructive and, through the course of it, I have found that my own assumptions, beliefs and ideas about the social world have been interrogated, challenged and deconstructed.

Section two: Context

This thesis was inspired by my own experiences of working within schools. I initially wished to perform a school-based ethnography as well as interviewing LGB teachers. However, my engagement with the literature led me to realise that there is a paucity of research, both within the UK and abroad, that deals exclusively with the experiences of LGB teacher identities and experiences (Endo at al, 2010, Nixon & Givens, 2002, Renold, 2005). Emma Renold’s work is situated within the primary sector and in her book ‘Girls, Boys and Junior Sexualities’ she states that,

The limited research on gay and lesbian teachers […] suggests unsurprisingly that in many ways identifying as lesbian or gay is either experienced or reported more widely […] as being incompatible with being a teacher (Renold, 2005, p. 28).

This research seeks to address this issue, to demonstrate that though being an LGB teacher within both the primary and secondary sectors of education often involves a negotiation between private and professional worlds, LGB teachers do exist and are able to challenge heteronormative discursive practices that dominate schools. My aim
has to been to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible of the experiences of LGB teachers within the UK and so participants are located professionally within both primary and secondary education, are aged across generations and have been an in-service teacher from a range of one to twenty eight years.

At first glance, it appears that the UK has undergone huge political-legal changes with regards to LGB rights since the election of New Labour in 1997. In 2001, the age of consent for sex between males was lowered to sixteen, which has been the age of consent between males and females in the UK since 1885. In addition, discrimination based upon both sexual orientation and gender identity in housing, employment and the provision of goods and services has been illegal since 2007. LGB people may serve openly in the British Armed Forces and same sex couples have been able to adopt since 2002. In 2005 the British government introduced the Civil Partnership Act which enables same sex couples to enter into legally recognized relationships; however same-sex marriage is not recognized within the UK.

So the private, professional and social lives of LGB people have seen much change over the past thirteen years. However these changes have not necessarily been reflected within education. The biggest change regarding schooling and sexuality within the UK has been the repeal of Section 28 in 2003. Introduced by the Thatcher administration in 1986, Section 28 was a way of ensuring that homosexuality was off the agenda as far as sex education was concerned. The clause stated that a local authority could not,

- intentionally promote homosexuality or public material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
- promote the teaching in any maintained school the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

Section 28 acted to reify the notion that the only ‘true’ family form is heterosexual. This denigrated same sex relationships and rendered them invisible within the minds of many educators (Bell & Crumper, 2003). It also prevented the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality within local authorities and the schools under their jurisdiction.
Though it applied to local authorities and never directly to schools, teaching staff felt that it prohibited them from having a dialogue with students about homosexuality. This led to many young people growing up feeling isolated and unable to talk about their sexualities and to LGB teaching staff feeling marginalized within their place of work (Epstein & Johnson, 1998).

The repeal of Section 28 was greeted with much celebration from social commentators, activists, political thinkers and academics. However the Clause was largely understood to be a symbolic piece of legislation put in place to make clear the Conservative party’s view of same-sex relationships. The repeal of Section 28 has not been followed up by any legislation that makes it mandatory for schools to engage with LGB issues or to address sex and relationship education. Sex and Relationship Education is mandatory for each school, but there is no centralised curriculum, therefore the content of such lessons are up to the individual management team at each school. Therefore same-sex relationships and LGB issues do not have to be discussed if this is the wish of school management.

As this thesis demonstrates when sexuality issues are discussed within schools it is often within the context of bullying. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (formerly the Department for Education and Schools) have produced several documents providing schools with guidelines on how to tackle bullying. The latest, published in 2008 and entitled ‘Safe to Learn’, are the first to include guidelines for tackling homophobic bullying within schools. The guidelines make it clear that schools have a duty under the law to protect students and teachers from homophobic bullying. However because there is no set curriculum for Sex and Relationships Education, for many schools, anti-bullying is the only context within which LGB issues are raised.

This then places LGB teachers in a precarious position. On one hand, there are laws in place which prevent discrimination within the workplace. One cannot, any more, be sacked simply for being lesbian, gay or bisexual. However, as this research shows, one’s ability to inhabit a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity within the workplace is often dependent upon a multitude of factors including geographical location, ethos of
the school and the community it supports. Another key issue for participants is support and working within an environment in which one’s sexuality and decisions around disclosure of that sexuality are treated respectfully. If sexuality is off the agenda as far as the school’s management team is concerned, then one can find oneself living private and professional lives that do not necessarily intersect smoothly.

It is for this reason that this thesis engages with the (re)production of heteronormativity and with the negotiation between LGB teachers’ private and professional worlds.

Although this thesis is underpinned by a poststructuralist feminist/queer theoretical framework it is data rather than theory driven. I believe that the questions about sexuality that have been taken up by queer theorists often reduce the lived to the textual within a linguistic and deconstructionist analyses. The rise and popularity of queer scholarship has shifted emphasis away from the lived and into a textual realm where ‘anything is possible’; one can read the queer within Disney like Halberstam or Shakespeare like Sinfield. However ‘queer’ is not always possible within people’s day to day lives, especially if one is employed within a social institution that limits identity play through heteronormative discursive practices. Therefore this research seeks to allow participants to speak of their experiences and to offer an analysis of them that is grounded within the social world, to emphasise the lived and to acknowledge the queer.

**Section three: Outline of the thesis**

The thesis is split into six chapters in addition to this introduction and a conclusion. Chapter one, ‘Investigating LGB Teachers’ Experiences: Theoretical Perspectives’, exposes the reader to the theoretical framework which underpins the thesis. The chapter provides an explicit insight of my understanding of poststructuralism and queer theory and the way in which I deploy them as analytical tools for analysis within the thesis. It also illustrates the way in which I use the concept of embodiment, of ‘becoming’ lesbian, gay or bisexual through a process of informal pedagogical practices. Additionally, this chapter seeks to illustrate the way in which the notion of a
(re)produced private/professional binary is used within this research as a tool for reflecting the discursive practices that delineate the boundaries between these tenets of participants’ identities.

The second chapter of the thesis, ‘Literature Review: mapping the field’, asks three major questions of existing research in the field. Firstly, it asks ‘What is a teacher?’ and engages with socio-historical work which posits the teacher as instrumental in the development of the state and citizenship and as ‘in loco parentis’ to their pupils (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). It examines the role that the private/professional binary can play in teachers’ lives as well as introducing the reader to research which takes as its subject the drive to recruit male teachers to the profession.

In addition, chapter two poses the question ‘Is the classroom a closet for LGB teachers?: sexuality and schooling’. It attempts to answer this question by engaging in an analysis of Section 28 and argues that the continuing essentialisation of categories of gender and sexuality within pedagogical and political discourse make it difficult for LGB teachers to negotiate the boundaries between their professional and personal lives. Finally, chapter two asks ‘What about the kids?’ and offers an exposition of the way in which the sexualities of young people are seen as a concern of government. It offers an analysis of research that discusses the use of the word ‘gay’ as a pejorative by children and young people and the meanings that are attributed to this phenomenon.

Chapter three introduces the reader to the methodological framework deployed within this thesis. This chapter is split into seven sections, each corresponding to a part of the research process that enabled the writing of this thesis.

Chapter four is the first analysis chapter and is entitled, “‘It wasn’t something that you’d think about’: Participants’ experiences of schools, sexualities and silence’. This chapter explores participants’ reflections upon their own schooling and identifies moments within these reflections that illustrate the way in which heteronormative discursive practices are (re)produced within schools. This chapter then makes a temporal move forward and offers an analysis of the way in which participants understand ‘how school is’ within their present positions as teachers. Finally this
Chapter offers an examination of the way in which pupils deploy the word ‘gay’ within their daily discourse and the impact this has upon participants as well as the ways in which they understand pupils’ use of the word. The way in which playground pejoratives act to construct a normative subject is also put under the lens within this chapter.

Chapter five, “I’m happy for people to look at me and say, ‘She’s gay’”: Participants’ experiences of coming out and their understandings of the embodiment of gender and sexuality within their private and professional worlds, sees a departure from school as the site of analysis and an engagement with the notion of ‘becoming’ lesbian, gay or bisexual through an engagement with and recognition of social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers. This chapter also introduces the reader to participants’ coming out narratives and posits coming out as an ongoing process rather than as a series of speech acts. The chapter also engages with participants’ understandings of their gender and sexual identities, the ways in which they embody their sexualities and the ways in which these understandings are played out within their private and professional worlds.

The final analysis chapter is entitled, “I Would Love to be in a Job Where I Could Just Be Me”: Coming out, staying in and the negotiation of LGB teachers’ private and professional worlds, engages explicitly with participants’ experiences as teachers and the points at which their lesbian, gay or bisexual identities intersect with their professional identities. The chapter offers an analysis of participants’ experiences of teacher training programmes and the way in which these programmes were often felt by participants to have ‘set the scene’ in terms of what to expect from teaching as a profession in terms of recognition and understanding of LGB identities. This chapter also engages with participants’ choices around coming out at work and illustrates and offers an analysis of the three trends which came out of the data on this issue: Those that were not out at all at work, those who were out to staff and those who had come out to both pupils and staff. The reasons behind these choices is put under the lens here as is the extent to which participants who are out to pupils felt able to challenge the heteronormative discourse that dominates their schools.
This thesis concludes by drawing out and tying together the key themes and findings of the thesis. The concluding chapter of the thesis argues that not only has this research addressed a gap in the literature regarding LGB teacher identity and experience, it is also able to add some new dimensions to the existing work in this area. It will be revealed throughout this thesis that there does, contrary to my expectations, exist spaces within which LGB teachers are able to challenge the heteronormative status quo. In addition, the two male primary teachers that I interviewed illustrated how non-normative masculinities and sexual identities are able to be deployed within this educational space without injury to the self. This research also furthers work in the field regarding coming out within the workplace as well as demonstrating that there exists an urban/rural split in the experiences of participants. Finally the concluding chapter of the thesis making recommendations for both policy and future research based upon the findings.

The following chapter introduces the reader to the theoretical framework which underpins this thesis as well as the reasons for its deployment.
Chapter One

Investigating LGB Teachers’ Experiences: Theoretical Perspectives

Introduction

In recent times much work on LGB identities has been influenced by both poststructuralist and queer theories. These intertwined theoretical tenets have addressed the complexities of identity through their illumination of the discursive practices that (re)produce the normative identity constructions that dominate much of social, cultural and political life. It is in this way that the intersections between different facets of identity, for example ‘race’, ‘class’ or ‘sexuality’ have become important to the analyses of the meanings social actors attach to the identity categories that they understand as belonging to them.

Because this thesis is concerned explicitly with LGB teacher identities and the negotiation between their private and professional worlds, it is important that I outline the ways in which such identities have come to be understood within both educational and wider theoretical debates. This chapter will therefore expose my own understandings of the identity categories of lesbian, gay and bisexual as well as the moment at which this thesis enters the debate about the ways such identities are understood within private and professional contexts.

The theoretical framework that underpins this thesis is multi-faceted. Firstly, it is inspired by poststructuralist feminist and queer theoretical epistemologies. An engagement with these theoretical tenets is necessary in order to address the complexities of participants and their experiences; they are gendered beings whose sexual identities are subject to minoritising discursive practices. Participants in this research are also engaged within pedagogical and educational frameworks that are managed both at the macro and micro level. Therefore this research demands an engagement with a poststructuralist/queer analysis in order to offer a rigorous analysis of participants’ experiences, both in their private and professional worlds.
However my analysis of the experiences of LGB teachers also encompasses a point of departure from poststructuralist and queer lines of thought. This point of departure arises because of a tension between poststructuralist/queer and sociological/political positions on identity categories and the significance they hold for people whose experiences are affected by minoritising discursive practices. Queer analyses have been criticised for their refusal to name a subject and for their reduction of the lived to the textual (Eves, 2004, Green, 2007, O’Driscoll, 1996, Roseneil, 2000). This thesis therefore attempts to offer a poststructuralist/queer analysis of LGB teachers but approaches this from the perspective of social actors; it is data rather than theory driven and therefore draws not upon one single theoretical perspective but rather is inspired by ideas, knowledges and understandings gleaned from multiple theoretical sites.

This chapter is split into three sections, the first; ‘Gender, sexuality and education’ provides an insight into of my understanding of poststructuralism and queer theory and the way in which I deploy these analytical tools within the thesis. The second section, ‘Embodying the ‘other’’, illustrates the way in which I use the concept of embodiment, of ‘becoming’ lesbian, gay or bisexual through a process of informal pedagogical practices. The extent to which LGB teachers are limited from taking this experience into their professional lives is also put under the lens within this section.

The final section, ‘LGB teachers as public servants and private beings’, illustrates the way in which the (re)production of a private/professional binary is used within this research as a tool for reflecting the discursive practices that delineate the boundaries between these facets of LGB teachers’ identities.

**Section one: Gender, sexuality and education**

This section offers an outline of my understanding of poststructuralist and queer theories and exposes the ways in which I deploy these tenets within my analyses of LGB teachers’ experiences. Poststructural/queer theoretical perspectives are necessary tools for this research because of the ways in which the thesis engages with the
multiplicity of identities and the intersections, negotiations and tensions between the professional and private identities of participants.

Poststructural analyses seek to trouble the discursive practices that act to construct, reify and (re)produce the ‘normal’ through mechanisms which ‘other’ those behaviours, actions and identities deemed to be subversive. Many poststructuralist analyses achieve this through an engagement with linguistic techniques and the linkages between language and power, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations and the way in which the modern state is organised (Adams St. Pierre, 2000, see also Berlant & Warner, 1998, Dillabough, 2001). In this way, poststructuralism continues feminism’s project of ‘personalising the political’ for it renders the fissure, often present within humanist analyses of personal and professional spheres, redundant. Within this paradigm language is viewed as a carrier of power, a creator of meaning and a constructor of social, cultural and political life,

Once a discourse becomes ‘normal’ and ‘natural’, it is difficult to think and act outside it. Within the rules of discourse, it makes sense to say only certain things. Other statements and other ways of thinking remain unintelligible, outside the realm of possibility (Adams St. Pierre, 2000, p.485).

It is in this way that categories of identity are dichotomised and hierarchically organised; heterosexual/homosexual/, man/woman/, white/black, adult/child; the former category is often privileged and the latter subordinate (Adams St.Pierre, 2000, Hughes, 2002). By way of continuing the feminist argument that women have been subjugated by hierarchical structures of power that act to privilege the masculine and subordinate the feminine, poststructuralists argue that much of social, cultural and political life is organised to construct and (re)produce dominant and hegemonic understandings of all identity categories.

Gender has been taken up as a category of analysis by poststructuralists and is viewed not as something one is, i.e. masculine or feminine; rather gender is something one is made or learns to be through normative discursive practices that dominate social institutions such as the family or education. Within this paradigm it is argued that
children are aware of their physiological differences from an early age but that gender differences are learned and rehearsed through bodily practices like play, language use and behaviours (Davies, 1989, Davies, 2003, Hammersley, 2001, Kehily, 2001, Paechter, 2007, Skelton, 2001, Renold, 2005). Poststructural feminist analyses of gender then are distinguished from other feminist perspectives because they posit the notion that gender is not stable or ultimately knowable in any ‘real’ sense (Butler, 1990, Dillabough, 2001).

The way in which gender is conceived of and understood is, within this paradigm, interconnected with sexuality. It is through our gendered bodies, and the way that they perform, that we become socially validated. Historically women’s bodies have been seen as her enemy. The sexology of the late 19th century found women’s bodies to be fragile, to render her hysterical, and made the claim that childbirth placed such a stress on the physical body that rational thought was impossible (Kimmel, 2000). The ‘cause and effect’ model that has come to typify the male role within reproduction has led to a phallocentric understanding of the male body (Butler, 1990) and a belief that the detachment of men from their part in reproduction facilitated their rationality, (Curry & Raoul, 1992); the attachment of women to their part in the reproductive process renders them irrational and explains women’s more emotional ‘nature’ (Kimmel, 2000). It is as a result of such ‘gendered heterosexism’ (Plummer, 1995) that we have come to understand the world as being separated into acts organised around the gendered division of labour and through which heterosexual relationships are prioritised (ibid.).

Queer theorists have labelled this system of knowledge heteronormativity. As a discourse, heteronormativity dichotomises the relationships between men and women, homosexuality and heterosexuality, adult and child. It normalises boundary making between these social groups and enforces them through a regime of homophobia, sexism and the dominance of heterosexual (male) masculinity. As a result it fails to acknowledge the complexities of heterosexuality as a set of social and cultural practices and relationships. This is because heteronormativity acts to uphold a normative, hegemonic version of heterosexuality that does not reflect the range of relationships heterosexuality, as a sexual identity, encompasses. Berlant and Warner (1998) argue that the discourse of heteronormativity has achieved its dominance over
any other way of thinking about sexuality because it has no opposite and therefore is not itself, as are the binary categories that it reinforces, operating within a dichotomy,

[Heteronormativity is] a concept distinct from heterosexuality. One of the most conspicuous differences is that it has no parallel, unlike heterosexuality which organises homosexuality as its opposite. Because homosexuality can never have the invisible, tacit, society-founding rightness that heterosexuality has, it would not be possible to speak of ‘homonormativity’ in the same sense (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p.548).

Our gendered identities are, then, dominated by hegemonic heteronormative assumptions about who and what men and women should be and this is enforced through a regime of homophobia and sexism that is fundamental to the (re)production of heteronormativity.

The way in which we experience gender is viewed within this paradigm as being shaped by the multiplicity of factors that make up our identities and sense of the self (Brah, 1992, Butler, 1990, Lugones & Spelman, 1998). Our abilities to ‘be’ gendered or to ‘have’ a sexuality are deeply influenced by what Butler (2004) identifies as ‘ontological thickets and epistemological quandaries’ – in other words by heteronormative discursive practices and the way in which they operate to create a matrix of otherness which is socially and politically policed. Sexuality is widely promoted within social institutions as belonging to the private realm. However gender and sexual identities are scrutinised by public politics and as such are open to the critical gaze of law makers (Dunne, 1997). This can be illustrated by laws in place which prevent fathers from taking fully-paid paternity leave, thus reifying the notion of woman as carer, man as provider and through the way in which political rhetoric continues in many countries to relegate queer lifestyles through refusal to extend anti-discriminatory laws to lesbian, gay and bisexual people. As a result, central to the work of many scholars is the reassessment of the relationship between the public and the private and a desire to bring the sexual to the political (Dunne, 1997, Epstein, 1998, Wilton, 1995).
In light of this project gender and sexuality, rather than being inherent human qualities, have come to be seen through poststructuralist and queer analyses, as being made up of complex sets of social understandings. Our subjective experiences of them are shaped by the relationship between power and knowledge that produce them as social categories of being (Butler, 1990, Connell, 2000, Foucault, 1976, Mac an Ghaill, 1996, Paechter, 2007). The flow of power affects gender and sexuality in a multiplicity of ways and this can be illustrated by the way in which hegemonic male masculinity dominates the social and institutional arenas through misogyny and homophobia. Queer gender performances such as female masculinity and male femininity are often held to ridicule within certain social contexts because they do not ‘belong’, are ‘other’ and belong to different, private, spheres of existence.

This thesis deploys a poststructuralist feminist/queer framework as its starting point for the analysis of participants’ understandings of their identities. As sexual identity is central to this research I will now discuss queer theory and the way in which it intertwines with poststructuralism within recent theories on sex and sexuality as well as the way in which it informs my thesis.

Queer theory, it can be argued, is not a tangible theory of any one particular thing (Berlant & Warner, 1995). It is rather a set of ideas that are influenced by and draw upon the gay and lesbian studies of the seventies and the radical feminist and queer activism of the eighties as well as by poststructuralist analyses of power, language and the discursive (re)production of identity (O’Driscoll, 1996). Queer theory seeks to trouble the heterosexual /homosexual binary by focusing not upon homosexuality as a set of sexual practices but rather as set of organizing principles, raising it from a politics of minority to a politics of knowledge and difference (Seidman, 1996). It seeks to dismantle the notion that there are stable categories of human sexual identity, to problematise existing identity categories and to develop new ways of articulating human desires. As feminism places women at the centre of intellectual inquiry, queer theory positions the sexual subject as central to its project (Berlant & Warner, 1995, Stein & Plummer, 1996). Queer theory is therefore not necessarily linked to LGB communities but is rather concerned with resisting and challenging dominant ways of knowing, understanding and living as sexual subjects (Sumara & Davis, 1999).
Poststructuralist feminist and queer theorists have done much work upon the discursive practices that influence the way in which identity categories are constructed and (re)produced. This has challenged the way in which identity is understood as a social phenomenon and has illustrated how minoritising discourses often lead to competing notions of what it is to ‘have’ an identity. Within this paradigm, the meanings attached to particular identities are understood in terms of the dominant social structures that position them as ‘other’. For example to ‘be’, ‘black’, ‘working class’ or ‘gay’ carries particular meanings that are laced with hierarchical power relationships that shift over time (Adams St. Pierre, 2000). Because this research is concerned with the tensions between LGB teachers’ private and professional worlds, a poststructuralist/queer approach provides an essential tool to this analysis of LGB teachers’ experiences. This is because such identities are often absent from educational discourse; Poststructuralist and queer theories are concerned with what is not spoken rather than what is and it is in this way that a process of deconstruction is deployed by poststructuralist/queer analysts. These theoretical tools enable an engagement with the often discrete discursive practices that act to minoritise LGB identities within education.

This thesis is also concerned with the poststructuralist project of analysing the way in which language is deployed as a carrier of power. It achieves this by offering an analysis of the way in which LGB teachers’ perceive linguistic trends; particularly that of pupils’ use of the word ‘gay’. The analysis of this phenomenon seeks not only to obtain teachers’ understanding of the ways in which pupils use this word, but also to analyse the meanings made by teachers regarding this subject. In other words I examine the current linguistic trend for the labelling of things as ‘gay’ and interrogate the notion that this always (re)produces homosexuality as something that is defective or lacking (Thurlow, 2001, Rasmussen, 2004). I also offer an analysis of the shift in choice of playground pejoratives from ‘spaz’ to ‘gay’ to ‘Jew’, as reported by several participants, and posit that trends in playground pejoratives reflect shifts in what are considered to be social norms as well as the ways that these norms are reinforced and (re)produced through childhood language use.

This thesis also seeks to further work in the field by troubling the way in which gender and sexuality are understood and (re)produced within schools. It illustrates the
subtleties through which binary (re)productions of gender and sexual hierarchies continue to be perpetuated through heteronormative discursive practices within schools. My research also seeks to illustrate the resistance and challenges LGB teachers pose to the notion that the gendered sexualities of teachers are silent within schools. Resistance is also part of the poststructuralist/queer project. However resistance is not seen within the totalising framework that characterises humanist theories such as Marxism. Resistance is viewed by poststructuralist/queer analysts as being multiple, shifting and subject to change (Adams St.Pierre, 2000). This thesis engages with the work done by participants to speak themselves into existence within their professional lives and as such the coming out process is significant.

Coming out is a tricky subject for a poststructuralist/queer analysis and there are several reasons for this. Firstly, poststructuralist/queer theories often draw upon the work of Foucault. In ‘The History of Sexuality: Volume 1’ (1976), Foucault argues that the history of sexuality should be seen as the history of discourse on sexuality. He sees sexuality as being embedded in power relations, and that these power relations are bound up in the act of confession. First religious convictions demanded the confession of subject to the priest, later the sexologist or psychiatrist demanded the confession of the sexual secrets of patients. It can be argued that our ever-evolving media culture continues to demand our confession. We have, then, ceaselessly been forced to confess our secret sexual selves (Foucault, 1976). Foucault goes on to argue that power laden mechanisms of regulation are at hand in the act of confession and that particular attention needs to be paid to the historical context of who confesses and who listens, ergo becoming the benevolent force, the forgiver, the redeemer, the healer. Within this paradigm, to state that one is ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’ is to attach oneself to the categories of identity held in place and (re)produced by discursive practices. Butler (1990) continues the Foucauldian line of thought and argues that sexual identity categories are ‘instruments of regulatory regimes’ and therefore should be challenged, resisted and ultimately rejected.

However the categories of ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ and ‘bisexual’ are understood sociologically as being important social, cultural and ultimately political statements of self (Califia, 1994, Plummer, 1995, Weeks, 1977). Because of the way in which language is operationalised within all spheres of life, people use the tools available to
them to describe themselves and their place in the world. This is always a relational process because we come to be known and know ourselves through our social, cultural and political relationships with others. Butler, in a later work, argues that,

When we speak about my sexuality or my gender, as we do (and as we must) we mean something complicated by it. Neither of these is precisely a possession, but both are understood as modes of being dispossessed, ways of being for another or, indeed, by virtue of another (Butler, 2004 p.19, emphasis original).

Butler raises several interesting points. Firstly that we do speak of our gender and sexuality and that we must is illustrative of the dominance of discursive practices that construct and (re)produce us as hierarchically categorised gendered and sexual beings. We are compelled, if we do not belong to the normative, to speak ourselves into existence. Coming out, then, and the process of (be)coming lesbian, gay or bisexual can be seen as being achieved through locating the self within prescribed identity categories and through a recognition of the social, cultural and aesthetic cues that denote their existence (Butler, 1990, Foucault, 1976, Munt, 1998, Phelan, 1993, Rust, 1993).

My analysis of participants’ experiences as teachers and as LGB people is situated, as called for by Butler (2004), within the context of their lived lives. It should be noted that though I draw upon queer theory in my analysis, I do not read all participants as queer nor do I fully subscribe to a poststructuralist feminist position. Rather my work, like Renold’s work, is ‘touched’ by poststructuralist feminism and queer theory (Renold, 2005). What a queer analysis enables me to do is to read the experiences of LGB teachers through a lens that interrogates socio-political positions such as lesbian, gay and bisexual and reveals the ‘power-ridden normatives’ of sex and sexuality (Berlant & Warner, 1995). I will now discuss my understanding of and deployment of discourse as a theoretical tool for enquiry.

Within poststructural and queer analyses experience is read through textual analysis, an engagement with linguistic constructs and discourse analysis. Discourse here is understood within a Foucauldian framework as the means through which power is
operationalised as a technique that constructs and (re)produces hierarchical categories of identity (Foucault, 1976). Foucault saw the restriction of human sexuality that has taken place through politico-legal discourse, as a means of ensuring that human reproduction took place within a socially and economically desirable context, ‘to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative’ (Foucault, 1976, p.37). An engagement with discourse within this context allows an analysis of the history of unequal social relationships (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). It allows the researcher to engage with this history at a particular moment, to interrogate the meanings of discursive silences, to redress the balance.

Within this paradigm, power is viewed,

Not as an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault, 1976, p.93). In other words, power is exercised through discourse and through the complexities and contradictions that validate a particular discourse at a particular moment and render it meaningful. This research then takes place within a socio-political context that would appear ‘tolerant’ of non-heterosexual relationships and desires. Over the last thirteen years in the UK significant legal changes have extended the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. However this thesis seeks to illustrate the gap between macro policy changes and life as it is lived at the micro level. The ways in which non-normative gender and sexual identities continue to be marginalised is reflected through participants’ experiences of homophobia and sexism within their workplaces.

The following chapter illustrates the ways in which ‘teacher’, as a professional identity, is often posited within socio-political discourse as being a moral figure charged with the responsibility of being ‘in loco parentis’ (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008), of contributing to the moral education of the next generation of national citizens. I wish to raise the point here that, as a professional identity, ‘teacher’ can clash with a private identity of lesbian, gay or bisexual. This is because of the way in which the sexual identities of teachers are positioned, through heteronormative
discursive practices, as belonging to the private realm (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). When sexualities are spoken into existence within educational spaces, it is largely within the context of heterosexuality in sex and relationship education, or within biology lessons on human reproduction. Heterosexuality is assumed within the institution of education, it is (re)produced as inherent, normal and often preferred. It is in this way that heterosexuality is positioned as a ‘national characteristic’,

National heterosexuality is the mechanism by which a core national culture can be imagined as a sanitized space of sentimental feeling and immaculate behaviour, a space of pure citizenship (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p.549).

A heterosexist model of governance then dominates contemporary democratic systems. Because schools as institutions reflect wider social mores the assumptions about gender and sexuality that dominate social life are practiced through minoritising discursive practices within schools (Davies, 1989, Thurlow, 2001). This research illustrates this through an engagement with sex and relationship education within the schools in which participants are employed. It demonstrates how issues around non-heterosexuality are approached through processes that act to ‘other’ such identities; pupils are often removed from the school premises in order to see plays about non-heterosexuality or members of the LGB community are brought in to schools to deliver such education. This acts to minoritise non-heterosexualities because they are not seen as ‘belonging’ to the wider school community, rather as something that exists outside of the institutional space of school. In this way, sexuality is further reinforced as something belonging to the private realm.

The following section offers an exposition of the way in which this thesis engages with the notion of embodiment, of becoming lesbian, gay and bisexual and with how this plays out within both the private and professional lives of participants.
Section two: Embodying the ‘other’

One of the key moments within this thesis is an analysis of the mechanisms through which one comes to embody one’s identity, of the discursive processes that influence gendered and sexual bodies and of the ways in which participants challenge dominant and normative constructions of their embodiments. This is one of the major concerns of poststructuralist/queer analyses of contemporary gender and sexual identities.

Gender and sexuality, within socio-political discourse, are widely understood to exist within binary classifications that can be read through the body. It can be argued that the notion of gender as dichotomous is constantly (re)produced through social and cultural media and that this begins at birth when girls are put into pink and boys blue (de Beauvoir, 2005) and is further reinforced at school where male hegemonic heterosexual masculinity dominates women, girls and ‘other’ boys through a regime of sexism and homophobia, forms of oppression that act to police the boundaries of gender and sexuality (Chambers et al 2004, DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Ferfolja, 1998, Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996, Paechter, 2007, Renold, 2003, 2005).

Butler (1990) calls this discursive regime the ‘heterosexual matrix’ and argues that this is the lens through which we perceive gendered sexual relationships. Heterosexuality acts as the dominant, normalised version of sexuality and is reliant upon such dichotomised gender identities to govern the performance of a hegemonic heterosexuality which is framed as compulsory (ibid., Dunne, 1997, Endo et al, 2010, Rich, 1984). Therefore we must, argues Butler, examine the nature of genders and sexualities within this context in order to develop an analysis of their workings and to challenge the way in which they are (re)produced.

As a result one of the key tasks of contemporary gender studies is to of re-define masculinity and femininity as unstable identity categories (Butler, 1990, Connell, 2002, Halberstam, 1998, Mac an Ghaill, 1996). An attempt has been made to de-essentialise gender categories and to see them instead as socially constructed phenomena which (re)produce themselves dichotomously; man as the opposite of
woman, masculinity of femininity. Gender is (re)produced in this way in order to keep intact the twin structures of patriarchy and heterosexism which dominate social and cultural institutions. Within this framework heterosexualised gender identities are seen as performative, as copies with no original (Butler, 1990).

This thesis is concerned with the way in which participants are able to ‘act out’ their gendered and sexual embodiments within both their private and professional worlds. It explicitly engages with the notion of ‘becoming’ (Butler, 2005, de Beauvoir, 2005, Phelan, 1993), that one is not born into a particular identity with pre-existing knowledge of it, but rather learns, through informal pedagogical processes, how to ‘be’, in this case, lesbian, gay or bisexual. Within this paradigm, ‘being’ or embodying a particular sexual identity are not viewed as inherent human qualities, rather as processes that are developed over time and achieved through the recognition and adoption of social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers. I argue that LGB teachers take with them into their professional worlds, prior knowledge of the discursive practices that constitute difference and with the means of integrating these processes into the project of the self. It follows a line of argument that situates LGB teachers as being in a unique position to tackle homophobia within their workplace but that this is often prevented by the heteronormative discursive framework that dominates social institutions such as schools (Sykes, 2004, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Butler, 2005).

It is also here that my work departs significantly from a poststructuralist/queer analysis. Given that one of the projects of queer theory is to interrogate the meanings of identity categories, and, in its most radical form, to render them mere constructions of discursive practices, engaging with the experiences of teachers who actively describe their identity as being lesbian, gay or bisexual is problematic.

In light of this, I take the following position on this apparent ontological clash. I do not view queer theory as a totalising theory, as the ‘answer’ to questions of inequality based upon sexual orientation or desire. Rather I follow Berlant & Warner’s (1995) assertion that queer theory ‘is not a theory of anything in particular’ rather it provides us with a way of commentating upon the social word (ibid. p.343). Berlant and Warner (ibid.) argue that queer work is able to address a range of power-ridden normatives concerning sex and sexuality. In this sense it is not superior to or more
inclusive to lesbian and gay studies which has its roots in sociological analyses. It is possible to overlap these two areas of study, to acknowledge that though ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ and ‘bisexual’, as identity categories may have been constructed through regulatory discursive practices, they nonetheless have significance for those who embody them, who choose to hold them up as symbols of pride and self-affirmation (Roseneil, 2000). It is in this way that my work sits between a poststructuralist/queer and a sociological/political analysis of LGB teachers’ experiences.

The thesis then engages with LGB practices of embodiment and seeks to illustrate the challenges that such bodies can pose to the heteronormative space of school. The ways in which participants are able to take their experience of ‘being’ LGB within their private worlds into their professional spaces will be put under the lens as well as the ways in which LGB identities and embodiments can be and are silenced within educational spaces.

The following section explores some of the tensions between the private and professional worlds of LGB teachers and the theoretical tenets that have informed my analysis of them.

**Section three: LGB teachers as public servants and private beings**

This thesis understands the negotiations between participants’ private and professional worlds to be one of the key issues informing their experiences of teaching as an LGB person. It can be argued that the simultaneous intersections and fissures between private and professional selves is a factor in the lives of most people – we all experience acts of separation between our ‘workselves’ and ‘homeselves’. However this is a particular concern for LGB teachers because of the way in which LGB identities are often silenced within schools.

It can be argued that this is partly due to the way in which teaching is positioned, within socio-political discourse, as being a moral profession and that teachers are positioned as ‘in loco parentis’ to the next generation of citizens (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). The private life of a teacher is then positioned within educational
institutions as a self that exists outside of the realm of teaching, learning and pedagogy (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). This reflects the way in which sexuality has been framed through political-legal discourse as something as in need of regulation,

Intimate life is the endlessly cited *elsewhere* of political public discourse, a promised haven that distracts citizens from the unequal conditions of their political and economic lives, consoled them for the damaging humanity of mass society, and shames them for any divergence between their lives and the intimate sphere that is alleged to be simple personhood (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p.553).

Berlant and Warner expose the mechanisms through which sexuality has come to be regulated and understood as a facet of the self that exists separately to the public sphere. Sexuality is viewed through this lens as a space of ‘pure personhood’ (ibid.), of base identity, something that shapes us as human beings but that belongs to a different sphere of existence to our public or professional selves.

The way in which this discourse impacts upon our abilities to live ‘(un)bearable lives’ (Butler, 2005) can be evidenced by the regulations placed historically upon our sexualities. Homosexuality between males was the particular victim of this kind of discursive practice. In 1968, when homosexuality was decriminalised in the UK, the age of consent was set at twenty one for sexual acts between men in private. This relegated homosexuality to the realm of the private, as simultaneously permissible and silenced.

The gay rights movement of the 1970’s and 80’s forced non-heterosexual identities into the public sphere and it is this way that identity politics and, in particular, the practice of coming out, became important. In this way lesbian and gay politics attempted to ‘remake reality’ (ibid.), to broaden the question of what is/not a liveable existence (Butler, 2005).

However these macro political acts, like those of the feminist movement, did not always filter down to the micro level. Despite broad political changes to the lives of
LGB people within the UK\(^1\), some spheres of public or professional life continue to position a heterosexual identity as preferred, reified and dominant. The social and educational institution of school is one such space.

Because part of the professional remit of teachers is to act as moral guardians to the next generation of citizens, they are expected as part of their professional identities, to lead ‘exemplary (hetero)sexual lives’ outside of school (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). They are to set examples for young people and must regulate the sexualities of those in their charge (ibid.).

On one hand, the sexuality of any teacher is not deemed an appropriate topic for the classroom. However on the other, it is relatively easy for heterosexual teachers to make reference to ‘my husband’, ‘wife’ or (opposite sex) partner. If a female teacher is married, her name will often be prefixed with ‘Mrs.’ This is not the case for LGB teachers who have to, if they so choose, declare their sexuality. This research illustrates how complex the coming out process can be within this professional context. Schools often actively deny the existence of sex/gender regimes and the heteronormative discursive practices that (re)produce them (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005); this in turn impacts upon the experiences of those within educational institutions whose identities do not fit the dominant normative paradigm.

So what are private and professional lives or identities? It can be argued that they are facets of identity; who one ‘is’ professionally can differ enormously to one’s private ‘identity’, especially when one’s profession demands certain ways of being. Because sexuality is subject to politico-legal interventions, its discursively produced position as belonging to the private realm is a precarious one. Simultaneous demands exist that ask us to speak our sexualities and restrict them to the private realm (Sedgwick, 1990). Though there are silences within the multiple discourses that regulate sexuality, sexuality is almost a constant presence within public life. Foucault raises this issue when he makes the claim, in ‘The History of Sexuality Volume One’ that,

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\(^1\) See p.4 of Introduction for an overview of the political changes that have taken place within the UK since the election of New Labour in 1997
What is peculiar to modern societies is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret (Foucault, 1976, p. 35, emphasis original).

Foucault illustrates the way in which political discourse became the authority on sex and sexuality, through restrictions it created the desirable national (hetero)sexual subject and relegated ‘others’ as abnormal, lacking and deviant.

The LGB ‘self’ is therefore a project that demands an engagement with politics, a challenge to the discourse that constructs it as ‘other’. The struggle for collective rights demands that we position ourselves as ‘coherent and recognizable subjects’ (Butler, 2005), as a ‘community’, a whole. It might seem then that there are no coherent private or professional worlds with the margins between them being so tightly regulated. However politico-legal definitions of who we are do not necessarily reflect what we are about as sexual subjects (ibid.). The ability to live a tolerable life is, much of the time, not informed by politics but by the micro issues that colour our existences.

It is from this perspective that my analysis of the private/professional worlds of LGB teachers is informed. On one hand teachers’ jobs and lives are regulated by macro policy structures. The very space of school reflects social and political mores and is under constant scrutiny from government in the form of league tables, OFSTED and student testing. However, as stated in the previous chapter, there is a gap between who teachers are positioned as being and who they see themselves as being. This self is further complicated when its sexuality does not fit into the heteronormative discursive framework that dominates school. Therefore LGB teachers experience a ‘double bind’. Many of my participants expressed a desire to be out at work, to actively challenge the way in which sexuality is understood and policed within schools. However this was often prevented by the way in which the management team at the school understood LGB issues. This precipitated several participants to actively conceal their sexual identities within the context of the workplace, thus creating a fissure between their private and professional selves.
Summary

The aim of this chapter was to outline the way in which I understand and deploy a theoretical framework within the thesis that draws upon and is inspired by poststructuralist feminist/queer analyses of gender, sexuality, embodiment and the intersections between the private and the professional.

The chapter illustrated the ways in which LGB identities have historically been and continue to be subject to minoritising discursive practices that (re)produce them as ‘other’. Here, I demonstrated the way in which such discursive practices are historically situated and subject to change. Sexuality was posited as a relational phenomenon, one that becomes reified through social, cultural and political processes that are enmeshed within shifting power structures.

I also demonstrated how I deploy a poststructuralist feminist/queer analysis within the thesis and that this is made manifest through my engagement with language, specifically with the linguistic mechanisms through which the normative subject is (re)produced within schools. Here, it was stated that the thesis engages with pupils’ use of the word ‘gay’, with the way in which participants understand and challenge this phenomenon as well as with the development of playground pejorative choice.

The chapter illuminated my engagement with LGB lives as they are lived by participants. Here, it was noted that issues such as coming out are difficult to analyse through a poststructuralist feminist/queer lens because of the way in which speaking one’s sexuality in this way aligns one with pre-existing and discursively produced identity categories. I demonstrated here the way in which the thesis acknowledges the identity categories of ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ and ‘bisexual’, as constructed through regulatory discursive practices. However the thesis also understands that such categories of identity have significance for those who embody them. Therefore my work sits between a poststructuralist/queer and a sociological/political analysis of LGB teachers’ experiences.
I also expounded the way in which I use the concept of embodiment within the thesis as a tool to demonstrate how sexuality is lived and read through bodily practices and social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers which mark one out as belonging to a particular sexual group. My engagement with this phenomenon encompasses the project of contemporary gender studies set within a poststructuralist feminist/queer framework which seeks to demonstrate the ways in which participants are able to ‘act out’ their private sexual identities within professional spaces. The thesis achieves this through an analysis of informal pedagogical and learning processes; one is not inherently ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’, rather one becomes LGB through an engagement with informal discursive practices.

Finally, this chapter looked at the ways in which the thesis is concerned with the intersections between participants’ private and professional worlds. Here, the thesis engages with historically situated regulatory practices that influence an LGB subjects’ understanding of themselves and their place within the social, sexual, cultural and political world that they inhabit. The LGB subject has, within this paradigm, been politicised because of discriminatory macro political changes and their impact upon the personal.

The following chapter offers an overview of the literature and existing research conducted on teacher identity, particularly the notion of teachers as nation builders. The chapter also exposes research in the field which engages with LGB teachers, gender, sexuality and schooling. It demonstrates that there is a paucity of literature concerning the experiences of LGB teachers. Finally the following chapter gives an overview of existing research which examines pupils and learning environments and the extent to which a heteronormative discourse dominates young peoples’ experiences of educational institutions.
Chapter Two

Literature Review: mapping the field

Introduction

This thesis is located within an international body of work which focuses on the relationship between gender, sexuality and schooling. It also engages with existing literature in the field of teacher identity and the ways in which discourses of gender and sexuality play out within this setting. My research addresses the ways in which LGB teachers negotiate their professional and private worlds. Though this negotiation is a concern for many people in many professions whether LGB or not, it can be a more pertinent concern for LGB people because of the spectre of the closet as a presence that hangs over the lives of many LGB teachers in a way that is does not for their heterosexual counterparts. Therefore this research also engages with previous research concerned with the issue of coming out at work and specifically within schools.

There is a paucity of literature concerning the experiences of LGB teachers; much work within the field of sexuality and schooling focuses upon the experiences of LGB or queer young people or the content and delivery of sex and relationship education. Therefore this research provides important insights into the lives of LGB educators across all sectors of education within English schools.

This chapter asks three questions of existing research in the field. The first section ‘What is a Teacher?: Nation building, teacher education and gender’ engages with the role of the teacher as a socio-historical figure who continues to be seen as instrumental in the development of the state and citizenship and as ‘in loco parentis’ to their pupils (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). It also introduces previous analyses of the intersections between teachers’ professional and private identities and the ways in which these are negotiated within the context of schools. Finally this section offers an analysis of research which takes as its subject the drive to recruit male teachers,
particularly at the primary level, and asks what this means in terms of the kinds of masculinity that is desirable within teaching.

The second section poses the question ‘Is the classroom a closet for LGB teachers?: sexuality and schooling’ and engages with both political and social discourses affecting the experiences of LGB teachers. Firstly it offers an analysis of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1986 and its impact upon teaching and learning about homosexuality as a ‘pretended family form’. It argues that the essentialisation of categories of gender and sexuality within pedagogical and political discourse make it difficult for LGB teachers to negotiate the boundaries between their professional and personal lives. Finally it asks how possible it is for LGB teachers to come out at work and the risks that this might involve.

The final section of this chapter asks ‘What about the kids?: Pupils and learning environments’. It offers an exposition of the way in which the sexualities of young people are seen as a concern of government and illustrates how policy acts to police LGB identities more forcefully than heterosexual ones. It also offers an analysis of research that discusses the use of the word ‘gay’ as a pejorative by children and young people and the meanings that are attributed to this phenomenon. Finally it argues that homophobic discursive practices learned in school often spill over into the private sphere and manifest as violent acts.

This chapter then seeks to map the field in terms of engaging with research on discourses of sexuality, schooling and the experiences of LGB people working and studying within compulsory educational institutions as well as to position my research within this vast field.

**Section one: What is a teacher?: Nation building, teacher education and gender**

This thesis engages with three key issues regarding the recently growing field of teacher identity (Beijaard et al, 2000). This section of the chapter offers an overview of these three areas and is split into corresponding sub-sections entitled: ‘Teachers as
‘nation builders’, ‘Teacher education and social justice issues’ and ‘Teaching as a gendered profession’.

**Teachers as ‘nation builders’**

There is much work which focuses upon a critical analysis of the notion that one of the key roles of a teacher is as keeper of the nation state, a figure that is instrumental in the personal and social development of the next generation of ‘good’ citizens (Banks, 2001, Day et al, 2005, Dillabough, 2005, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Paechter, 2000, Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008, Warin et al, 2006). As a result of this discourse, educational successes and failures have ‘come to stand for what is desirable or amiss in (the) nation’ (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Teaching then, within socio-political discourse, is related to not only the delivery of lessons but can also be read as contributing to nation building. It is viewed by politicians and policy makers as a moral profession, one which demands multiple levels of commitment from teachers to their pupils, who should be thought of both as a collective to be taught and as individuals with social and emotional needs (Banks, 2005, Beijaard et al, 2000, Day et al, 2005).

The notion that teachers should, as part of their professional remit, foster pupils’ personal and social development is reflected in the Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) guidelines for schools published in 2000. They state that Personal, Social and Health Education (PHSE) should:

- [develop] confidence and responsibility and [make] the most of pupils’ abilities;
- [prepare pupils] to play an *active role as citizens*;
- [develop] a healthier lifestyle; and
- [develop] good relationships and [respect] differences between people.

(Department for Education & Employment, 2000 p.19, emphasis added)
In light of this it is important to note that there exists a dichotomy between social and political understandings of who teachers are and with the way in which teachers view themselves as professionals. It is argued that because of the restrictions placed upon teachers by government, educational management systems and governing bodies, teachers are limited in the ways that they are able to perform their professional identities (Sachs, 2001). Within the UK the debate continues to rage about the National Curriculum, SATS, the ‘dumbing down’ of ‘A’ Levels and the impact that this has had upon the teaching profession. It is argued that teaching has become increasingly de-skilled as an occupation and that the abilities of teachers to engage with pupils at a personal and emotional level are limited by the ‘testing culture’ of many schools (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996, Skelton, 2001).

This has implications for issues surrounding teachers’ professional identities and their abilities to perform them effectively within the classroom. The previous chapter illustrated the way in which, through poststructuralist/queer analyses, identity has come to be understood as a relational phenomenon and that this is understood to be because of linguistic structures that are deployed to create a normative subject. Within this paradigm identity is understood as a relational process because we come to be known and know ourselves through our social, cultural and political relationships with others. Teacher identity has therefore also been posited as a relational phenomenon that is influenced by a multiplicity of interconnecting factors that are subject to change. As Lasky, (2001) argues,

Teacher professional identity is how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others. It is a construct of professional self that evolves over career stages and can be shaped by school, reform, and political contexts (Lasky, 2001, p.901).

Though it can be argued that all aspects of the self are negotiated through interaction with others (Butler, 2004, Jackson & Warin, 2000, Paechter, 2007) within teaching the social context of work influences teachers’ senses of professional identity and pedagogical practices in multiple ways (Lasky, 2001, Beijaard et al, 2000, Skelton, 2001). Professional identity is something that has to be negotiated in relation to the community within which a school is situated as well as with social and political
expectations of the role of a teacher. This is because schools reflect the social mores of the community within which they are situated as well as governmental expectations (Davies, 1989, Paechter, 2000, Thurlow, 2001).

My research addresses the intertwined issues of teachers as nation builders and as reflectors of community expectations from the perspective of LGB teachers, and illustrates the ways in which the social and pedagogical communities within which participants are situated influences their abilities to negotiate their professional and private identities within their workplaces. The notion of community is a particularly salient point in my research because there was a striking difference between the experiences of LGB teachers in rural and urban settings in terms of them feeling able to actively participate within the social and pedagogical communities within which they are professionally situated.

Teachers do not exist within a professional vacuum. They take with them into the job prior knowledge, values and experiences that intersect with their professional identities (Lasky, 2001, Vulliams et al, 1997). As schools are contextually varied across and within nations in terms of the social and political mores which dominate them, the notion of teacher identity is suffused with competing discourses on what a teacher’s role means (Britzman cited Weber & Mitchell, 1996, MacLure, 1993, Warin et al, 2006). Teaching often demands a negotiation between a teacher’s professional lives and their personal lives as people moving through the world because of the implications of the job as a moral profession. Teachers are expected to be ‘upright moral citizens’ and their pedagogical practices should reflect this. Within this paradigm it is argued that there is often little space for the performance of a non-heterosexual identity because schools are dominated by a heteronormative discourse which privileges heterosexual versions of masculinity and femininity and assumes the heterosexuality of its staff and pupils (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Ferfolja, 1998, 2009, Grace et al, 2000, Røthing, 2008).

Teachers then often occupy complex private and professional spaces. On one hand they are expected to conduct themselves in particular ways. This conduct should reflect social and political expectations of teaching as well as the community based mores of the individual school and the community it serves. At the same time teachers
are required to engage emotionally with their pupils in order to foster their development as effective citizens. Many researchers argue that in order to successfully negotiate the boundaries between private and professional selves and to integrate these dualisms within pedagogical techniques reflective practice is required (Banks, 2001, Conrad & Crawford, 1998, Hatton & Smith, 1995, Warin et al, 2006, Woods & Harbeck, 1992, Zemblayas, 2003). This means that teachers should not only reflect upon their professional conduct but also upon the way in which their experiences as human agents have shaped their lives.

In addition to this self-reflection it is argued that teachers should also reflect upon how society functions in terms of its social and political institutions and to question their own roles in the continuation of the social status quo (King, 1999). This perspective sees teachers bringing performance to their professional role and understands emotion to be embedded within this performance (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Reio Jr., 2005, Zemblayas, 2003). Zemblayas (2003) argues that,

Teacher emotion is embedded in school culture, ideology and power relations through which certain emotional rules are produced to constitute teachers’ emotion and subjectivity (ibid. p.119).

Emotionality here is understood to be an embodied performance and is related to how teachers understand their ‘sense of body’ (ibid.). However this version of the self can be limited, firstly by the way in which the classroom is organised in terms of its physicality, with teachers at the front standing to deliver lessons to pupils who are seated below them (Jones, 2004). The physical space of the classroom denotes a relationship of power that is hierarchically situated positioning adults and children within a binary (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Kilgore, 2004). In addition, pedagogy is widely understood as a cognitive rather than a physical event (Jones, 2004). Therefore, teaching can be construed as an ‘out of body experience’, a performance during which one might temporarily separate the private and professionally embodied selves. This makes performance, playfulness and emotion difficult to include within pedagogical practice and can be compounded by a teachers’ sense of ‘difference’ within the classroom.
Embodiment is another key issue within this thesis and engages not only with LGB teacher’s senses of ‘professional embodiment’ but also with the way in which participants understand their sexual embodiments in terms of their wider social experiences. It illustrates how LGB identities are bound up with a discourse of ‘becoming’ and posits the notion that this is a social, political and emotional process (Phelan, 1993, McInnes & Murphy, 2004). Within this matrix identity, both personal and professional can be seen as ongoing processes which demands (re)negotiation as we move through life (Beijaard et al, 2000).

The following sub-section looks at the intersections between teaching, the notion of nation-building and social justice issues within teacher education.

**Teacher education and social justice issues**

In order for teachers to reach their potential as nation builders and to successfully negotiate their personal and professional identities, it is argued that teacher education programmes must engage with social justice issues and emotionality within teaching (Banks, 2001, Britzman, 2000, Hatton & Smith, 1995, Nieto, 2000). This is the second of the key points regarding teacher identity that this thesis addresses and participants’ experiences of teacher education are put under the lens in chapter six. It is within teacher education programmes that student teachers’ dominant understandings of class, race, gender and sexuality can be challenged, thus fostering change to the way in which education privileges some and marginalises others. As Banks (2001) states in relation to teacher education and race and ethnicity issues,

> To develop clarified cultural and national identifications, teacher education students must be helped to critically analyse and rethink their notions of race, culture and ethnicity and to view themselves as cultural and racial beings (Banks, 2001, p.11).

Teacher education holds the potential for students to engage with what Deborah Britzman (2000) terms ‘difficult knowledge’ (see also Robinson, 2005); the knowledge that human life includes violence, social catastrophe and trauma, both personal and collective. It also offers student teachers the opportunity, as Banks
(2001) argues, to critically reflect upon their own social position and to challenge dominant social understandings of the way in which identity is socially and culturally understood. This is important because of the nature and history of contemporary society and the injustices that exist in terms of class, race, physical dis/ability, gender and sexuality both intra and internationally. Britzman argues that,

If teacher education is to join the world, be affected by its participation in world making and question the ‘goodness’ of its own passions, we must rethink not only past practices and what goes on under the name of professionalism, but also the very imagination it will take to exceed compliance, fear of controversy and ‘unclaimed experiences’ (ibid. p.204).

In other words if teachers are to fulfil their potential as contributors to the social and political world they must be allowed space to engage with the world outside of the classroom, to view it through a critical lens and to figure new ways of socialising pupils into it.

However as Robinson & Ferfolja (2008) argue, social justice issues are often low on the list of priorities within teacher education programmes. This can be viewed as part of the deskilling of teaching as a profession (Sachs, 2001, Skelton, 2001). Teacher education programmes at the postgraduate level within the UK are becoming increasingly short, leaving little time to tackle social justice issues. In addition, the National Curriculum and its pre-occupation with league tables and ‘failing schools’ limits the way in which teachers are able to engage with wider social justice issues within the context of their subject areas (Vulliams et al, 1997). My research engages with teacher education programmes and gives voice to participants’ experiences of them. Here we will see that there is often little space within teacher education programmes for an engagement with LGB issues and, when they are mentioned, it is often at a tokenistic level steeped in heteronormative discursive practices.

Linda Eyre argues that the call from feminists and critical theorists for a liberatory education which addresses, in a meaningful way, the intersections between race, gender and sexuality and which moves away from an education system dominated by
a predominantly white, middle class and ultimately heterosexist curriculum (Eyre, 1993) face multi-faceted opposition,

Efforts to deal with heterosexism in schooling come face to face with opposition from communities entrenched in heterosexism and accepting of homophobic violence. Social institutions such as schools, the nuclear family, the church, the medical and legal systems and the media reinforce what Helen Lenlys describes as ‘heterosexual hegemony’ – a form of hegemony kept in place through intimidation and violence (Eyre, 1993 p.275)

In order to effectively challenge the dominance of heteronormative discursive practices within schools and other key social institutions, a dialogue needs to be opened up between the social institutions referred to by Eyre. ‘Heterosexual hegemony’ can be read as the dominance and privileging of masculinity within much of social life. The way that this plays out within schools is multiple and the following sub-section offers an analysis of literature and research that engages with teaching as a gendered profession.

Teaching as a gendered profession

The third key point within the literature regarding the question of ‘who teachers are’ that is addressed within this thesis is the notion that teaching has become an increasingly classed and gendered profession. Most students entering teacher education, and therefore much of the emerging workforce are white, middle class women (Banks, 2001, Carrington & Skelton, 2003, Dillabough, 2005, Mills, 2004, Mills et al, 2004, Skelton, 2001). The notion that teaching is a ‘feminised’ occupation is a complex one. Firstly, within the liberal democratic state that characterises most Western nations, women have been historically constructed as ‘subjects rather than agents of the state’ (Dillabough, 2005 p.135). As subjects women are engaged in acts of caregiving and motherhood to the next generation of citizens (ibid.). Therefore teaching has been viewed as a ‘natural’ profession for women because it allows them to take up the role of ‘mothers of the state’. Indeed women teachers were prevented from marrying in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because it was felt
that marriage and biological motherhood would compromise this role (Cavanagh, 2007). It should also be pointed out here that teaching also offered, for some women, an escape from the pre-prescribed roles of ‘wife’ and ‘mother’ (Tamboukou, 2000).

Teaching is then the ‘traditional’ preserve of women and this has implications for the status of teaching in socio-economic terms as well as in relation to dominant understandings about masculinity and femininity (Skelton, 2001, Martino, 2008a). Primary education in particular is viewed as related to femininity and men working within the primary sector are seen as having to constantly (re)negotiate their hegemonic masculine identities (Skelton, 2001, Martino 2008b). My research engages with this notion from an LGB perspective and specifically with the experiences of two gay men who work within the primary sector. The way in which they are able to offer a different version of ‘maleness’ and to challenge pupils’ understandings about masculinity and sexuality within their professional roles sheds new light on this issue.

Secondly, the notion that teaching is female dominated has been taken up by British politicians and media who read this phenomena as a reason for boys failing within schools (Hilton, 2001, Mills et al, 2004, Skelton, 2001). There have been recent drives to recruit men into the teaching profession, particularly at the primary level despite a lack of evidence to suggest that any pupil’s achievements are harmed by being taught by white, middle class women (Carrington & Skelton, 2003).

The need for male teachers is perceived by policy makers and social commentators as being reflected by the ‘unruly’ nature of some boys in some schools. ‘Strong male role models’ are seen as necessary in order to provide disaffected working class (black) boys with both discipline and a model for educational success (Carrington & Skelton, 2003, Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010). In a study of an Australian policy document that echoes many of the sentiments raised in the UK, Mills et al (2004) argue that schools are encouraged to be more ‘male friendly’, especially primary schools. It is argued that the feminisation of schools has made them unwelcoming places for men. Women teachers are blamed for this in a backlash against feminism that implies a ‘feminist conspiracy’ against boys and men in schools (ibid.). This debate implies that ‘all girls’ are higher achievers than ‘all boys’ (ibid.) and this
ignores many of the raced, classed and sexed dimensions that can affect a child’s learning.

The drive to recruit male teachers is fraught with tensions. Firstly, the notion that schools are not ‘friendly’ places for men implies that they are friendly places for women. This notion can be countered by the argument that the ‘feminisation’ of teaching has not benefited women (Mills et al, 2004). The upper echelons of school management are still male dominated, and men in education are more likely to gain promotion earlier than are women (Mills et al 2004, Moran, 2001, Skelton, 2001). It has been argued that this constitutes a ‘glass escalator’ for men in ‘feminised’ professions like teaching (Williams, cited Mills et al, 2004).

The male primary school teacher is a particularly problematic presence. Men entering primary education, and especially those that enter at the early years stage, are placed within a professional double-bind. Policy makers want more male teachers and men entering the primary school often do so at the upper levels in order to be able to ‘discipline’ boys on the cusp of adolescence (ibid.). However, teaching younger children in the primary school is perceived as the preserve of women (Jones, 2004, King, 2004). Men who do enter teaching at the early years stage have effectively fractured the heteronormative structure of the institution. The top down management structure of schools often leads them to be analogous in structure to the heteronormative family; a male at the head to provide discipline with women providing care (Moran, 2001, Tamboukou, 2000). Men entering teaching at this early stage in children’s academic career is often viewed as feminised himself, as gay and/or, more insidiously, as a paedophile (Carrington & Skelton, 2003, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, King, 2004, Jones, 2004, Martino, 2008b). The perceived link between homosexuality and paedophilia and the view that gay men are dangerous to young children raises the spectre of the gay man as sexual predator (Califia, 1994, Carrington & Skelton, 2003, Epstein & Johnson, 1998), a phenomenon that contributes to the (re)production of the heteronormative discursive practices that dominate schools as educational institutions.

The notion that children should have ‘strong male role models’ is a challenging one and calls into question the kinds of role models that children require in order for
effective social development to take place. Carrington and Skelton (2003) pose the question as to whether or not it is possible for teachers to be role models at all. Role models in the contemporary world are often equated with personal achievement and they are famous or idolised as stars ergo extraordinary people. Most teachers are concerned with acting professionally within their jobs (ibid.) and do not see themselves as role models. As Warin et al (2006) state, ‘government, governors, parents, media, and pupils all have a view of teachers which may differ from their actual view of themselves’ (ibid. p.234). It is also questionable as to whether or not children and young people see their teachers as role models at all (Jackson, 2010). Regardless of whether children and young people regard teachers as role models it is important to further this discussion of because of the socio-political credence the notion is given, and because of the homogenised versions of identity that the discourse of teacher as role model perpetuates (ibid. Martino, 2008b, Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010).

Robinson & Ferfolja (2008) state that the idea of teachers as role models has its roots in the historical construction of teachers as ‘reflect(ing) social mores and (being) considered in loco parentis’ (ibid.). This brings us back to the notion that teachers are viewed as nation builders who are dually, with parents, responsible for the fostering of the ‘next generation’ of citizens. Boys and young men are perceived as needing male role models in the form of teachers in order to ‘learn how to be men’; rational, masculine and ultimately heterosexual. This raises questions about gender politics within education (Jackson, 2010, Martino, 2008, Warin, 2006). The call for male teachers demands that we ask what kind of man is encouraged to enter teaching. If men are needed to control ‘unruly boys’ then it is a particular kind of masculinity that is being asked for (ibid. Skelton, 2001, Martino, 2008b). Christine Skelton (2001) makes the claim that primary schools have historically equated male teachers with discipline and authority and that male teachers are more likely to:

- Have responsibility for the high status areas of curriculum such as maths and science
- Occupy central roles in the school requiring decision making
• ‘Control’ older pupils and generally maintain discipline and punishment throughout the school (Skelton, 2001, p.70).

This suggests that the kinds of male teachers required by primary schools follow Connell’s (1995) notion of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Men are required to assert discipline; to be ‘head of the household’ within schools and the top-down management structure of most schools reflects this. Connell argues that the structure of the state is patriarchal and that structurally it follows ‘the reproductive arena’ (p.73) and that this is a social, rather than biological phenomenon. In other words, the state and the social institutions it manages are socially organised around discursive practices that privilege the masculine and subordinate the feminine. This trickles down to the micro level and is evidenced by the perceived need for male teachers in disciplinary roles within primary schools as well as by the phenomenon of the ‘glass escalator’ that privileges men in education.

However female teachers also occupy a precarious position within the institution of school. Though they are not viewed with the same suspicious eyes as their male counterparts within the early years sector of education, they nonetheless have to be aware of the physical spaces between themselves and their pupils, both for their own protection and to avoid accusation of violence (Jones, 2004, see also Robinson 2000 & Tamboukou, 2000). The heterosexist discourse in education then positions women within a gender hierarchy that places them in an inferior position. This is evidenced by the previously mentioned ‘glass escalator’ which hastens the promotion of male teachers (Williams cited Mills et al, 2004), and by the number of headteachers who are men vis-à-vis the number of women who are career teachers. Researchers in the field note that the subtleties of sexism are often not picked up within the school system because they are often performed in a nuanced way that the nature of heteronormativity normalises (Carrington & Skelton, 2003, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Robinson, 2000). This research picks up on this issue and offers an analysis of it from a lesbian perspective. Lesbian teachers are often doubly subordinated within their jobs as women and as lesbians, within this paradigm lesbian teachers are often prey to the twin stigmas of both sexism and homophobia (Rich, 1984).
It is argued that schools epitomise Connell’s ‘gender regime’ and that women working in schools can face the threat of sexual harassment from boys that they teach and men that they work with (Robinson, 2000, Skelton, 2001). Mills et al (2004) argue that the drive towards an increased presence of men in schools posits gender as the only variable; gay or ethnic minority men are not targeted for recruitment which suggests that it is a white, heterosexual population of male teachers that is lacking. Mills et al (2004) make the claim that that this may lead to the reification of hegemonic male masculinity as being the most desirable form of identity for males within schools. This can see male teachers and boys using sexism as a way to assert dominance over women in schools. This notion is echoed in Robinson’s (2000) work where it is argued that the intersections between racism, sexism and homophobia in schools and the way that these issues are separated within the institution is a significant point. It should be noted here that Mills et al and Robinson write from an Australian perspective but research located within the UK has similar findings (see Skelton, 2001, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, McKenzie-Basant, 2007, Moran, 2001).

For example, in her book ‘Schooling the Boys’, Christine Skelton (2001) argues that the debate surrounding the feminisation of teaching in the UK is framed within a discourse which sees this as one of the prime reasons for boys’ underachievement. The National Curriculum is posited as favouring girls’ learning styles. However Skelton is keen to point out that many of the reasons for boys’ under achievement is not grounded in evidence, academic or otherwise. She draws upon Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity in order to assert that it is a particular type of masculinity that is played out within and required by primary schooling.

The question of ‘who teachers are’ is a difficult one to address. Teaching is a precarious profession, one under constant scrutiny from government, media and parents. To ‘be’ a teacher is to be a social actor, an agent of the state employed in order to assist with the raising of the next generation of citizens. Teaching is also a profession within which gender hierarchies act to privilege the hegemonic masculine, putting the majority of the workforce (who are not men) under the microscope as being unable to provide for the needs of boys within schools. Heteronormative discursive practices are deployed within schools as institutions and within the way in which teaching is constructed as a profession. This renders the social, cultural and
political perspective on who teachers are, or perhaps more importantly, on whom they should be, to be framed within a middle class, white and often female dimension.

The next section of this chapter looks at research in the field which explicitly engages with the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers within schools. It will also engage with the ways in which state regulation has led to a heteronormative understanding of gender and sexual identities within the institution of education.

**Section two: Is the classroom a closet for LGB teachers?: sexuality and schooling**

This section engages with the key issues within the literature surrounding sexuality and schooling and specifically with the ability of LGB teachers to negotiate the boundaries between their personal and professional lives. Firstly, it offers a brief overview of the way in which socio-political institutions posit sexuality as a fixed and essential component of the lives of citizens as well as the regulatory practices which are a result of this positioning. As much work on sexuality and schooling within the UK took place before the repeal of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1986, an analysis of the Clause is offered as well as an exposition of some of the literature which offered a critical analysis of it.

Research that has been carried out upon the experiences of LGB teachers raises several key points that are furthered by this research. Firstly, there is the silencing of non-heterosexual identities and its exclusion from inclusion policies within schools (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Ferfolja, 2009). Secondly research demonstrates that the private/professional worlds of LGB teachers are often fractured and that this, coupled with the silencing of non-heterosexual identities within schools, leads to LGB teachers becoming isolated within their workplaces (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Endo et al, 2010, Ferfolja, 2009, McKenzie-Bassant, 2007). It is within this context that decisions around coming out become important (Ferfolja, 2009). These issues are expounded throughout this section of the chapter.

In addition, this section also introduces research in the field that illustrates the way in which heteronormative discursive practices impact upon the lives of LGB teachers
and the extent to which they are able to come out within the workplace. The section is therefore split into two sub-sections entitled ‘Regulating sexuality in education’ and ‘How is heteronormativity (re)produced within schools?’

Regulating sexuality in education


It has been posited by researchers, both within the UK and internationally, that public and political debates often discuss homo and heterosexualities within essentialist frameworks that dichotomise sexual identity and posit them as fixed sexual behaviours that emerge during a specific lifestage, usually understood to be adolescence. As such, they are subject to regulation by the state. Matthew Waites (2003) argues that,

The persistence in public debates of an emphasis upon the establishment of a fixed sexual identity in childhood suggests the persistence of homogenising and dichotomised understandings of homosexuality and heterosexuality (p.651).

I demonstrated in the previous section that the state can be seen as an institution that organises its citizens within a heteronormative framework that places gender identities
within a binary and is hierarchically situated to privilege the masculine within socio-political institutions (Connell, 1995). Waites, in the above statement, illustrates how the state organises sexuality in much the same way to privilege heterosexuality. Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1986 is an example of the state regulation of sexuality within education and with how the state has historically intervened in the delivery of sex and relationship education within schools.

Introduced by the Thatcher administration in 1986, Section 28 was partly a reaction to the contemporary public panic over the AIDS crisis, and the tabloid ergo public opinion that it was ‘the gay plague’ (Jeffrey-Poulter, 1991). AIDS was seen as a disease that was bought in to the ‘normal’ heterosexual world by sexual ‘foreigners’ (Smith, 1997). Section 28 was a way of ensuring that homosexuality was off the agenda as far as sex education was concerned. The clause stated that a local authority could not,

- intentionally promote homosexuality or public material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
- promote the teaching in any maintained school the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

Semantically Section 28 acted to reify the notion that the only ‘true’ family form is heterosexual. This denigrated same sex relationships and rendered them invisible within the minds of many educators (Bell & Crumper, 2003). In addition it prevented the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality within local authorities and the schools under their jurisdiction. The implication here was that knowledge of homosexuality was perceived as dangerous to children and young people, that it is a corrupting influence and something that children are in need of protection from (ibid., DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Epstein, 1997, Moran, 2001.).

Though it applied to local authorities and not directly to schools, teaching staff felt that it prohibited them from having a dialogue with students about homosexuality. This led to many young gay people growing up feeling isolated and unable to talk about their sexuality and to gay teaching staff feeling marginalized within their place
of work (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). In 2003, and after much political lobbying from LGB rights groups, Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1986 was repealed.

Research into sexualities and schooling written before the repeal of Section 28 was largely critical of it as a symbolic piece of legislation which reflected social, political and legal disapproval of homosexuality and which itself, as a piece of legislation, (re)produced social and sexual inequalities (Bell & Crumper, 2003, Epstein, 2000, Moran, 2001).

The pedagogical effect of Section 28 was that it restricted the content of sex education lessons to that which covered the biological ‘facts of life’ and limited the discussion of sex within schools to heterosexual relationships. In a piece of research carried out before the introduction of Section 28, Lisa Allen (1987) states that while parents were calling for tougher restrictions to sex education classes and the right to withdraw their children from them, teaching staff felt a need to turn away from the ‘biological approach’ to sex education and instead to place more stress upon relationships and personal development (Allen, 1987). Section 28 acted to take the decision on lesson content away from teachers and instead place it in the hands of local authorities (Moran, 2001). This led to teachers feeling unable to address non-heterosexual relationships within the context of sex education and also to teachers feeling unsure of how to tackle homophobic bullying (ibid. Bell & Crumper, 2003, Chambers et al, 2004, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Lewis & Knijn, 2002).

The SRE guidelines for schools in the UK have not been revised since 2000, before the repeal of Section 28. Although they generally provide a framework for tolerance of sexual difference within schools, the language used within them is reminiscent of Section 28,

It is up to schools to make sure that the needs of all pupils are met in their programmes. Young people, whatever their developing sexuality, need to feel that sex and relationship education is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs […] teachers should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions
and offer support. *There should be no direct promotion of sexual orientation* (DfEE, 2000, p.13, emphasis added).

The statement that there should be ‘no direct promotion of sexual orientation’ is problematic. On one hand, the guidelines state that teachers should be able to deal with pupils’ questions about sexuality and relationships, and they do not state that any particular sexual orientation is preferable within this discourse. However that this sentence is included in a section that discusses sexual orientation implies that the guidelines are mindful of Section 28 and its emphasis upon the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality. That the guidelines have not been updated since the repeal of the clause coupled with the fact that PSHE, where much SRE that discusses sexuality outside of a biological framework is delivered, is not currently part of the statutory curriculum in British schools highlights the fact that it is up to each individual school management team to decide the content and scope of SRE. Therefore, if schools do not wish to discuss SRE in terms of sexual relationships and non-heterosexualities, they do not have to and so the ways in which pupils’ questions about sex and sexuality can be answered is variable. This issue was picked up by Emma Renold (2005) and in her analysis of the SRE guidelines she argues that non-heterosexualities are invisible within them, thus rendering them guidelines for how to deliver heterosexual sex and relationship education.

The debate provoked by Section 28 and SRE/PSHE provision raises the issue of the physical domains of sexuality and the professional/private dichotomy of the work place. Though feminism put the personal on the political map, there still exists a binary social categorisation of the professional and private spheres. Sexuality overlaps these spheres because although it is seen as belonging to the private realm, public institutions such as schools do much work on the (re)production of sexual identities (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Paechter, 2007, Renold, 2003, 2005) and on policing (in)appropriate acts of sexual expression. Conrad and Crawford (1998) take the position that,

To add something to the basic feminist tenet, the personal is not only the political, it is also the pedagogical. In other words, who we are is a question of what we do (ibid. p.159).
Here, the professional is viewed as intersecting with the personal; they are not mutually exclusive categories, rather interwoven tenets of identity. Because non-heterosexual identities are marginalised within schools through the deployment of heteronormative discursive practices, the outwardly projected sexuality of a teacher becomes important because of the way in which schools act to enshrine heterosexuality as the ‘preferred outcome’ for its pupils and staff (Dunne, 1997, McKenzie-Bassant, 2007). This places staff members who do not fit into this heteronormative paradigm under particular pressure which may include making a decision about disclosure or having to deliberately hide their sexualities from staff and pupils (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Endo et al, 2010, Ferfolja, 1998, 2009, Lehtonen, 2004, Nixon & Givens, 2002, Russ et al, 2002).

My research continues to engage with the notion that the negotiation between professional and private worlds is particularly tricky for LGB teachers. It illustrates the tensions that this can cause for LGB educators in terms of being able to challenge homophobia within their workplace. Although all teachers, to some extent, have to negotiate their personal and professional selves within their jobs, for LGB teachers this can be particularly problematic,

Due to their positioning as heterosexuals their experience of this private/public split differ dramatically from [LGB] teachers. Equally the consequences […] of not rigorously maintaining this split are very different for lesbian and gay teachers when compared to their heterosexual colleagues […] while the public/private split offers a form of protection against discrimination it also obscures the inequities experienced by [LGB] teachers in the public sphere of the school (Sparkes, 1994, p.110, emphasis original).

Sparkes’ assertion that the public/private split may simultaneously offer a form of protection to LGB educators as well as obscuring the sexual inequalities espoused by schools brings into focus the spectre of the closet and its confessional accompaniment, coming out.
So what does it mean for an LGB teacher to come out? It can be argued that non-
disclosure on the part of both heterosexual and LGB teachers can disrupt students’
assumptions about homosexuality and heterosexuality, however this is only the case if
students are made aware that this is an active choice by the teacher in question
(Conrad & Crawford, 1998). The decision about whether or not an LGB educator
should come out to pupils is one that is often fraught with tensions about being a good
role model, hiding an important part of one’s identity and making visible non-
heterosexual identities within the context of school (Epstein & Johnson, 1998,
Lehtonen, 2004, Nixon & Givens, 2002, Russ et al, 2002). There is also the notion
that was introduced within the previous chapter that coming out at all is precarious
because of the way in which doing so aligns the speaker with predetermined,
hierarchically situated and power-ridden identity categories (Butler, 1990).

Coming out within the workplace is however a consideration for many LGB people
regardless of their profession and there are many factors that influence this choice.
Firstly, workplace relationships are often built around the knowledge of colleagues’
private lives and discussions during down time are frequently based around social
activities and relationships conducted within the private sphere (Day & Schoenrade,
people feel that they cannot disclose details of their private lives through fear of
intolerance or homophobia, then engaging with colleagues during these social
situations can be difficult. Research has shown that LGB people tend to share less
private details with their colleagues than do their heterosexual counterparts
(Lehtonen, 2004). Day et al (1997) found that LGB people often decide to come out
because hiding their sexual orientation at work can be too emotionally costly. The
decision to come out, they argue, is often a deliberate choice and one that is made
after careful assessment of the context within which the LGB person in question is
employed.

Furthermore, coming out is posited theoretically as a performance riddled with
2005). Eve Sedgwick (1990) makes the claim that one can never truly be in the closet
because we can never be sure about who has knowledge about our sexualities. Within
this paradigm, one can never be completely ‘out’ either because each new social
situation demands for an LGB person, a consideration of one’s own and other people’s knowledge of one’s own, and other people’s sexuality. The decision to come out can then dominate the minds of LGB people and being in the closet within differing social and institutional contexts can involve a complex web of gender neutral speech acts, secretiveness or attempting to ‘pass’ as heterosexual (Ward & Winstanley, 2005).

Ward and Winstanley (2005) follow Butler’s (1990) argument that coming out is a performative act because it positions discourse as social practice. In other words LGB identities speak themselves into existence, and this arguably aligns them with predetermined, hierarchically situated and power-ridden identity categories, through the speech act of coming out,

Talk becomes action. It is in the repetitive nature of this action that the practice becomes performative, as in every new situation and faced with new contacts, the coming out process has to be repeated. By studying this repetitive action, expressed as social practice, the researcher is able to identify means through which discourse produces its effects (Ward & Winstanley, 2005).

Heteronormative discursive practices are therefore able to be identified by the researcher when offering an analysis of LGB people’s coming out processes. This thesis furthers this research through its engagement with LGB teachers’ experiences of coming out within both private and professional contexts and with what this means in terms of the reification through repeated performance of their private and professional identities. The way in which the heteronormative discursive practices that operate within schools impact upon participants’ abilities to come out will also be exposed.

The closet is one of the mechanisms through which heteronormativity (re)produces itself within social, cultural and political spaces. The following sub-section furthers this discussion by offering an exposition of the way in which researchers in the field have argued that heteronormative discursive practices are (re)produced within schools.
How is heteronormativity (re)produced within schools?

Researchers in the field have illustrated the ways in which the discourse of heteronormativity continues to dominate key social institutions such as schools. For example Tania Ferfolja (1998) argues that the inequalities (re)produced by heteronormativity makes teaching a difficult career for LGB people. She maintains that the presence of LGB teachers acts to disrupt the carefully constructed heterosexist nature of schools and that this is the reason for much of the hostility displayed towards LGB teachers from colleagues and pupils. She argues that,

> Homosexual teachers feel more vulnerable than their heterosexual colleagues because their stigmatised lifestyle does not represent the heterosexist societal norm. The heterosexist norms and hegemonic male power of the dominant culture are carefully guarded and perpetuated. Harassment and abuse is a method of attempting to impose and maintain traditional social structures and gender norms (Ferfolja, 1998, p.407).

The consequences of working in an environment which marginalises a teachers’ sexuality and that can include harassment and homophobic abuse is stress, anxiety and depression (Robinson et al 2004). Heather Sykes (2004) argues that LGB teachers are in a unique position to understand and tackle homophobia within school if they wish because of their own experiences of intolerance and homophobia.

However a teacher’s homosexuality can be a barrier rather than a facilitator to discussion because of real or perceived homophobia within individual schools and the school system (Ali, 1996, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Sykes, 2004). The relationship between teacher and pupil is one of power (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Conrad & Crawford, 1998). This relationship of power is fragile, and can be reversed by signs of vulnerability in staff. ‘Gay’ is used as a pejorative by many children to describe something that doesn’t work properly or isn’t ‘cool’. This suggests that if children believe that ‘gay’ is uncool, puny and distasteful, then any staff member who declares him/herself as such is vulnerable to abuse. As stated in the previous chapter, this thesis engages with a debate that is concerned with the positioning of ‘gay’ as always
harmful, (Thurlow, 2001, Rasmussen, 2004) however here it is noteworthy to state that the classroom can become an intimidating place in the face of such prejudicial language use and that it is evidenced that this can be felt both by staff and pupils. Lesbian and gay teachers, argues Sedgwick are particularly vulnerable to injury,

The space for simply existing as a gay person who is a teacher is in fact bayoneted through and through, from both sides, by the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden (Sedgwick, 1990 p.70).

There is then a dualism operating within schools in terms of the sexuality of its teaching staff. On one hand teachers themselves may feel under pressure to come out in order to challenge homophobia and other heteronormative discursive practices or because being in the closet it too emotionally costly. On the other hand there is often little space within school to discuss non-heterosexual identities rendering them silenced and/or invisible.

Foucault (1976) argued that there are no ‘sexual inner beings’, drives or identities. What we have are cultural discourses that shape the way in which sexuality is conceived of, understood and performed (Berggren, 2004). Within this paradigm, sexualities are relationships of power rather than simply relationships of sex. Power is mobilised through discourse into lives, simultaneously creating and denying human possibilities (Plummer, 1995). Foucault saw this as compounded by the act of confession. He argued that attention needs to be paid to the historical moment at which we perceive the need to confess as well as with to whom. We confess our secret sexual selves to the Church, the state and in the contemporary world to the media. We are tied to our roles of confessor or interlocutor and to the ‘truths’ that such roles produce about sex and to the way in which these truths work to regulate our sexualities (Foucault, 1976). Coming out, the choice to declare oneself as lesbian, gay or bisexual is such an act. This is an acute pressure for teachers who work within a social institution that (re)produces the discourse of heteronormativity.

The presence of sexuality within schools is also one which ties in to the notion of citizenship and national identity (Chambers et al, 2004, Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Epstein & Johnson argue that ‘schooling is about forming the nation of the future’
(Epstein & Johnson, 1998 p.28). In the UK, this is framed within a liberal governance model which promotes the perceived importance of ‘individual rights’, hence the content of sex education is organised by the management team of each individual school. Chambers et al (2004) see this as problematic because,

The discourse of liberal individualism suffers from an inherent arbitrariness about what is being prioritized as a problem. Teachers’ views and actions endorse a culture of heterosexual male entitlement that stigmatizes girls and gay pupils, vindicated by the lack of clear policy to challenge this culture (ibid. p.573).

This illustrates the moral framework that underpins discussions of sexuality in British schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Lewis & Knijn, 2002). This is illustrated by the moral panic that surrounds sexually active girls as potential single mothers who produce ‘dangerous’ male offspring with no male role model (Chambers et al, 2004). Research has shown that where there is a social approach to sex and relationship education, with respect for ‘other’ identities as being part of a persons role as a citizen, for example in the Netherlands, not only is there less homophobic bullying but young people become sexually active at a later age than they do in the UK (see Lewis & Knijn, 2002 & Spencer et al, 2008).

The literature concerning teaching and pedagogy is concerned with the way in which gender, class, race and sexuality intersect within teachers’ worlds. The silencing of homosexuality from and the regulation of sex education within the British context illustrated some of the ways in which heteronormativity is (re)produced. The way in which male teachers are deemed necessary for discipline and simultaneously potential danger to children if working in early years adds further weight to this argument. The precarious position of women in teaching furthers the discussion; that women are denied promotion by a ‘glass escalator’ (Williams cited Mills et al, 2004) that privileges men and the subtle ways in which sexism is deployed illustrate the ways in which the gender binary generated by heteronormativity is (re)produced. Finally the pressure under which LGB teaching staff are placed by the fear of or actual homophobic harassment and abuse reflects the ways in which deviations from the
hegemonic heteronormative model preferred by social institutions such as schools are regulated and policed.

The final section of this chapter offers an exposition of research carried out with children and young people regarding sexuality and learning environments.

**Section three: What about the kids?: Pupils and learning environments**

There is a historically situated discourse that facilitates a social and political belief that children are innocent and in need of protection from sex and sexuality until they have reached the point at which they are able to make reasoned decisions, i.e. the age of consent. Until the eighteenth century childhood was not understood as a fixed life stage (Aries, 1960, Davin, 1999, Renold, 2005), only children of the wealthy experienced a childhood now understood to be ‘normal’. Poor children were expected to work to support the family, and it was socially acceptable for all children to marry, thus procreate, at fourteen (Davin, 1999).

The Industrial Revolution precipitated changes in the nature and organization of work and concentrated populations into towns and cities. This in turn intensified paid labour and social differentiation, whether by class, employment, social group, gender or age (ibid., D’Emilio, 1999, Foucault, 1976, Jones, 2004, Moran 2001). From the nineteenth century onwards there has been an increasing emphasis placed upon the value of childhood and an urgent need to prevent children from accessing the sexual, especially the ‘corrupting influence’ of the homosexual (Califia, 1994). It was also at this time that the category of ‘adolescent’, a life stage between child and adulthood, and the regulatory institution of school emerged (Epstein & Johnson, 1998).

The sexuality and sexual behaviours of young people is a concern of government. In 2003 the age of consent for gay men was lowered to match that of consensual heterosexual sex which was fixed at 16 in 1885 (Weeks, 1977). Great Britain today has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies in Europe. In addition sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS are on the increase amongst the young (The Guardian 14/11/04). Although, as expounded earlier in the chapter, sex and
relationship education is compulsory in all schools in the form of human reproduction lessons in biology, Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) is currently not statutory and it is up to the senior staff team and the governors of each school to decide the content and frequency of such lessons. The reasons for this are quoted as being social and religious but it is arguable that part of the reluctance to provide a curriculum for sex education comes from an innate desire to protect the fantasy of the innocent child in need of defence from the corrupting influence of sex (Moran, 2001, Renold, 2003, 2005).

The SRE guidelines published in 2000 state that,

The teaching of some aspects of sex and relationship education might be of concern to teachers and parents. Sensitive issues should be covered by the school’s policy and in consultation with parents. Schools of a particular religious ethos may choose to reflect that in their sex and relationship education policy (DfEE, 2000, p.8).

As with the statement about schools not ‘promoting sexual orientation’, the guidelines are not explicit about what ‘sensitive issues’ should be co-ordinated with parents. Schools can therefore decide upon the issues that are unsuitable for their classrooms and their community context. This research explores this issue and illustrates the way in which non-heterosexualities are often marginalised or ignored by the SRE provision in participant’s schools.

Sex education within the science curriculum covers the biological facts of human and animal (heterosexual) reproduction. Many pupils do not receive PSHE, which covers issues such as sexually transmitted diseases and contraception, until they are in their mid teens. When they do receive such education, girls are often taught how to say “no” to the advances of boys, who are framed as having uncontrollable sexual desires (Chambers et al, 2004, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Hilton, 2001, Lewis & Knijn, 2002, Rich, 1984). Non-heterosexual desires are rarely broached; heterosexuality is, for pupils, a desirable and preferred component of their development.
Section 28 was a symbol of sexual conservatism, however its repeal has not been accompanied by developments in SRE that means that homosexuality is on the school agenda. LGB teaching staff still feel excluded and isolated from other staff members because of homophobic attitudes within the school system. In addition, research has shown the lasting psychological damage that can be done to young people who grow up gay and experience violence and hostility from family and peers because of homophobia (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Sedgwick, 1994, Rivers & Carragher, 2003, Thurlow, 2001).

Within schools homophobia, sexism and the dominance of hegemonic masculinity operate to (re)produce a heteronormative discourse that marginalises non-heterosexual gender and sexual identities within the institution. The word ‘gay’ is used by children to describe things that they deem to be uncool, puny or distasteful, including each other. This can lead to an internalisation of the view that to be ‘gay’ is to be all of those things, and this can be damaging to the mental health of young people growing up with feelings of attraction to their own gender (Rivers & Carragher, 2003, Richardson & May 1999, Thurlow, 2001, Valentine et al 2001).

Sticks and stones may be more likely to break their bones but the relentless, careless use of homophobic pejoratives will most certainly continue to compromise the psychological health of young homosexual and bisexual people by insidiously constructing their sexuality as something wrong, dangerous or shambeworthy (Thurlow, 2001, p.36).

Research has shown that it is predominantly boys in schools who use homophobic and sexist pejoratives in their daily interactions, using them as a way to assert dominance over women and girls and other boys who do not conform to the rules of hegemonic masculinity (Chambers et al 2004, Ferfolja, 1998, Paechter, 2007, Renold, 2003, Renold, 2005). Epstein (1997) argues that it is against the identification of gendered behaviour that deviates from the hetero-masculine norm that most boys seek to define their identities. It is in this way that the binary identity categories resulting from sexist and homophobic parameters of heteronormativity within schools are (re)produced. Youdell (2004) argues that the enforced identity categories (re)produced within this heteronormative matrix actively constitute our subjectivities,
Identity categories, including those of gender and sexuality, constitute subjects. These categorical names are central to the performative interpellation of the subject who is unintelligible, if not unimaginable, without these (Youdell, 2004, p. 481, emphasis original).

This reinforces Epstein’s (1997) argument that boys define their identities through recognition of what it is not to conform to the dominant heterosexual norm and this raises again the notion that identity is a relational phenomenon.

This thesis offers an analysis of the way in which the word ‘gay’ is used within schools and approaches this from the perspective of LGB teachers. Their ability to challenge homophobia within their workplaces is put under the lens as well an analysis of how LGB teachers understand the use of the word ‘gay’. Language use is important in school ground politics (Plummer, 2001, Thurlow, 2001) and to the construction of (un)desirable identities. Like racism, homophobia acts to construct an undesirable other through signifiers that are written on the body and it is often gender-norm subversion that can render a subject prey to homophobia (Adam, 1998, Rasmussen, 2004). However homophobia also transgresses the body and can be applied to boys in schools who achieve well academically or are well behaved (Plummer, 2001). Within this research I offer an analysis of this phenomenon and ask participants who they understand pupils labelled as gay are in terms of their gendered and sexual identities to be.

This is important because there is an argument that sees the use of the word ‘gay’ and its application to inanimate objects as being more complex than homophobia. Children use language in particular ways, to learn how to interact and as a tool to bind themselves together against the authority of the institution of schools, parents and the adult world (Thurlow, 2001). The use of the word ‘gay’ as a pejorative may not be directly connected to the speakers views on homosexuality; it can be seen as a word en vogue with children and young people (ibid.). Gay can also be used self-referentially or with irony in the same way that some formerly racist labels have been taken up by members of ethnic minority communities (Rasmussen, 2004). Within this paradigm, the way in which ‘gay’ is used can be understood as having multiple
meanings and this has important implications for the way in which it can be engaged with within educational settings,

Multiple readings of the term might provide the basis of a pedagogical strategy that engages students in conversations about how their understandings of people and objects are formed through language. This might prove more fruitful than efforts to stamp out the [use of the word gay] through punishment or educational strategies which insist that the phrase be read as homophobic (Rasmussen, 2004, p.304).

In other words, if teachers engage with students on a meaningful level that moves beyond putative measures against the use of homophobic pejoratives and asks them what they mean and understand when they use the word ‘gay’, deeper understandings of the way in which language is used to construct the other might be gleaned. This thesis engages with this notion and offers an analysis of the different strategies employed by LGB teachers to challenge the use of homophobic pejoratives. It also looks at the evolution of playground pejoratives and the linguistic structures that are in place to keep binary understandings about gender, sexuality, physical ability and ethnicity in place.

Research shows that the use of homophobic pejoratives is widespread in British schools and in young people’s experiences of bullying and growing up with an LGB identity (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Gray, 2007, McKenzie-Basant, 2007, Thurlow, 2001), it has also been documented that such abusive naming practices are not necessarily regarded as being offensive (Thurlow, 2001). The ‘Stand up for us’ guidelines published by the DfES in 2004 allude to the fact that homophobic name-calling is offensive and dangerous to the mental health of young people who are labelled as such, however as these guidelines are not a compulsory component of schools’ anti-bullying procedures the situation remains unchanged, leaving queer and LGB youth in a vulnerable position (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Mutchler, 2002, Valentine et al, 2001).

Much research has focused on the secondary school as the space where pupils become sexualised, sexual identities formed and where positive dialogue about these matters
becomes vital (Lewis & Knjijn, 2002, Sykes, 2004, Waites, 2003). However recent work by Emma Renold (2003, 2005) shows that the primary school is not an ‘asexual space’, rather it is where pupils begin to recognise and develop their sense of ‘the normal’ (ibid.). Until the oppositional binaries that are so carefully held in place by heteronormativity and that police the behaviour of queer persons within the institution of school begin to be dismantled at the micro level, the legacy of successive queer generations will remain characterised by fear, isolation and abuse (Gray, 2007).

As previously stated, most previous research on homophobia within schools has focused on students, literature explicitly concerning the experience of queer teachers is lacking, and therefore this research will make a useful contribution to the field.

**Summary**

This chapter aimed to offer an overview of research carried out on several areas of teaching, education and sexuality. These areas constitute some of the key themes within this research and also acted as a starting place for my own engagement with and analysis of LGB teachers’ experiences.

Firstly the chapter offered an exposition of the notion of the teacher as being socially and historically situated as a nation builder charged with the moral education of the next generation of national citizens. Within this paradigm teacher identity is understood as a relational phenomenon that is influenced by a multiplicity of factors, such as the community within which a school is situated as well as macro factors such as policy interventions. It is through the intersections between these factors that the desirable teacher is constructed and positioned as white, middle class and female.

The tensions inherent in the constitution of the desirable teacher were expounded within this chapter’s engagement with teaching as a gendered profession. Here, the notion that teaching is a ‘feminized’ profession was introduced as well as the seemingly contradictory drive to recruit more male teachers, particularly at the primary level. The importance of a gender performance that is hegemonically masculine was illustrated here as well as the notion that if a male teacher does not
follow the expected gendered script within his professional life, he may be construed as gay and/or paedophile. The gendered expectations of teachers and the teaching profession were illustrated as one of the mechanisms through which heteronormative discursive practices are (re)produced within schools.

This chapter also picked up on the notion of embodiment and the ways in which teaching has been constituted as an embodied performance. This is however problematic because of the way in which macro policy interventions within the UK have increased the pressure on schools to perform well academically, leading to a ‘testing culture’ which sidelines the more emotional aspects of learning. Here, it was argued that diversity and social justice education is often low on the list of priorities within schools. The trend for the lowly position of social justice issues within educational institutions and within the professional mindsets of teachers was shown to begin within teacher education programmes where there is often little time, or inclination, to address diversity issues within their curricular.

In order to situate the above debates within the context of this thesis, this chapter also offered a review of research carried out both within the UK and internationally, on the experiences of LGB teachers. Here, a paucity of literature was highlighted, meaning that this research has an important contribution to make to the field. The way in which sexuality has been posited within British schools by policy makers is as an essential, fixed and binary category of identity. Research in the field has contested this and argued instead that the way in which sexuality is understood at the macro level filters down to the micro ergo heteronormativity is (re)produced within schools and this impacts upon LGB people working and studying within the institution. Section 28 and its legacy were touched upon within this chapter and this symbolic piece of legislation was exposed as a political tool with which to regulate the way in which sexuality was framed within schools.

Coming out is one of the key issues within this research and this chapter engaged with the notion of coming out at work and the impact this has upon LGB teachers. Again, the closet and its sibling coming out were seen to be tools of heteronormativity because of the way in which coming out involves speaking oneself into a pre-determined, hierarchically dichotomised and power ridden category of identity. The
way in which hierarchically dichotomised identity categories play out within educational contexts was exposed by the chapter’s engagement with ‘gay’ as pejorative and its deployment by pupils and young people.

Finally this chapter offered a brief overview of the literature concerning sexuality, schooling and young people. Within much of this research, ‘gay’ is read as a pejorative that can cause harm to children and young people with feelings of attraction towards members of the same sex. Researchers in the field have argued that the use of the word ‘gay’ as well as pejoratives that refer to one’s gender, ethnicity or physical ability act to constitute the normative subject within the playground and therefore (re)produces heteronormativity. This research enters the debate and engages with participants’ understandings of what ‘gay’ means and with how it is deployed and understood by their pupils.

The following chapter offers an exposition of the methodological framework which underpins the thesis as well as the methods I deployed in data collection and analysis.
Chapter Three

Methodological Framework

Introduction

This thesis explores the notion that schools as institutions continue to be dominated by a heteronormative discourse that regulates the sexual and gender identities of staff and pupils through a set of minoritising discursive practices. The research offers an analysis of the ways in which lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers negotiate their gender and sexual identities within their professional lives as educators and the way in which this impacts upon their subjective understandings of their lives. A theoretical framework inspired by queer theory and poststructuralist feminism narrates these issues. This approach facilitates a thorough analysis of interview data because of the way in which it encourages an engagement with the social, cultural, aesthetic and linguistic signifiers that influence how we construct our identities. I designed a two-tier methodological framework which has allowed me to work with the participants to unravel the meaning of their stories.

It is posited here that there is often little space within schools for LGB teachers to articulate the complexities of existing as a lesbian, gay or bisexual person because such identities can be ignored, misunderstood and/or scandalised by other staff and/or pupils. LGB identities can therefore constitute an ‘invisible presence’ within schools. They are invisible in the sense that LGB issues are, as demonstrated within this thesis, often only raised reactively and within the context of bullying. Schools that do engage with LGB issues frame them as something that exists ‘outside’ of the school community. However non-heterosexual identities are nonetheless present within schools, and were evidenced by participants through pupils identifying as LGB as well as by their own presence within the workplace. That LGB identities are an ‘invisible presence’ within schools acts as contrast to the lives that LGB teachers live outside of their profession where social networks of resistance, understanding and pride are often in place. Therefore the way in which some of the LGB teachers interviewed were able to resist the heteronormative discourse and to challenge the
discursive production of the heterosexual/homosexual binary within school is explored within this thesis.

In common with poststructuralist feminist epistemologies, I reject the notion of the meta-narrative, of there being a single, overarching ‘truth’ to explain particular social phenomena. I reject this notion because, like many poststructuralist feminist and queer researchers, I understand this way of thinking as reflecting the detached, objective and hierarchically organised view of the social world that has been (re)produced by the twin discursive structures of patriarchy and heteronormativity (Adams St. Pierre, 2000, Code, 1995, Reinharz, 1992).

Feminist theory and research offers a sustained challenge to the dominant epistemologies of modernity which privilege rationality, objectivity and neutrality within social science research (Code, 1995). Feminist researchers have posited the notion that the purpose of research should not be to collect knowledge for its own sake based on objective, scientifically obtained facts. Rather, feminist research takes the analysis of the subjective experiences of participants as a means to raise consciousness or to challenge the socio-political status quo. This is achieved through a loudening of the silences surrounding women’s experiences and an exposition of the power structures that subordinate women in society. Clare Hemmings states that,

In a feminist context, which stories predominate or are precluded or marginalised is always a question of power and authority (2005, p118)

This research then seeks out the stories that predominate the lives of its participants. It offers an analysis of the stories they tell and when. It is also concerned with the manner in which the stories are told; with how participants narrate their lives and the meaning they obtain through this in terms of their subjective and collective understandings of the worlds that they inhabit.

This chapter is split into seven sections, each corresponding to a phase of the research process. Section one, ‘A poststructuralist feminist/queer framework for research’ expounds my reasons for deploying a poststructuralist feminist/queer framework for data analysis. It states the way in which I negotiate theories which have been subject
to criticism for reducing the lived to the textual and how I am able to relate participants’ lived experiences to these theoretical tenets. Section two, ‘Queer/feminist tools for enquiry’ reveals the methodological tools that are facilitated by a poststructuralist feminist/queer approach to data analysis. Section three, ‘Methods’, introduces the reader to the two-tier methodological framework I employed to the data collection process. Section four, ‘The sample’, demonstrates the changes to participant numbers that came about as a result of reflection during the early stages of the project. I also introduce the reader to the participants whose voices are heard throughout the thesis. Section five, ‘Pilot interviews’, charts the development of first interview schedule from pilot to schedule proper. Section six, ‘Interviews’, gives an account of the interview process and final, section seven, ‘Analysis’, offers an exposition of the analysis process and the reasons for choosing to analyse the data as I did.

Section one: A poststructuralist feminist/queer framework for research

Queer theorists and researchers have argued that sexuality has been omitted from much social science because of the assumption that sexual orientation is an innate or essential human quality (Hammers & Brown III, 2004, Seidman, 1996). Sexual diversity had been a silence even within much feminism until the late nineteen seventies/early nineteen eighties. Feminist analyses of the sex/gender divide are seen, by some queer commentators, as being too reductive, as leaving a biologically differentiated sex intact and introducing the notion of a mind/body split (Francis, 1999, Ingraham, 1996, Martin, 1998). Judith Butler challenges this notion by asserting that ‘sex was gender all along’ (Butler, cited Prosser, 1998), in other words that the biological differences of sex and the social categories of gender are both socially constructed and culturally mediated. Butler argues that,

Whether gender or sex is fixed or free is a function of a discourse which […] seeks to set out certain limits to analysis or to safeguard certain tenets of humanism as presuppositional to any analysis of gender (Butler, 1990, p13).
The feminist analysis of ‘women’ as socially gendered but biologically sexed beings, can, in light of Butler’s comment, be understood as discursively situated. Women came to be seen through the feminist lens as a unified and coherent group, effectively bypassing the cultural, political, social and economic intersections within which ‘the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed’ (Butler, 1990, p.20). Heterosexuality is inscribed upon the sexed body and the innate nature of this heterosexualised body had been a silent presence, both within feminist and social science research as a whole. Queer theory works to put sexual difference at the centre of inquiry and posits that a loudening of the silences within sexual social life illustrates the fragility of the social binaries that heteronormativity relies upon for its (re)production. Indeed Prosser argues that in ‘Gender Trouble’ Butler,

In analysing the way in which the sex/gender system is constructed through the naturalisation of heterosexuality and vice versa, ‘Gender Trouble’ performed its work in an interstitial space between feminism and lesbian and gay studies, producing a new methodological genre [...] queer feminism (1998, p.59).

Queer theory asserts that the existence of the closet, the act of coming out and the self-affirmation of a particular identity are not necessarily liberating and view them instead as contributing to disciplinary and regulatory structures (Seidman, 1996). Butler in particular asserts the notion that categories of sexual identity are,

Instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression (Butler, 1991, p.575).

However, Butler’s, and much queer theory in general has come under fire from social scientists who see it as rarely moving outside of the textual realm ergo ignoring the lived experiences of people (Stein & Plummer 1996). I am wary of labelling LGB lives as queer because ‘queer’ can mean many things; it is analytical category, a political statement and a term of abuse (Berlant & Warner, 1995). In its crudest form ‘queer’ can become just another identity category, the very thing that, as an analytical tool, it wishes to challenge and disrupt. There is also a danger in labelling LGB
people as queer, many of my participants strongly identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual and talked about their politics, rather than their embodied sexualities, as being queer. Therefore, although I deploy queer as an analytical tool, when discussing participants’ experiences I will use the language that they used when referring to their sexual orientation within my analysis.

This research asserts the notion that although it is vital to continue queer theory’s project of opening up identity categories as contestable sites of knowledge, politics and meaning (Seidman, 1996), it is also important to acknowledge the roles that identity categories play in the lives of my participants. Many participants found a sense of belonging, equilibrium, pride and happiness in identifying themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual and although this research seeks to expose the social forces that construct LGB identities in this way, it does not wish to erase identity categories or to render them meaningless. This is because I take the position that binaries still dominate our social lives and impact upon the way in which people existing outside of the heteronormative order understand the world. To reduce the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people living in the world to the textual, as much poststructuralist feminist/queer work seeks to, is to miss the richness of the difference that queer should celebrate. As Martin states,

Too thorough an evacuation of interiority, too total a collapse of the boundaries between public and private, and too exclusive an understanding of psychic life as the effect of normalization can impoverish the language we have available for thinking about selves and relationships, even as they apparently enrich our vocabularies for thinking about social construction (Martin, 1996, p.74)

Queer identities as expounded by queer theorists Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick are fluid, playful, performative and fun (Martin, cited Prosser, 1998). However Prosser expresses concern that, within this paradigm, gender is ‘collapsed back into sexuality’ (ibid. p.31) and therefore gender identity is read through the lens of sexuality. The link between the two, Prosser feels is debatable. Prosser writes from a transgender perspective and argues that Butler’s, and by association, much of queer theory’s, appropriation of the transgender body as ‘queer’ is misled: Not all trans people define
themselves as queers. In the same vein I will not refer to my participants’ experiences and/or identities as ‘queer’ if this is not how they choose to define themselves.

The level of textual analysis that characterises much queer theory is difficult to transpose onto the lived experiences of LGB people. Through this research I wish to assert that there is much left to say about the boundaries that Martin expounds above. A critical poststructuralist feminist/queer framework for research has enabled me to interrogate, through the experiences as articulated by participants, the discursive practices which impact upon their lives as teachers and as lesbian, gay or bisexual people. Rather than view this apparent contradiction as a limitation of my epistemological framework and conclude that poststructuralist analysis of identity categories is somehow redundant, I concur with Francis (1999) who argues that,

While we may agree theoretically that the self is constituted through discourse, we still feel ourselves to have agency, moral obligation, and preferences for different kinds of discourse […] describing our lives is part of being a human subject (ibid. p 391, emphasis original)

In other words although theoretically I position myself, albeit tentatively, as having a poststructuralist/queer epistemology, as a person in the world I ‘am’ a lesbian and therefore acknowledge that we cannot offer an analysis of lives as they are lived purely theoretically and devoid of lived experiences that may seem to contradict this.

The following section outlines the analytical tools that a poststructuralist feminist/queer approach to data analysis facilitates.

**Section two: Queer/feminist tools for enquiry**

One of the projects of feminist inquiry has been to illustrate the contradictions inherent within a scientific mode of enquiry that sees the researcher as an objective enquirer using his ‘expertise’ to make sense of particular social phenomena. Feminist inquiry has shown that research of this kind always contains the interests of the observers and that this usually reflects an androcentric reading of the social world
As one of the central tenets of feminist inquiry has been to raise women’s consciousness, to make ‘the personal political’, feminist research lets speak and engages with those voices that have previously been silenced or spoken for (Fonow & Cook, 1991, Reinharz, 1992, Hammers & Brown III, 2004). From this point, feminist researchers have demonstrated the importance of what bell hooks (1989) has termed ‘the view from below’; ‘insider knowledge’, of belonging to the group or community you are engaged in researching. The ‘insider knowledge’ that forms the researchers’ own experiences is often the basis for research and theory and is, as such, woven into all research projects the researcher is involved with (Hammers and Brown III, 2004).

Queer research has followed this framework and has highlighted the heteronormative bias of much research. It therefore focuses upon discursive practices of normal/natural within sex/gender identities and the impact that this has upon those living outside of a heterosexual matrix (ibid.). Dilley expounds three tenets of inter/trans disciplinary queer research:

- The examination of the lives and experiences of those considered to be non-heterosexual;
- The juxtaposition of those lives and experiences with the lives and experiences of those considered to be ‘normal’;
- An examination of how and why those lives and experiences are considered to be outside of the norm (Dilley, 1999, p. 462).

My research engages with these three tenets through its exploration of the ways in which lesbian, gay and bisexual participants negotiate the social boundaries surrounding their identities within the different contexts of their lives as educators, as members of a community, LGB or otherwise and as individuals moving through the world.

In order to achieve this I have engaged with the feminist notion of politicising the personal, researching from the inside and loudening silenced voices. I feel that non-heterosexual teachers are, too often, an ‘invisible presence’ within schools. My
epistemological position is then, inspired by the poststructuralist feminist/queer way of reading the social world. I utilise the research tools enabled by feminism but approach my subject through a queer lens. Hammers and Brown III argue that,

Such an approach relies upon conversation, connection and an open-ended forum where ‘objects’ of enquiry become the Subjects of their world and where ‘the agency of the people studied is itself transforms the entire project of producing social theory’ (Hammers & Brown III, 2004, p.99).

I am concerned with the subjective *meanings* that people attach to their experiences. To the way in which people tell their stories, with the way they remember, narrate and understand their lives. This storytelling should not be understood *qua* storytelling; language does not simply mirror society, but creates it, binds it to ways of knowing and understanding itself (Adams St. Pierre, 2000, Davies & Gannon, 2005). I therefore, through data collection and analysis, deconstructed the discourse of heteronormativity, its regulation, (re)production and reinforcement within the institutional setting of school and other social realms.

Poststructuralist feminist and queer sociologists have adopted a deconstructionist approach because it acknowledges that our senses of self are ‘historically specific and socially regulated’ (Davies & Gannon, 2005). Deconstruction is largely understood as Derridean philosophy (Adams St. Pierre, 2000, Lenz Taguchi, 2006), a critical practice that offers a deep reading of the structure or discourse under analysis: how has it been constructed? Which words (re)produce it? How is it held together? (ibid., Janks, 2005). The aim of using this approach within this research is to deconstruct heteronormativity through an analysis of what the discourse is and is not; to put it ‘under erasure’ (Derrida cited Lenz Taguchi, 2006), to seek out the binaries it (re)produces and the ways in which the discourse is played out in the professional and private lives of participants.

Deconstruction, as a method, offers a way to rigorously analyse and challenge the way our subjectivities are discursively (re)produced and it encourages the collection and analysis of data as a co-constructive act. Poststructuralist theorists and researchers
posit that this co-construction is a good thing because it breaks down the binary of researcher/informant often present within educational research and characterises a rational, humanist approach (Adams St.Pierre, 2000, Davies, 2004). By deploying a poststructuralist feminist/queer approach to data analysis, this research engages with the complex and multi-faceted senses of self and identity that can be loosely grouped around the identity categories of lesbian, gay and bisexual. It is important that research acknowledges the subjective and multi-dimensional nature of identities and to engage with what Adrienne Rich refers to as ‘the politics of location’ (Rich, cited Hammers & Brown III, 2004) and Butler deems ‘regulatory regimes’ (Butler, 1990).

In other words the intersections between experiences and understandings of gender, sexuality, history, location, ethnicity, class and so on that narrate a person’s subjectivity. In order to deconstruct the oppressive and hierarchical discourse of heteronormativity it is important to engage with them thoroughly in order to understand the way in which they impact upon our lives.

Therefore this research seeks to interrogate the discursive practices that have shaped participants’ experiences, to ‘queer’ or trouble the notion that, as I was once told, ‘Schools are conservative places’, that there is no place for queerness or a non-heterosexual identity within this social institution, thus forcing many LGB people to lead lives fractured by the private/professional binary. Hammers and Brown III (2004) argue that,

\[\text{Difference and the constant questioning of socially constructed concepts, which act as filters in our perception of society, has the potential to enlighten us to possibilities. In other words, to assert multiple identities and their fluidity in which humans leave themselves open to change and re-negotiation is, in the truest sense of the word, liberating. ‘Queering’ also conveys an active, energetic and self-critical stance that moves with its subject; that is, the constant movement of borders, locations and societal shifts and transitions (p. 96).}\]

I wish to do just this, to assert the multiplicity of identity that participants encompass, to illustrate their personal liberations and the way in which they rainbow colour their experiences as teachers.
The following section outlines the two-tier methodological framework that I employed to the data collection process.

**Section three: Methods**

This research deploys a two-tier methodological framework in order to offer an analysis of the experiences of LGB teachers working within the British education system. Twenty participants were interviewed twice; the first interview took the form of a semi-structured life-history interview, and the second was less structured and based upon the key issues coming out of the first interview in a general and personal sense. Both interviews were conversational in style as the participant and I talked through the questions and issues together.

I decided to generate data in this way for several reasons. Firstly, because the methodological framework deployed in this research is inspired by a poststructuralist feminist/queer approach to research, my work sets out to trouble the binary and hierarchically organised categories of male/female, straight/gay, private/professional, to make visible their construction and to question the inevitability of playing them out within a heteronormative framework (Davies & Gannon, 2005). Approaching the research in this way allowed for an examination of multiple social settings within participants’ private and professional worlds. This framework also allowed me to view the data generated not as transparent evidence of the real, rather as illustration of the way in which people articulate their understandings of the social worlds that they inhabit (ibid. Davies, 2004).

As much of the data I collected relied upon participants’ memories, I feel that it is important to make the following statement about my use of memory within the research. I understand that participants are not able to make any direct comparisons between their remembered past and the present as they experience it. Rather, they are able to reflect back upon their past from their current position as teacher and as adult with a developed and reflective sense of self and identity. This inevitably impacts upon the way in which memories are articulated by participants. Memories are
selected, half-remembered and re-interpreted with each telling (Dunne, 1997, Keightly, 2009). However memory remains a useful tool for research because it enables an examination of people’s lives as they live them in the present and understand them in the past (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). In addition memory has been posited within social science research as a ‘vast potential resource for social science in explorations between public and private life (and) agency and power’ (Keightley, 2009). As one of the central themes of this thesis is an exploration of private and professional lives it seems fitting that I should deploy memory as a methodological tool.

I am interested, then, in narrative, with how people talk about their lives, their experiences and with how they understand their embodied sexual selves and the relationship of this self to other people. The theory chapter of this thesis expounded the notion that, because of the way in which language is operationalised, people use the tools available to them to describe themselves and their place in the world. Identity therefore becomes a relational process; we come to be known and know ourselves through our social, cultural and political relationships with others. The narratives of self narratives are then culturally constituted and mediated by social forces and norms. To interrogate the narrative of self and identity is to challenge the veracity with which categories of identity are lived and are understood to be inherent or essential human qualities. In order to challenge the notion of what we understand to be ‘real’ as well as what is not, we should cease to be concerned with how a narrative as text is constructed, rather we should pay attention to the way in which it operates as ‘an instrument of mind in the construction of reality’ (Bruner, 1991). Bruner states that,

The loose link between intentional states and subsequent action is the reason why narrative accounts cannot provide causal explanations.
What they supply instead is the basis for interpreting why a character acted as he or she did (ibid. p7, emphasis original).

One of the aims of this research is to show the ways in which the narrative accounts participants give are constructed within discursive frameworks that dictate the language that should be used when talking about one’s gender and sexuality.
Therefore participants have to refer to themselves as ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’ because there are no alternative words for expressing non-heterosexual desires, relationships or embodiments.

However we are not merely blank slates upon which the stories of our lives are written for us. Rather, we are living, thinking people who challenge what we know and question what is. A poststructuralist feminist/queer approach is necessary to this research because it allows the researcher to free herself from the confines of ‘traditional’ objective social science and to explore the emancipatory possibilities of life in the margins. A poststructuralist analysis does not allow subjects to become untangled from the discourses that fashion them as subjects (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000); it offers a way to challenge what we know and to understand how we have come to know it. The two interview schedules were specifically designed in order to facilitate a discussion about identity, meaning, life on the ‘wrong side’ of a binary and the way in which these issues impacted upon the different spheres of existence within which participants live.

This work, then, engages with the subjective understandings of LGB people and the primary site of this research is an institutional one. In-depth interviews provided a way to interrogate heteronormativity as an institutionally situated discourse. In order to achieve this it was necessary to engage with the opinions, understandings, interpretations and experiences of those who have knowledge of that social institution (Mason, 1996, Smith, 2002). Gerson and Horowitz (2002) argue that,

Individual interviews provide the opportunity to examine how large-scale social transformations are experienced, interpreted and shaped by the responses of strategic social actors. Macro social trends thus provide the starting point for formulating a research problem. The empirical puzzles they raise however can be solved only by examining micro social processes as they unfold in the lives of individuals (p.201).

In this case then, the discourse of heteronormativity is the macro social trend, and its (re)production within the social institution of school is the primary research problem.
The subtleties with which this and other discourses impact upon the lives of teaching staff unfolded through the interview process.

Being a teacher and being lesbian, gay or bisexual are two contextual subject positions. The way that they intersect with other identities are of importance here but also under the lens is the impact that negotiating these identities within private and professional contexts has upon participants. As illustrated in the previous chapter, ‘teacher’, as a professional identity, carries certain socio-political meanings that are, like all identity categories, negotiated through relationships with others. Adams St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) state that,

A word such as “teacher” is already overpopulated with other contexts, with other people; with competing forms of knowledge and with desires, pleasures and fears. Thus the word itself constitutes both a set of discourses and a set of practices. Its contradictory meanings cannot be isolated from the speaker, the listener, or the histories and practices that overdetermine contexts of education and pedagogy (p.37).

The same can be said about the word ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’. These words are loaded with meanings, understandings, contradictions and challenges. It is therefore a project of this research to interrogate LGB identities as linguistic constructs, as discursive practices and as lived lives.

The following section introduces the reader to the sample of participants, with how I recruited them to the research and with participants’ reasons for wanting to participate in the research.

**Section four: The sample**

Three key questions formed the basis for my enquiries during the early stages of the research process:
• What does it mean to be an LGBT teacher in terms of how you negotiate public and private lives?
• Is this perceived differently generationally?
• Is this perceived differently according to gender and whether you identify as LGB and/or T?

Originally it was my intention to interview 40 participants once. I wanted to gain as wide an insight as possible into the issues listed above. My original sample was split into the following categories to allow access to a cross-section of genders, ages, sexualities and career stages:

• Four career stages: early career (1 – 5 years teaching), mid career (6 – 20 years teaching), mature career (21 – 30 years teaching), late career (31 – 40 years teaching). N.B. Age may cut across these categories.
• Four identity categories: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
• Out at work, not out at work
• Locally situated in four urban centres: Brighton, London, Birmingham and Lancaster – I wanted to concentrate upon urban settings because there are more likely to be several participants in close proximity to each other than in rural areas though the workplace of participants need not be limited to an urban setting.

However, after careful consideration I decided that this was too large a number and halved it. This was partly because of my engagement with the notion of deconstruction and the way in which it allows for a close reading of data. I felt that a smaller sample would be a more suitable way to approach the research questions given the nature of what I wanted to achieve. Therefore I decided to interview twenty participants twice. Two interviews allowed me to incorporate a limited longitudinal aspect to the research. Five months separated the first and second interviews and so participants had time to reflect upon the first interview and to read the transcript of it which I sent to them. The intervening period also saw them living their lives and so they had new insights, experiences and issues to bring to the second interview.
Participants were approached in the following ways. Firstly, I put a posting on two e-mail lists for LGBT teachers; one was from a teaching union’s LGBT group and the other the mailing list of an LGBT lobby group. Secondly I had a letter published in the UK lesbian lifestyle magazine DIVA calling for participants (see Appendix A). I also posted a request for interview on an e-mail list for transgender activism but received no replies. I had wanted to engage with the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in order to examine the notion of there being an LGBT ‘community’ to which participants might feel a sense of belonging. This was also partly due to an LGBT political rhetoric which engages in political lobbying on behalf of an LGBT community. I also wanted to explore the notion of the ‘T’ being ‘tagged onto’ the end of LGB and the extent to which transgender teachers feel that this is the case. Transgender people have historically met with mixed reactions from lesbian, gay and bisexual people, male to female trans people often being labelled with an essential ‘maleness’ (Bornstein, 1994, Namaste, 2000). The lack of transgender respondents may also illustrate Jay Prosser’s (1998) assertion that some transsexual people do not wish to politicise their gender identity and simply wish to ‘be’ (p.32). Therefore; within my thesis, the experiences I discuss are in terms of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) participants.

I had existing links with both the union and the lobby group and, given the sensitive nature of the research and my prior knowledge of the difficulties involved in being open about your sexuality within the context of school, I felt that posting a request on the two mailing lists was an appropriate way to access potential participants. Initially I had a good response from this but felt that the potential sample was ‘male heavy’. Given my own sexual identity and the socio-political notion that teaching is a ‘feminised’ profession (Basten, 1997), I decided to publish a letter in DIVA magazine in an attempt to recruit lesbian and bisexual women participants. Again I had a good response with many women writing to me who were willing to participate. Of the twenty participants, all of the male respondents approached me as a result of the mailing list postings. This is axiomatic given that DIVA is a lesbian lifestyle magazine. Only one of the fourteen female participants approached me via the mailing lists, the rest heard about my research through the letter in DIVA. This may say something interesting about lesbian political participation but I do not feel that the
aims or outcomes of my research qualifies me to comment upon this. In addition, though I did have several women respond to the mailing list and lobby group postings I was unable, because of scheduling issues, to meet with them.

I had feared that accessing participants through lobby or union groups may attract a certain kind of politically active participant who would have a particular ‘script’ or political agenda to follow during the research process. The fact that I had prior knowledge of both the union and lobby groups was also a factor; two of the participants I knew personally through my involvement. However it should be noted that they were not aware of my identity when they responded to the mailing list posting and I gave them the option of dropping out if they felt that our prior involvement might compromise them in any way. Neither felt that this was the case and continued to participate. Almack (2008) argues that that the use of existing social networks, particularly those within LGBT communities,

Can lead to people who are most confident about being out and taking part in research and who are part of the most visible LGBT communities (Almack, 2008, 3.2)

Many of my participants were highly politically aware and were unionists, feminists and queer activists regardless of whether they were approached through the union, the lobby group or the magazine. Others were less politically active and wanted to share their experiences for other reasons. This will be discussed further below. All participants had degrees and had pursued teaching through the PGCE (or equivalent) route. I do not feel, and hope that the data itself will demonstrate, that I recruited a particular ‘type’ of participant. It seems that people wanted to tell their stories and whether those stories were situated within a personal, political social moment, for me, is of equal value to the project of this thesis.

One of the aims of the interviews was that I would get to know participants as whole people with multiple, intersecting identities. Additionally, the interview schedule was designed so that a focus upon the political was not possible and participants were encouraged to share their experiences from different stages in their lives and careers. I feel that approaching participants in the way that I did allowed me to achieve my
aim of accessing ‘whole people’ successfully. This was reflected in participants’ reasons for wanting to be involved in the research. The responses to this question ranged from a general interest precipitated by their own experiences as LGB teachers to more specific desires to raise the profile of LGB teachers and related issues. For example Kate, who is thirty and lives and works in London, responded to this question as follows,

I think, as an out lesbian, I think it’s…duty’s maybe too strong a word but I think it’s really important that our voice is heard. An’ there are not enough people that make their voice heard; particularly in teaching […] I just think it’s important to get our voice out there.

Dee, who is forty and lives in the south of England is not out at work but had similar feelings to Kate about wanting to contribute to promoting equality issues for LGB teachers,

I think ‘cause I’m not out at work. So I want to somehow do my bit for that kind of people (and) equal ops legislation an’ erm I mean I will, very ferociously defend stuff, you know, between the kids but on a personal level, I don’t consider it that safe to be out at work, so I’m not. So this is my little, I dunno, it’s my way of helping.

What is interesting about these responses is that they show an awareness of the silences surrounding LGB lives in education and generally. This was further highlighted by Tony’s response,

I’m very concerned about LGBT rights erm and I’m very concerned that discrimination against LGBT people is dealt with not just amongst adults in the workplace but where it starts which is at school and um I like to get involved in anything that is going to contribute to the debate […] The main point I think is that people’s personal histories are vital to research and in understanding where we’re coming from and where we’re going. And I, y’know, I think history is something that we need to record as much as possible.
‘Personal histories’ are important because they illustrate the ways in which certain aspects of people’s lives are marginalised, silenced or otherwise restricted. Contributing to a debate on equalities was central to many participants’ reasons for wanting to participate in my research and indeed, one of my reasons for wanting to carry out the research.

The twenty participants that contributed to this research were not, then, hand-picked. I initially had an excellent response to my mailing list postings and the letter in DIVA magazine. However time and availability meant that it was only possible to interview the twenty people represented here. This is a good number with which to approach a deep, deconstructive reading of data and the spread across age, gender and time teaching has meant that a thorough analysis was possible. The female to male ratio is reflective of the spread in the teaching profession generally as the following quote from National Statistics Online illustrates,

In both nursery and primary schools, 85 per cent of full-time teachers were female in 2004/05. In secondary schools there was less difference between the sexes – 56 per cent of full-time teachers were female (http://wwwnationalstatisticsonline.com – accessed 06/05/08).

The tables below provide a breakdown of participants by demographic characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Lesbian</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Bi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Participants by age, gender and sexual orientation

The age range of participants has allowed me to engage with the research questions from a generational perspective and has enabled me to explore issues such as the problems with the epithet ‘queer’, the influence of feminism upon women studying in the 1970’s and the perceived impact of changes in educational policy on sex and sexuality.
Interviewing participants in different stages of their career was also important because it allowed me to engage with issues of teacher education and the extent to which LGB issues are explored on PGCE and professional development courses. It also allowed participants who were mature teachers to reflect upon their career and the changes that have taken place within education over a number of years. The category of ‘mid career’ was set between 6-25 years teaching because by six years in teaching, teachers will have fulfilled any probationary requirements of their training and have settled and into their position.

I wanted to engage with the notion of ‘having’ a sexual identity and what this means in terms of the subjective experiences of being LGB and being a teacher. I am also interested in how participants came to construct their identities in the way that they do, the processes involved in this and the way in which heteronormativity impacts upon the ability to achieve equilibrium between these intersecting identities.

I wanted to engage with LGBT issues within all areas of compulsory education to see how far the issues overlapped regarding language use, ability to challenge this and the way in which sexuality is constructed through educational discourses throughout compulsory education. Therefore it was important that I speak with teachers working
in both primary and secondary education. Unfortunately none of the participants worked in the early years sector so I was unable to access this group. However I wish to analyse school as an institution in the ideological as well as spatial sense and so feel that the data I have was sufficient for me to achieve this aim.

A summary table of participants by name is located in Appendix C, this has been provided so that the reader can ‘get a sense’ of who participants are when reading about their experiences. The data is broken into quotations that are relevant to the analysis chapter and subsequent issues under discussion and brief biographical details are provided to accompany quotes.

The following section demonstrates the changes made to interview schedule as a result of two pilot interviews.

**Section five: Pilot interviews**

Two pilot interviews were carried out using semi-structured life history interviews. Both Participants identified as LGBT, one was a gay man and the other as a transgender female who identifies as lesbian. The interviews were split into 5 sections:

- Introductory questions
- Reflective experiences of schooling
- Coming out in public and private lives
- Experiences of homophobia and sexism
- Reflections on change.

Participants were encouraged to talk about key moments in their lives both as educators and as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender-identified people. The interviews were organised in this way to ensure that the research questions and themes were addressed. This was done by grouping the relevant questions into the above headings and by relating the questions to the original three themes which I shall list again here:
• What does it mean to be an LGBT teacher in terms of how you negotiate public and private lives?
• Is this perceived differently generationally?
• Is this perceived differently according to gender and whether you identify as LGB and/or T?

There was a heavy focus upon participants’ lives as educators and a smaller engagement with the way in which they lived as LGBT. At the end of the interview, participants were asked to reflect upon the process in order to alert me to any problems with the method. The interviews were transcribed and preliminary analysis of the data was carried out. Because there were just two pilot interviews it was not possible to draw generalisable conclusions from the data. However the participants did have experiences in common and several themes emerged that were to form the basis of the first interview schedule proper:

• Childhood and experiences of schooling
• Homophobia & sexism as experienced personally and professionally
• Coming out at work
• Reflections on social and political changes to LGBT lives

The major change between the pilot interview schedule and the interview schedule proper was that the questions were made less formulised and acted more as prompts. I felt that the pilot interviews had been too structured, what I wanted was for participants to reflect about their lives as whole people, not simply as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans people. I wanted to get a sense of how participants narrated their life story and felt that the pilot interview schedule inhibited this by asking too many specific questions and asking participants to quantify specifically when certain events happened in their lives such as when the first came out, how old they had been when they first started to think about their gender/sexual identity and how rather than if they self-identify as LGBT. The interview schedule proper allowed participants to ‘take the lead’ during interview and respond to prompts and ideas rather than to specific, temporally posed questions.
Section six: Interviews

The starting point for this research came from my own experiences of working within secondary education and initially my focus within the first interview was upon the experiences of staff within the classroom and the way in which they understand the use of homophobic and sexist pejoratives as well as strategies they employ to resist and challenge such language use. Additionally the ability of participants to discuss, perform and integrate their sexual identities within both the professional and social components of their occupation is addressed through an analysis of the following issues: coming out; attending school social functions with or without partners; integrating private experiences into the public domain of the classroom; perception of generational differences between teachers and pupils; the role of support networks both inside and outside of school. An engagement with the above issues allows a rigorous reading of heteronormativity and the way in which it is constructed within schools and the gendered and sexualised performances it provokes.

As previously stated the twenty participants with whom I have worked on this research were not hand picked. After an initial influx of volunteer’s, location, journey time and availability meant that these twenty people became my sample. The twenty are roughly split into three geographical locations, eleven are in London or the south, five are in the midlands and four are in the north. All currently work in education except one, Michael, who is a retired teacher. All except four are classroom teachers: Tony works one to one with children on long term leave from school; Steve is a head teacher, Fiona is a peripatetic music teacher and Edward works for a ‘Healthy Schools’ consortium within a Local Authority.

It was an important part of the data gathering process that participants felt as comfortable as possible during interview. Therefore I encouraged participants to choose a time when they were free to speak for an hour or so and also to choose where we would meet. Several participants invited me to their homes however most chose to meet me in a public place, usually a bar or café and in one case the school in which they work. This was problematic in some cases because of noise levels that hindered the transcription process but not the interview itself. Because participants
had chosen where to meet it could be assumed that the setting enabled a certain level of comfort that meant that participants were able to be fully engaged during interview.

For reasons of personal safety I made sure that my partner knew where I was going and that she had the contact details of the participant prior to my visiting with them. Over the course of the two interviews I interviewed two participants over the phone but this was due to time constraints rather than preference. We were unable to arrange a time when we were mutually available for a face to face interview and so a telephone interview allowed me to finish interviewing on schedule. It should be noted that I did meet both participants in person for one of the interviews.

I developed a good rapport with participants during first interview and was able to generate useful data. I have never been very good at separating my private and professional selves and went into the field not simply as a ‘university scholar’ but rather as my whole self, as a lesbian-identified woman who has worked in education, likes real ale and country music, is white, from the Black Country and who enjoys kickboxing as well as being a PhD student. The starting place for this research came from my experiences of working in education and my understanding of some of the issues I discussed with participants. I am out to my friends and family and have worked within a school where I was interrogated and told to ‘keep quiet’ because I disclosed my sexual identity to the headteacher. I feel that it was important to the research process that I shared my feelings, experiences and ideas with participants. Almack argues that too much reciprocity may ‘push respondents to reveal more than they intended to’ (2008, 4.7). I tried to avoid this by encouraging participants to ask me questions as we went along and also to explicitly state, during the course of both interviews, that should they wish not to answer a question or to discuss a particular issue, they should not feel obliged to do so. Indeed one participant did decline to follow a particular line of discussion. I felt that, over the course of the two interviews, I was able to get to know participants as people rather than data sources and to relate to them at this level (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). I feel that this is necessary to the research process given the poststructuralist/feminist queer approach in operation and a desirable way to gather data that minimises the potential researcher/informant binary that can characterise social research.
However despite my attempts to avoid an unequal distribution of power between myself and participants, I remained aware of the potential for such relationships during the process of data gathering. It is therefore important that I remained reflexive throughout the course of data gathering and indeed the research as a whole. Pillow argues that,

To be reflexive [...] not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced (Pillow, 2003, p.178).

It was important that I remained self-aware during interview and that I actively listened and engaged with participants’ stories, talking myself only when necessary and sharing my own experiences only when appropriate. Jennifer Mason (1996) states that a researcher should ‘seek to understand their role in [the research] process’ (p.6). In light of this, I feel that my role was to facilitate a discussion based around the thematically organised interview schedule. I felt that my embodiment was important to the process; that I came to interview looking like me. My embodiment generally leans towards the boyish, I like to be read as lesbian in my dress and demeanour. Therefore at interview I wore a shirt and tie to denote my gender and sexual orientation as well as my status as a researcher. This worked well and became a talking point during several interviews, particularly with female participants.

Because I feel a political responsibility to make my participants’ voices heard I have also decided to allow them to choose which name I refer to them as. Many requested that I change their names and anonymised all data regarding their lives. Several were not out at school and so this, for them, was a condition of their participation. Others requested that I use their real names and this was bound up with a feeling of political responsibility to have their voices and experiences heard in such a way that they would be able to identify themselves when the data is written up. I will not make obvious which participants chose to do this but will refer to them using the name that they have chosen for themselves.

The first interview was split into the following sections (see Appendix B):
Once all first interviews were completed and transcribed I performed preliminary analyses of them. This was done through careful reading of the transcripts and identifying major themes and issues that came out of interview. The transcribed interviews were sent to individual participants so that they could, if they wished, reflect upon them. It is important for me that participants are included in the research process as a whole if they so wish to be. This again is because of my political position as a feminist/queer researcher and also as a lesbian-identified woman moving through the social world. This is characteristic of this kind of qualitative social research (Devine & Heath, 1999).

It was always my intention that the second interview should pick up on general and personal issues emerging from the first. Therefore the second schedule was a work in progress for each participant. Before I met with each participant for the second time, I read through each transcript and pulled out issues or themes pertaining personally to the participant in question. The general design of the second interview schedule facilitated an open exchange of ideas and experiences rather than an interview. As such there are no rigid sections but rather prompts which ask the participant to reflect upon the following themes:

- Coming out
- The use of homophobic pejoratives, particularly of the word ‘gay’
- Heteronormativity
- Personal issues
- Legal and cultural changes

Participants were sent the second interview schedule ahead of the interview so that, if they so wished, they could think about the issues under discussion. I decided to do
Heteronormativity is a term used by social theorists in order to discuss the way in which gender and sexuality are separated into hierarchically organised categories. This means that man has been set up as the opposite and superior of woman, and heterosexual as the opposite and superior of homosexual. Heteronormativity dominates social institutions such as law, science and education and is kept in place by a regime of sexism and homophobia. It is in this way that lesbian and gay lives are marginalised. Theorists have become interested more recently with bisexual and transgender lives. They can be seen as providing a counter argument to the idea that gender and sexuality are fixed and/or natural human characteristics and provide a way to challenge or ‘queer’ our understandings of these categories. Bisexual and transgender identities are able to be read in this way because law, science and education often talk about gender and sexuality as fixed, immovable and pre-ordained human characteristics that fit into either oppositional group (male/female and gay/straight). Political rhetoric also often follows this script. The idea that people can live in a different gender to the one they were born into, or refuse to identify as either male or female, or that people can have intimate sexual relationships with men and women and reject the gay or straight classification, demands that we re-think the way we understand gender and sexuality, what they mean and what they are.

If participants at second interview had not read this, I asked them to read it during the interview or I read it to them, explaining heteronormativity as both a theoretical concept and as a way of seeing the world. I wished to do this because an engagement with the discourse of heteronormativity is one of the central tenets of this research ergo I wanted participants to be aware of it and to lend their view of it. Several participants had previously engaged with heteronormativity and so were able to further their own understanding of the concept through interview. There were
questions in the second interview schedules that directly related to heteronormativity and so it was vital that participants understood what it was and how I am using it. However though this section of the interview yielded some interesting data I also felt that some participants were confused by it and understood heteronormativity as a prescriptive rather than discursive concept. The subtleties with which the discourse operates came out of less explicitly driven sections of the interview although many participants found heteronormativity to be a useful way to think about the way in which lesbian, gay and bisexual lives are marginalised within schools and general social life.

As with the first interview I allowed participants to choose the location and time of the interview, again there was a mix of participants’ homes and bars and cafes. This time I felt that the rapport was stronger and we were able to engage with the material more deeply than at first interview because we felt comfortable enough with each other to do so. Again I felt that it was my responsibility to share my own experiences throughout the process, an approach inspired not only be feminism but by my own feelings about belonging to an often stigmatised minority.

With the second interview I wanted to really understand some of the events in participants’ lives that led them to think about their sexuality, their profession and all the things in between that made them who they are. I wanted to deconstruct with them some of the mainstream heteronormative understandings about sexuality and gender and to ask them what it meant to challenge this on any level within their private and professional worlds. It was therefore important that participants had an understanding of heteronormativity and the way in which I use such theoretical concepts within my thesis. We tackled some deep subjective issues together and as a result I collected some rich data with which to work.

It is vital that I remained aware of not just participants’ subjective understandings but also my own, that I engaged with the discursive constructs that have informed my own ways of knowing. All research is limited because researchers only gain access to participant’s lives through a small temporal window. Though several participants have become friends as a result of the process, all of the stories told belong to those two meetings, to two contextual moments. It is therefore difficult to capture the
vitality with which each individual I met came across. A way of attempting to achieve this is through an engagement with emotion. Walkerdine et al note that,

Understanding subjectivity […] demands an understanding of emotions not because it seeks to uncover an essentialist depth psychology but because the fictions of subject positions are not linked by rational connections, but by fantasy, by defences which prevent one position from spilling into another (Walkerdine et al, 2002, p.180).

An engagement with the emotional helps to uncover the discourses which permeate the lives of participants, that which has damaged them as well as that which has enriched their lives. I view identity categories as functioning at these and many other levels and so asking participants about the way that they felt during specific moments in their lives was important. In writing up the data and re-telling participant’s stories I have attempted to keep the dialogue as true as possible to the speaker and so some words are written phonetically and any colloquialisms have been left intact.

When participants’ statements are quoted within the thesis, I utilise the following markers:

[…] – Text missing
(text) – Text added
… - Denotes a pause in speech
*Italics* – Denotes emphasis
CAPITALS – Denotes a raising of voice

It should be noted that the research process as a whole, and particularly interviewing, has been an enriching experience for me both intellectually and personally. I have come to question everything that I thought I knew about gender and sexual identity, to examine my own understandings of identity politics and the role that it plays in the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Participants provoked me into this questioning through the retelling of their experiences, through the way in which they understand their lives and their positions as LGB people working as educators and the way that these identities intersect with other facets of the self and with the other
people that populate their lives. I wish to conclude this section with a quote from Ken Plummer which relates to the way in which the researcher, the researched and research projects as a whole relate to each other and to the (re)production of discourses of sexuality,

Research accounts cannot simply be understood as direct copies of an assumed reality […] the sexual stories gathered from research are not mere resources, but become topics of investigation in their own right. They can no longer be taken as transparent and unproblematic in their search for truth. Instead, the social scientist is part of the very process of being observed, analysed and ultimately written about […]. The research stories of hundreds of sexological studies conducted over the past few decades are not mere reflections of our sexual lives, but play an active role in their construction (Plummer, 1995, p.12).

This passage illustrates perfectly my approach to research. I am part of that process, what I take with me to interview impacts upon the way participants narrate their lives and vice versa. My research is also part of a body of work which aims to challenge and disrupt normative understandings of marginalised gendered and sexual lives. The interplay between me, the participants and the research is a thread which runs through this thesis.

The following and final section of this chapter gives an account of the five-stage process I deployed in my analysis of the data.

Section Seven: Analysis

The analysis for this thesis was completed over five phases. Firstly, once all twenty participants had been interviewed twice and the interviews transcribed and sent back to participants for comment, I began a thorough reading of the transcripts. Interview data was organised by question for both interviews. This was done chronologically as per the interview schedules and organised alphabetically using the names that participants chose to be referred to or names that I had given to them at their request. This was an efficient method of data organisation and left me with two databases
based upon the two interviews from which to begin my analysis. Because, at second interview participants were asked individualised questions, the responses to these questions were organised separately from the scheduled interview questions and exist as a third database. This process also allowed me to edit the data into sections that are suitable in length for insertion into the main body of the thesis.

Once the data had been organised in this way, I moved onto the second phase of analysis. I went through the responses for each question making notes using the Microsoft Word tool ‘track changes’. Here I noted any commonalities in responses and I was able to highlight the themes coming from the data. Where possible I also made links between participants’ responses and the theoretical framework that underpins the thesis.

Figure one illustrates this process:

**Figure 1: Annotating the collated data.**

**Edward:** I had a group of people around me erm…but, yeah it just wasn’t, it was a crap school. (I wanted to miss PE because) I had no interest in it, for a start off, I mean I know it’s a cliché but the whole kinda gay boy, football, don’t wanna do it kinda not interested, not very…erm…I mean I’d always been, being the youngest of 6 and 3 of those being straight males, I’d always been sort of picked on a bit as a kid and just not, you know, was the weedy one, was the whatever, erm…and PE just really highlighted that. I wasn’t much cop. And everything else in school I was doing okay, but PE I was absolutely useless. And I just found it a real ordeal. And there weren’t…You were just put in, you know, in other sessions you would, there’d be 30 people and there would be erm a teacher, whereas this you’re put in a changing room which when you’re kind of not sure about (laughs) sexuality, you’re put in a changing room full of people that’re taking all their clothes off (laughs) which is quite confusing anyway, and then you’ve got erm no supervision around that.

As illustrated above I highlighted relevant sections of question response and labelled them with notes referring to the issues that they raised. I also drew out any cross-references with other responses, in this way I was able to build up a body of data that I could use to reflect each issue drawn out of the data.

Once this stage of analysis was complete I moved on to the third stage which was to collate all of the notes I had made on the three databases. I used flip-chart paper to do this and again organised the notes by question and interview. This time however I was able to weave the responses to the individualised questions into the system of analysis. This was because the process was theme rather than response based. Many
of the themes were referred to by the individualised responses participants gave to their personalised questions.

This stage of the analysis allowed me to draw out the major themes present within the data. I was able to see the ways in which participants’ experiences have shaped and been shaped by the way in which they understand their lives as educators and as LGB people moving through a largely heteronormative world. From this point I was able to map out the thesis pictorially, this became the fourth stage of analysis, please see figure two for an example of this process.

Figure 2: Mind map of three key issues (hubs): Teaching, anti-bullying & homophobia

The mind maps were organised with main ‘hubs’ or key issues forming a centre of analysis to which relating themes, both minor and major could be related. The figure above has ‘teaching’, ‘homophobia’ and ‘anti-bullying’ as its hubs. The thick blue
lines indicate that these hubs are inter-related and the black arrowed lines indicate major themes arising from these central themed hubs. The plain lines indicate individualised issues or minor themes arising from the analysis of the hubs. The mind maps were then organised hierarchically around key themes or hubs and major and minor relating issues. I felt that this was the most appropriate way of organising the data and the analysis of it because it reflects best a poststructuralist feminist/queer framework for analysis. Poststructuralism/queer theory allows for an engagement with the ‘messiness’ and often contradictory nature of experience and subjectivity and so I felt that to deploy a more linear approach to data analysis would restrict the process and limit findings.

Mapping the data in this way left me with fourteen main hubs or themes that were identified through the mind map process. They were:

- Teaching
- Anti-bullying
- Homophobia
- Learning to be lesbian
- Binaries
- Coming out (at work)
- Sexual identity
- Heteronormativity
- Language
- Changes
- Media
- Identity
- Gender
- Inequalities

I then mapped these themes onto the research questions in order to see which themes would lend weight to which questions. This fourth process yielded the following results:
a) How do LGB teachers understand and experience the use of the word ‘gay’?
   Inequalities, heteronormativity, anti-bullying, teaching, homophobia, binaries, changes.

b) To what extent do LGB teachers feel that they are ‘outsiders’ or intruders upon the heteronormative space in which they work?
   Heteronormativity, inequalities, teaching, identity, coming out, language, anti-bullying.

c) To what extent does being an LGB teacher demand a negotiation between private and professional spheres?
   Heteronormativity, teaching, sexual identity, coming out, inequalities.

d) In what ways do participants perceive the way in which macro policy changes have impacted upon their lives at the micro level?
   Changes, media, inequality, heteronormativity, learning to be lesbian.

e) In what ways do LGB identities queer or challenge the heteronormative discourse operating within schools?
   Changes, heteronormativity, coming out, teaching.

f) How do LGB teachers understand their subject positions in relation to their jobs?
   Learning to be lesbian, coming out, heteronormativity, teaching, inequalities.

From this point I was able to begin to think about the structure of the thesis. I initially wrote a chapter about ‘coming out’ and had thought that this would be one of four analysis chapters. However when I began writing I realised that coming out should not be a stand alone chapter because it is one of the themes that overarches the thesis. Coming out is a continual narrative rather than being a one-off event. At this point I felt that I needed to further the research questions and so reworded question e) so that it now reads:
e) Is there space within the compulsory educational institutions to challenge or queer the dominant discourse of heteronormativity?

I also felt that there should be a specific research question about coming out as this was one of the major themes to come out of interview. Therefore I designed the following question in order to ensure this issue is engaged with fully within the thesis:

g) What do coming out stories tell us about the way in which gender and sexual identity is played out in varying social contexts?

From this point I then went back to the data and the fifth stage of the analysis I had done so far and reconceptualised the thesis. I realised that education and schooling dominated the participants’ telling of their lives. Therefore I changed the chapters from four 10,000 word chapters entitled: Heteronormativity; Coming Out; “That’s SO Gay!” and Changes and instead decided that the thesis would be made up of three 13,000 word chapters entitled: “It wasn’t something that you’d think about”: Participants’ experiences of schools, sexualities and silence; “I’m happy for people to look at me and say, ‘She’s gay”’: Participants’ experiences of coming out and their understandings of the embodiment of gender and sexuality within their private and professional worlds’ and ‘I Would Love to be in a Job Where I Could Just Be Me’: Coming out, staying in and the negotiation of LGB teachers’ private and professional worlds. This then was the fifth and final stage of analysis; from here I was ready to begin writing up the analysis chapters.

Organising the thesis in this way allows me to weave in all of the key themes that came out of the analysis, questions e) and g) explicitly relate two the two overarching concepts that underpin the thesis, the discourse of heteronormativity and the internal and external processes of coming out. The three chapters additionally allow me to engage in rich discussions of the research questions as follows (please note that the questions are listed in the order in which they are answered within the chapters):

Chapter Four: “It wasn’t something that you’d think about”: Participants’ experiences of schools; sexualities and silence
Sub headings: How school was; How school is and “That’s SO Gay!

Research questions to be addressed: e) Is there space within the compulsory educational institutions to challenge or queer the dominant discourse of heteronormativity?; d) In what ways do participants perceive the way in which macro policy changes have impacted upon their lives at the micro level?; a) How do LGB teachers understand and experience the use of the word ‘gay’?; g) What do coming out stories tell us about the way in which gender and sexual identity is played out in varying social contexts? and b) To what extent do LGB teachers feel that they are ‘outsiders’ or intruders upon the heteronormative space in which they work?

Chapter Five: (Be)coming Out

Sub-headings: “You’ve gotta have that internal dialogue before you can have that external monologue”: Acknowledging and acting upon same-sex desire; Learning to be Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual and Coming Out Stories.

Research questions to be addressed: e) Is there space within the compulsory educational institutions to challenge or queer the dominant discourse of heteronormativity?; g) What do coming out stories tell us about the way in which gender and sexual identity is played out in varying social contexts?; d) In what ways do participants perceive the way in which macro policy changes have impacted upon their lives at the micro level? c) To what extent does being an LGB teacher demand a negotiation between public and private spheres? and f) How do LGB teachers understand their subject position in relation to their jobs?

Chapter Six: ‘I Would Love to be in a Job Where I Could Just Be Me’: Coming out, staying in and the negotiation of LGB teachers’ private and professional worlds

Sub-headings: Teacher training and sexual identity issues; “I don’t really wanna go into the ins and outs of my love life [at work]”: Participants’ choice not to disclose their sexuality to colleagues; “I do come out but I do it by stealth”: Participants’ choice to disclose their sexuality to colleagues and “I don’t think you can have a
relationship with the kids unless you are honest with them”: Participants’ choice to disclose their sexuality to pupils:

**Research questions to be addressed:** b) To what extent do LGB teachers feel that they are ‘outsiders’ or intruders upon the heteronormative space in which they work?; c) To what extent does being an LGB teacher demand a negotiation between public and private spheres?; f) How do LGB teachers understand their subject position in relation to their jobs?; e) In what ways do LGB identities queer or challenge the heteronormative discourse operating within schools? And g) What do coming out stories tell us about the way in which gender and sexual identity is played out in varying social contexts?

The data analysis tools that were deployed within this research provided me with a map for each chapter. I was therefore able to ensure that I included all of the issues I wished to within the thesis and had an efficient framework from which to start my writing.

**Summary**

This chapter provides the reader with an overview of the methodological framework that was deployed in order to collect and analyse data. This framework was situated within the theoretical tools facilitated by a poststructuralist feminist/queer theoretical framework. The chapter then provided the reader with an exposition of the methods used for data collection and introduced the reader to the sample of participants whose experiences narrate the thesis. It also demonstrated the way in which the interview schedule evolved from pilot to schedule proper as well as giving an account of the interview process itself. Finally the chapter gave an account of the analysis process and the foundations for writing which were provided by this process.

The following chapter is the first of three analysis chapters and offers an analysis of participants’ reflections upon their own schooling, their understanding of their current experiences as teachers and an analysis of participants understanding of the word ‘gay’ as used by children and young people within their daily discourse.
Chapter Four

“It wasn’t something that you’d think about”: Participants’ experiences of schools, sexualities and silence.

Introduction

One of the key aims of this thesis is to examine the extent to which being a lesbian, gay or bisexual teacher encompasses a negotiation between private and professional worlds. To a certain extent, many people experience a fissure between who they are at work and who they are at home. However for LGB people, this split can be made more pronounced by heteronormative discursive practices within socio-cultural institutions that minoritise non-heterosexual identities, rendering them ‘other’. These discursive practices are made manifest through perceived or actual homophobia and heterosexist gender regimes, practices which can render the LGB subject invisible within the workplace (Day & Schoenrade, 1997, Epstein & Johnson, 1994, Heaphy, 2008, McKenzie-Basant, 2007, Ward & Winstanley, 2005).

Chapter five offers an examination of some of the broader social pedagogies of gender and sexual identities participants experienced through informal learning strategies. These processes enabled participants’ coming out processes as well as assisted in the development of their understandings of themselves as LGB subjects. These processes largely took place outside of the physical space of school and within LGB community spaces. This chapter however engages with participants’ experiences taking place within the physical space of school. It aims to demonstrate the way in which heteronormative discursive practices dominated participants’ reflections upon their childhood and adolescence as well how heteronormative discursive practices continue to dominate their experiences as teachers.

The chapter is split into three sections, the first ‘How School Was’, explores participants’ school days and the extent to which they understand their adult sexualities through a reflection upon their childhood and adolescence. Therefore, key
moments during which non-normative gender and sexual identifications were recognised by participants are targeted for analysis, these include understandings of play as gendered, feelings of same sex attraction within adolescence and homophobically motivated bullying.

The second section, ‘How School Is’, jumps forward temporally to examine participants’ more recent experiences as teachers. It examines their thoughts about how schools are at present and of the perceived changes that have taken place regarding sexuality and schooling since they themselves were at school. This section also engages with participants’ experiences of pupils who identify as LGB. This section will also illustrate participant’s perceptions of the way in which identity issues in general are addressed within their workplaces.

The third section ‘That’s SO Gay!’ explores participants’ understandings of the way in which the word ‘gay’ is used within the context of schooling. The implied meaning of this word will be assessed as well as the discursive effects of it. The impact the continual use of the word has upon the subjective experiences of participants will also be addressed. One issue that emerged from this research was that between first and second interview participants recorded a decrease in the casual use of the word ‘gay’. The perceived reasons for this will be explored as will be the trend, reported by two participants living in different geographical locations, that pupils now use the word ‘Jew’ as a pejorative instead of ‘gay’. This will be discussed in terms of the way in which, over the past twenty or so years, we have seen the preferred choice of playground pejorative evolve from ‘spaz’ to ‘gay’ to ‘Jew’. I will engage here with both crip and queer theory in order to offer a thorough analysis of this trend. Finally this section will look at participants’ abilities to challenge homophobic language and the extent to which they felt that there is a ‘hierarchy of prejudice’ within which homophobia occupies a lowly position.

The chapter demonstrates the ways in which non-heterosexualities were, are and continue to be simultaneously spoken about and silenced within educational institutions. The implications this had for participants in terms of their sexual development will be assessed as well as the way in which participants perceive that heteronormative discursive practices impact upon the young people they teach.

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Section one: How School Was

Schools are spaces that most people have experienced (Epstein & Johnson, 1998) and within this social institution sexuality is often posited as something belonging to the private realm. However, schools are spaces within which a great deal of work is done on sexuality (Epstein, 1997). It has been argued that far from being places that silence sexual development, schools are privy to a cacophony of voices that demand a heterosexual outcome for pupils in terms of their gender and sexual identities (Davies, 2003, Dunne, 1997, Endo et al, 2010, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Plummer, 2001, Renold, 2003, 2005). Therefore there is often little space within formal learning spaces for the exploration of non-normative sexual desires and/or gender identifications. Schools rigidly police the boundaries of gender and sexuality and it is in this way that heteronormativity is (re)produced through educational discursive practices.

In light of this I felt that it was important to examine participants’ reflections upon their own school days, and there were two major reasons for this. Firstly, we do not live within temporal vacuums, the experiences that we have throughout our lives shape our understandings of ourselves as subjects. Therefore, in order to develop an understanding of the way in which heteronormative discursive practices impact upon LGB teachers’ experiences as ‘whole people’, it is important to engage with their reflections upon their own schooling. Secondly, it was important that participants reflected upon their experiences as children and young people in order to observe any perceived changes that have taken place for LGB people within formal educational spaces since their own schooling.

I wish to re-iterate a point made in the methodological chapter about the use of memory within research. I understand that participants are not able to compare their experiences of schooling from the perspectives of teacher and pupil; they are only able to reflect back on their school days from their current position as teacher and as adult with a developed understanding of self. This inevitably impacts upon the way in which childhood memories are articulated by participants. Memories are selected, half-remembered and re-interpreted with each telling (Dunne, 1997). However memory remains a useful tool for research because it enables an examination of
people’s lives as they live them in the present and understand them in the past (Epstein & Johnson, 1998).

This section is divided into three sub-sections respectively entitled ‘Reflecting upon primary schooling’, ‘Reflecting upon secondary schooling’ and ‘Homophobic bullying’.

Reflecting upon primary schooling

Because the nature of memory is sometimes sketchy and often coloured by contemporary re-interpretation (Dunne, 1997, Epstein & Johnson, 1998), most participants had stronger memories of their secondary schooling than of their primary schooling. However several participants did talk about their early years and primary education and of a feeling of ‘difference’ that they were unable to make sense of within the context of these educational spaces. Several issues arose from the data regarding this. Two male participants, both of whom identify their sexualities as gay, talked about play at primary school and articulated understandings of the play they engaged in as subverting both gender and sexual norms.

Tony is forty seven and grew up in a mining town in the North-East. He stated that,

At infant school […] I realised I was a bit different, we used to have play on a Wednesday afternoon. And um the other boys would be straight in the sandpit and be cowboys and Indians and I was straight in the Wendy house, yep, making cups of tea.

Tony’s reflections on childhood play illustrate recognition and understanding of the expected gender play for infant-age children, as well as the way in which his own preferences for play contradicted this.

Emma Renold’s (2003, 2005) work disrupts the commonly held belief that primary school is an asexual environment and, argues instead, that the foundations for the work on gender and sexuality that are so vigorously upheld in secondary school are laid during primary schooling. Several participants discussed their primary school
experiences in terms of feeling ‘different’. One participant, John, linked this to same sex attraction within the context of play. John is thirty five and grew up in a Lancashire town. He stated that,

I remember (laughs) at primary school playing kiss chase or whatever it’s called…There was myself, (another boy and 2 girls) and I remember running around the cloakroom of the infants section […] I was 5. (I) Remember being chased (by the 2 girls) but remember actually wanting to be chasing (the boy).

Tony and John’s reflections raise several issues. Firstly, they illustrate the way in which heteronormative discursive practices are (re)produced through the expectations of child’s play. Poststructural analyses of educational institutions have posited the notion that children are aware of their physiological differences from an early age but that gender differences are learned and rehearsed through bodily practices like play, language use and behaviours (Davies, 1989, Davies, 2003, Hammersley, 2001, Kehily, 2001, Paechter, 2007, Renold, 2005, Skelton, 2001). During their reflections, Tony and John articulate awareness that their respective desires to play in a Wendy house or chase boys instead of girls in a ‘kiss chase’ game were not what was expected of them as boys. Through childhood games then boys and girls learn who they should not be playing with, as well as who they should. That this is remembered into adulthood is illustration of its discursive power.

The boundaries of appropriate play and gender identity are rigidly policed through informal structures within schools and other children are often quick to point out and, therefore, to reinforce the inherent ‘wrongness’ of crossing the gender binaries. Dee is forty and offered the following reflection upon the way in which her gender identity was challenged at primary school,

When I was at junior school […] I wanted to play really boysey physical games like British Bulldog, an’ I was a strong character, y’know, good at sport, and I pissed people off. Because I was good and basically I got really bullied an’ they were like, “You wanna be a boy” an’ that…was a real source of shame.
Sally Munt (1998) talks about shame as ‘what one is made to be’ and we can see here how Dee’s transgression of heteronormative gender expectations were read as wrong and undesirable by her classmates at primary school and that this led to her feeling ashamed of her skill at sport and desire to be a tomboy. Her statement also acts as contradiction to Halberstam’s (1998) assertion that tomboyism is largely accepted until it carries over into adolescence; Dee was punished because she was perceived as ‘wanting to be a boy’. Her rejection of femininity within the context of sport was, then, deemed unacceptable and marked her as ‘different’ (see also Paechter, 2007 & Renold, 2005).

Another issue to come out of the data on early years and primary schooling is John’s assertion that he wanted to be kissing boys and not girls in the kiss chase game suggests an element of desire that is often missing from socio-cultural notions of childhood (Rasmussen, 2004). The child is often understood to be sexless, desireless and therefore in need of protection from the corrupting influence of sex and sexuality (Allen, 2007, Bell & Crumper, 2003, DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Moran, 2001, Rasmussen 2004, Renold, 2003, 2005). This is arguably one of the reasons why sex and relationship education within the UK has been historically met by such public and political resistance (Lewis & Knijn, 2002). However research in the field has shown that children do have an understanding of themselves as sexual beings and that this is evident within the interactions of early years and primary aged children (Cavanagh, 2007, Davies, 2003, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Renold, 2003, 2005).

Several participants in this research reflected upon desire and feelings of same-sex attraction remembered from their primary school days. We have already seen how John, during his time at infant school, wished to kiss boys rather than girls in a kiss chase game. Another participant, Dirk, who is forty eight and grew up in Witbank in South Africa, reflected upon same sex attraction during his primary years in the following way,

I never fancied girls. I felt they were sort of wrong. And do remember distinctly fancying boys, but sort of ignoring it. Thinking ‘well maybe
it’s a phase’ you know I wouldn’t think about it. You know that was the case from primary school [...] I mean I didn’t sort of think of the label gay and straight but [...] that made me different didn’t it?

That Dirk was unaware of the ‘labels gay and straight’ illustrates the invisibility that can surround non-heterosexual identities within educational institutions. Participants often articulated reflections on their school days as being characterised by a feeling of ‘difference’, there was, though, often little space within formal educational spaces to explore these feelings.

However despite the lack of formal educational spaces within which to explore gender and/or sexuality, participants did do a lot of informal, often internal, reflection upon their sexual desires and identifications whilst at school. Children and young people’s awareness of ‘difference’ and its connection to sexuality is a concern for researchers in the field. For example Epstein and Johnson (1998) argue that gay men are often able to identify a much younger age at which they knew they were attracted to their own gender than do lesbians. This was reflected in the data. Out of the six gay men interviewed, four talked about early years or primary education as the site for early feelings of ‘difference’ that they were able to link to attraction to boys. Out of the fourteen lesbian and bisexual women interviewed only one, Natasha, talked about her experiences at primary school in terms of same-sex attraction. Natasha, like Dirk, grew up in rural South Africa and stated that she began to think about her sexuality,

(Towards the end of) primary school [...] and why my girlfriends had crushes on the boys, and I just couldn’t understand that. I just (would) always think, “what’s up with you guys, don’t you wanna play with me?” or (laughs) You know? I just didn’t get them…that was sort of above my head, I never had that. But in secondary school, also I had boyfriends and things but it just didn’t…you know…do it for me.

Natasha’s statement raises the issue of following heteronormative gender expectations by having boyfriends at secondary school. Many of the women in this study did, at some point in their lives, what was expected of them as women: heterosexual relationships. Epstein and Johnson (1998) argue that women and girls are
marginalised by a heteronormative discourse that privileges heterosexual male masculinity and sidelines female sexuality, rendering it passive and receptive only to the male gaze. Women are rarely encouraged to be active agents in their own sexual lives. Those that are, are viewed as subversive (ibid.). This, they argue, offers an explanation as to why gay men are able to recognise their sexual preferences earlier than lesbian or bisexual women. It is male privilege and the notion that male sexuality is more forceful than female sexuality that precipitates earlier sexual identifications by gay men.

This leads us to the next subsection of this part of the chapter. Here, I will offer an analysis of participants’ reflections upon their secondary schooling.

Reflections upon secondary schooling

Most participants were able to recall their secondary schooling and reflected upon the way in which gender and sexual expectations were played out within this institutional setting within both formal and informal spaces.

In the previous sub-section we learned that gendered processes within early years and primary schools ‘teach’ children how to behave appropriately as boys and girls through signifiers and bodily practices that (re)produce binary lines of gender classification (Davies, 1989, Davies, 2003, Paechter, 2007, Skelton, 2001). This lays a foundation for understanding and (re)producing binary classifications that continues through adolescence and into adulthood (Renold, 2003, 2005).

Several participants articulated an understanding of the heteronormative gender and sexual expectations that were (re)produced within secondary schooling. The major difference between reflections on primary and secondary schooling was that participants remembered their secondary schooling explicitly in terms of sexual development and the identification of desires.

In the previous sub-section we learned that participants often experienced their school days in terms of a feeling of ‘difference’. This difference was often made manifest by participants’ desires for or identification with the same sex that were deemed
inappropriate or were rendered invisible by the heteronormative discursive regimes that dominate educational institutions in terms of formal learning. It was also noted that at the time their same-sex desires were realised, participants often did not possess knowledge of or the language with which to articulate their desires or identifications during their early years and primary schooling.

This was also the case for many participants during their secondary schooling. One issue to come out of the data on secondary schooling was that several female participants reflected back upon having had same-sex desires whilst at school but of understanding this in terms of it being a ‘normal phase’ of adolescent heterosexual female development.

Kate is thirty and grew up in London reflected upon and articulated her adolescent understanding of desire as follows,

(When I was) probably about eleven I kind of thought about it but I didn’t quite articulate it in that sense. It was there but I suppose being that it wasn’t quite so much in the media and I didn’t know anyone that was gay an’ like, erm…I knew I obviously had feelings for women but I didn’t quite think, ‘oh that must mean I’m gay’. It was like ‘oh that’s what everyone does, don’t they?’ And then grow up and get married. Which I did.

The feeling that her desires for women must have been a ‘phase’ was compounded by the fact that there was no space within the formal learning environment of her school within which non-heterosexual desires were spoken about,

I just don’t think it was there. It just wasn’t raised. Everything was just totally heterosexual and you know just the language and everything that was going on was just totally and utterly heterosexual. So it didn’t really come up in that sense.

Lesbian sexuality constituted an ‘invisible presence’ within Kate’s secondary school. It was invisible because it was acknowledged or spoken about, it could not be
explored. However it was present because Kate felt same sex attraction. This lends weight to Sedgwick’s (1994) argument that homosexuality is often simultaneously present and invisible within educational spaces. Kate, like Dirk, was unable to articulate her desires; therefore she understood them as being a ‘normal phase’. She talks about the absence of LGB people and issues from media, an informal tool for learning that informs many young people about sex and sexuality (Kehily, 2002). However another participant, Fiona, who is twenty six and grew up in Edinburgh, also understood her adolescent feelings of same-sex attraction as a ‘normal phase’, because of the way in which it was framed within media,

I think (I) always assumed I was straight because I’d never met a girl in real life that I was attracted to. And I had met boys that I was attracted to so you would of course presume ‘I’m straight’. […] Erm…there was a girl I had a major crush on when I was 15, but also, y’know, you read in all the magazines, ‘girls always get crushes on friends’ and it wasn’t something that worried me, I was just like ‘well I fancy a girl, that’s okay, that’s fine’.

The official discourses and practices that operate within schools then contribute to a silencing of lesbian sexuality. Schools therefore can foreclose a discussion of non-heterosexual sexualities and this was evidenced by the lack of opportunity within educational spaces, reflected upon by participants, for an exploration of their same-sex desires.

However, though many of the schools that participants attended had little in the way of formal spaces through which to explore sex and sexuality, informally there were spaces within which sex and sexuality were on the agenda and were able to be explored.

Leslie is forty five and attended boarding school during her adolescence. Whilst she was there she experienced ambiguous physical contact with other girls,

I can remember having, I guess what with retrospect, you would call early sexual experiences with girls in the dormitories. Erm…not kind
of in any *overt* penetrative sexual way or anything, but just kind of looking at each others’ bodies and touching each others’ bodies […] generally it was just a kind of nurturing amongst the girls. The staff were very distant. So that the girls would be very erm…*physically affectionate* I guess.

Leslie understands her experiences in terms of reflecting back upon and re-reading them, as is consistent with the role memory plays in research. She contextualises her experiences and therefore reads the affection that took place between the girls as almost a compensation for a lack; the girls were affectionate with one another because they did not live in the family home and staff were emotionally distant. Kathrine Rockhill argues that our emotions are ‘etched into our bodies’ (Rockhill, 1993, p.355); we often remember our experiences through bodily affect, therefore Leslie reads her physical experiences at boarding school in terms of ‘nurturing’ or comfort rather than as the beginnings of her adult lesbian sexual identity.

Dee also attended boarding school during her adolescence and her reading of the sexual experiences she had whilst there can be read partly as a contradiction to Epstein & Johnson’s (1998) assertion that girls who transgress the boundaries of heteronormativity and become active agents in the pursuit of sexual pleasure are labelled as ‘dangerous’. During our first interview Dee talked about feeling ‘emotionally shut down’ during her teenage years, something she was able to disguise because of her excellence in the formal academic side of school. During this time Dee actively sought out sex and described this in the following way,

I had sex with boys […] and I had a very erm…er…*nymphomaniac* approach to sex. ‘Cause I was so desperate for male energy of any description, I would throw myself inappropriately in certain situations and just want to, well fuck.

Her academic excellence allowed her to ‘get away’ with behaviour that, outside of a middle class environment and within a different social context, might have been deemed subversive,
I played a game at school which was very much about the fact that I was very bright. So…I could get away with a lot of stuff (such as) being quite unconventional, smokin’, drinkin’ […] being naughty, being rude. I could get away with a lot because I was Oxbridge material, and it would look good for the school. I also think that that blinded them to all the things that were more psychological and emotional that I could have had a lot of help with.

The way in which Dee reflects upon her school days raises several important points. Firstly, she talks about her excellence in academia as a way to disguise her emotional needs. This point will be discussed in detail later in this sub-section, however here it is important to flag the notion that her erstwhile subversive behaviour did not result in her being labelled by the school as ‘dangerous’, rather she was revered as one of its ‘stars’.

Secondly, when she talks about her sexual experiences she once again raises the issue of sexual pleasure. It is widely understood within research that an element of pleasure is often omitted from formal educational discourses on sex and sexuality (Allen, 2007, Fine, 1988, Leahy & Harrison, 2006, Rasmussen, 2004). However, schools, as stated earlier, are spaces where a great deal of work is done on sex and sexuality and within informal spaces, participants were able to explore their sexualities and understood sex, within their interactions with others, as pleasurable.

Michael, who is fifty three, grew up in Yorkshire and also attended a grammar school talked explicitly about sexual experiences he had at school,

I remember my first orgasm (laughs). It’s…um…well I was having a bit of a fumble with another lad, and…suddenly there was this wet stuff. And this amazing feeling in my, in my loins. And…well that was the first time I’d come. And it was wonderful (laughs). (I was) 12 or 13 (and this was at school).

Michael was eventually expelled from his school because his sexual behaviour was discovered by a teacher. His experience must be read within the temporal context
within which it took place – the participant was at secondary school in the late nineteen-sixties. Michael’s experience raises the issue of the informal processes through which children and young people explore the pleasurable element of sex. Later in the chapter I discuss the extent to which participants who deliver sex and relationship education are able to include same-sex desires and relationships. However in terms of a discourse of pleasure, participants illustrate that although same-sex desire and pleasure through sex were missing from their formal education, there did exist spaces through which to explore sex and sexuality. It is interesting to observe that the four participants who talked about same sex physical experiences whilst at school all attended single sex schools with Leslie and Dee both attending boarding schools. Perhaps heteronormativity is able to be disrupted within single sex schools because there are fewer opportunities for the sexual power play that occurs between male and female pupils at mixed sex schools to occur (Allan, 2009, Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2005).

However though participants may have had same-sex physical experiences whilst at school, a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity was not a possibility for them. Michael was expelled because the school discovered his sexual behaviour. Dee was aware of the existence of lesbian sexuality during her time at school, but for her, this was something to be afraid of,

A lesbian was…something out of my experience. I’d never met one and they were obviously weird and they were condemned people. You know it was not something I would ever want to be, it was like a death sentence. (My school) was very middle class, you see. Not in a sort of Tony Blair, everyone’s included equal op’s sense, in really conservative…Sloan Ranger sort of sense. It just doesn’t really figure in that world.

The notion that lesbians were ‘condemned people’ in Dee’s reflections upon her adolescent years illustrates again the invisible presence of same sex desire. A lesbian was ‘other’, something that existed outside of her sphere of reference; they did not belong to her world. Her statement is also evocative of Foucault’s (1976) writing on
the construction of the homosexual identity and the way in which homosexuality has been constructed as a ‘sub-race’, a strange other to the normal, heterosexual world.

The extent to which the notion that homosexual people were, have been and continue to be seen as a perverted sub-race is evidenced by Dee’s adolescent understanding of a lesbian identity as a ‘death sentence’, as something she could not identify with.

Dee also alludes to being ‘middle class’ and this was something that several participants discussed in connection with their sexual development. Participants’ perceived the notion of ‘middle class’ and the way that it intersects with gender and sexuality differently, and this cut across generational differences. Alexandra Allan’s (2009) work illustrates the way in which middle class girls’ femininity is policed contemporarily, it appears, from my data that little has changed. Middle class girls and young women are expected to be chaste, ‘ladylike’ and heterosexual (Allan, 2009). Like Dee, the girls in Allan’s study feared being ‘misrecognised’ as lesbians. Dee is forty and talks about being a middle class teenager during the Thatcher years, a time of individualism and social conservatism. The ‘Sloan Ranger’ is a character that she mentions above is associated a particular kind of ‘middle classness’ that is privileged, wealthy and ultimately heterosexual.

Frances, who is twenty four, grew up in Belfast. She stated that she also put her sexuality ‘to the back of her mind’ because of middle class assumptions about sexuality,

I was sort of middle class, upper middle class growing up. Erm, Protestant town, obviously Northern Ireland’s very sort of religiously divided still […] I (did think about my sexuality) a little bit, I think. But not enough to deal with it. It was never something I was really willing to think about.

Several female participants then experienced heterosexuality then as part of the middle class expectations for girls and young women (Allan, 2009, Anyon, 1982). Previously we saw how Dee talked about using academia as a shield from the more emotional aspects of her adolescence. It is arguable that this is a classed and gendered
aspect of participants’ experiences. Class remains a factor in the academic expectations of girls and boys with academic success remaining largely a middle class preserve (Lucey, 2001). Female participants experienced positive reinforcement from their academic successes as Dee illustrated. For some participants, academia also acted as a focus in order to cope with their emergent sexual desires (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). For example Frances stated that,

I guess it was just very straight, a conservative lace you know and there was not…there weren’t any sort of positive (LGB) role models. At all. And so it was not something that you think about. So yeah, I guess, I focused on like academic stuff and music and things like that.

The notion of academia acting as an escape from thoughts about sexuality was also a factor for Dirk, however this was not read as positively in his experience as a boy and this is gendered differentiation of the value among peers of academic success is highlighted within research on academic gender expectations (McLeod & Yates, 2006),

I was very paranoid. I felt bullied, you know I was gay boy (which means) that I felt ostracised, I felt different, I felt I didn’t belong […] I became what the kids now call a boffin (laughs) I would just be the best pupil in the school. And hide away in the library, you know, reading books. That’s why I can speak English; I just read books (laughs).

For Dirk, ‘boffin’ was a preferable to ‘gay’ as a marginalised identity. Academia then acted as a shield for some participants, it was something they were able to focus on and it enabled an identity that was less stigmatised than that of the lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Several participants talked about being aware of LGB people at secondary school and these people took the form of fellow pupils or teachers. Participants had ambivalent feelings about these figures and their experiences of them form what I term a
‘negative modelling’ of gay or lesbian sexuality. For example Alison, who is twenty
nine and grew up in Yorkshire, talked about a P.E. teacher at her school,

I wasn’t really that aware of it at school and […] I certainly didn’t
identify as gay then an’ I think […] the only sort of gay that I’d come
into contact with was a P.E. teacher who I just didn’t relate to at all and
I just like, you know (laughs) I just assumed I wasn’t like that and
went off, so…

I did not ask Alison whether or not this particular teacher was openly gay at school or
was perceived to be so by the pupils. However the lack of alternative models of gay or
lesbian for Alison led her to believe, as an adolescent, that the P.E. teacher was the
embodiment of all lesbians and therefore something that she could not relate to.

Edward talked about feeling ‘different’ in a similar way to other participants.
However Edward felt that a school friend ‘put back’ his own sexual development
because gay was modelled negatively through him as this statement illustrates,

I knew I was different from primary school, but I hadn’t really put erm
words to that until sort of 14 or 15. I think one of my best friends was,
or is, a complete screaming homosexual […] an’ I hung around with
him, an’ in a way […] his experience in school and also subsequent,
put me coming out back by quite a bit because […] we’re very
different. And me seeing gay modelled through Jonathan wasn’t
somewhere I wanted to be. The, you know, dragged up, drama queen
that’s having a fabulous time doing this, that and the other, it just
wasn’t me […] I just thought, ‘well if that’s being gay then really I
don’t wanna be it’.

Both Edward and Alison effectively articulate a lack of diversity in the way that they
saw gay being modelled. Edward felt that he couldn’t be gay because he wasn’t like
his friend Jonathan. Similarly Alison felt that she couldn’t be lesbian because she
wasn’t like her P.E. teacher. What the experiences of these participants illustrate is the
‘invisible presence’ of LGB identities in the schools that participants attended.
The next sub-section will examine the experiences of participants who were bullied because of their perceived sexual orientation whilst at school.

**Homophobically motivated bullying**

There is a wealth of literature that offers analyses of homophobic bulling and its impact upon young people (see for example Dame, 2004, Dunne, 1997, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Gray, 2007, Rivers, 2000, Rivers & Carragher, 2003, Valentine et al, 2003). Several participants were homophobically bullied at school. They were singled out as being gay or lesbian despite not identifying as such at the time. Kitty is thirty nine and spent her adolescence in Somerset. Ironically for this participant, the source of her experiences of bullying was a friend’s attempt to follow a heterosexual script,

I was picked on for being gay (laughs) even though actually at the time I didn’t know that I was. My best friend was called Rachel, and she fancied my uncle which obviously had the same surname as me so she started drawing on her book Rachel Bee, which is my surname […] ‘cause that’s what girls do, you know, an’ of course everyone in the school thought that she was imagining she was going to marry me and so we were branded as lesbians throughout our whole school life in that secondary school (and) nobody would come near us.

The misreading of Kitty’s friend’s attempt to demonstrate her heterosexuality led to the two girls being given a stigmatised label that meant they were classed as outcasts within the world of their school.

Nicole, who is forty five and grew up in Liverpool was also subject to homophobic bullying but she perceived that this may have had more to do with her unusual class position within the school that she attended,

I remember […] absolutely hating secondary school, an’ being really badly bullied. […] Some of it was about being working class in the school that I was in, I got like into a bit of a posh school and I was
from a very working class background so some of it was definitely about that. And some of it, whether it was real or not [...] anyone who was (different) for any reason would get called a lesbian [...] it’s hard to know whether…they knew or not. But I remember when I was being called it ‘cause I was thinkin’ ‘I might be’ (laughs)! An’ how d’you know (laughs)!

The bullying that Nicole endured led to her regularly truanting school. A recent report published by the lobby group Stonewall suggests that this is still a regular course of action taken by LGBT young people to avoid being bullied (Stonewall School Report, 2009). In addition Allan (2009) argues that class, gender and sexuality are reinforced through discourses that operate within and dominate schools. Nicole’s presence as a working-class girl within a middle class educational space then disrupted the space of the school as a middle class enclave. As a result, her class, gender and sexual identity were subject to the scrutiny of her peers.

When Steve was at school he endured,

Absolutely horrific homophobic bullying. Physical violence, being spat at, being called gay, queer, [...] queer boy, bumfucker you know, every sort of word an’, an’ also horrible things like [...] some of the lads somehow went to a magazine and sent free sample porn to my house an’ that sort of stuff, gay porn. Really nasty things um someone else wrote a love letter to a P.E. teacher signed by me an’ of course I was called in about it, you know, an’ they knew it wasn’t my writing but, you know…But the school didn’t do anything about that.

Emma Renold’s (2005) research found that boys in the primary sector were ‘homosexualised’ by other boys if they did not embody the normative, masculine and ultimately heterosexual subject. Drawing from Steve’s experiences, it appears then that little has changed over the past thirty years in terms of the peer-regulation of gender and sexuality.
Steve does however feel that his experiences at school influenced his choices as an adult. Steve is the headteacher of a primary school and is an active gay rights and union campaigner. He stated that,

I remember the instances of bullying very, very well [...] erm so they were significant. They made me feel really bad [...] but maybe also affirmed myself. So they did most probably make me I think a more campaigning, active person. So [...] I think in the long run, as I always believe, we learn from those experiences as well. We become better people from them.

Both Kitty and Nicole have also, at some stage in their lives, been involved in LGBT political action and this is, I feel, an important challenge to a heteronormative discourse that attempts to stigmatize LGB identities. Sally Munt (1998) talks about shame within her work and posits the notion that though shame is about 'what one is made to be', it can also be transformative. That Steve, Kitty and Nicole have been able to reflect upon their negative experiences of homophobic bullying and through them, challenge inequality for LGB people is evidence of the transformative nature of shame.

The next section of this chapter jumps forward temporally and offers an analysis of how participants experience school as LGB teachers.

**Section two: How School Is**

Much research on the LGB experience of schooling within the UK took place before the repeal of Section 28 in 2003\(^2\) (see for example Bell & Crumper, 2003, Carrington & Skelton, 2003 Epstein, 2000, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Moran, 2001, Nixon & Givens, 2002 Skelton, 2002). Therefore, it examines the effect this restrictive law had

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\(^2\) In 2003 Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 was repealed. The clause stated that a local authority could not,

- intentionally promote homosexuality or public material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
- promote the teaching in any maintained school the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.
upon LGB people working and studying within British educational institutions. It also offers an analysis of the Clause as a piece of legislation that actively sought to silence LGB identities within education. As this research takes place after the repeal of Section 28, this section offers an exposition of participants’ experiences of education post Section 28 as well as their reflections on the effect the repeal of the Clause has had upon the institutions within which they work.

The section also offers an examination of the way in which staff members, other than participants, deal with LGB issues when they arise for pupils. Additionally, this part of the chapter looks at the extent to which participants who deliver sex and relationship education are able to raise LGB issues within this context.

This section of the chapter also raises one of the key findings arising from the data; that of the urban/rural divide in participants’ experiences of being an LGB teacher.

Finally, this section posits the notion, that several participants articulated, that there exists ‘hierarchies of prejudice’ within the schools that they work, a hierarchy upon which sexuality issues often occupy a lowly position and are subsumed by issues of race, ethnicity and religion perceived to be more important. Here, it is argued that it is at the intersections between identity issues that the schools in which participants work are presented with a conundrum that they are not equipped to address effectively.

The chapter is therefore split into three sub-sections, respectively entitled, ‘The legacy of Section 28 and LGB issues’, ‘An urban/rural divide’, and ‘Race vs. Sexuality’.

The legacy of Section 28 and LGB issues

As previously stated, much work on LGB issues in education is situated before the repeal of Section 28 in 2003. Though largely regarded as a redundant piece of legislation (there were no prosecutions under Section 28), the notion that non-heterosexual families are ‘pretend’ has arguably endured since its repeal. Section 28, like most legislation on sexuality, secured in law the notions both that sexuality is fixed (Bell & Crumper, 2003, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Moran, 2001), and by way of contradiction, the idea that children are potentially corruptible by the mere presence

I wish to make clear that my data on the repeal of Section 28 is in no way meant to measure the effects of the repeal of the clause upon British schools, nor is it used to make generalisations about the effect of the repeal. Rather, it reflects participants’ experiences since the repeal and their thoughts and understandings of the way in which the educational institutions within which they work might have changed since the repeal.

Participants were asked specifically at first interview to reflect upon the politico-legal changes that have taken place for LGB people over the past ten or so years including Section 28. As educators, participants often had strong feelings about Section 28 and its legacy. Many felt that it had been a symbolic piece of legislation, and one that reflected the political, social and cultural mood of its time. Edward, who is a qualified teacher but works as a Healthy Schools Drugs Education Co-ordinator in a London borough stated the following,

The Section 28 thing I think has just caused a huge hullabaloo and a commotion and it never allegedly affected what schools legally could do. However it caused a huge smoke-screen, and in many ways was a homophobe’s charter ‘cause you can say, “We can’t do that ‘cause of Section 28” rather than “You can’t do that ‘cause I don’t believe in it”.

Edward’s statement illustrates the point made by much previous research has highlighted, that Section 28 was a symbolic legislation. Section 28, when it was in force, could be used as an excuse by schools not to address issues around non-heterosexuality. It therefore enshrouded LGB issues within a legally sanctioned silence.

Participants expressed much optimism at the repeal of the Section 28 with many feeling that the repeal could potentially open up a dialogue on non-heterosexualities within schools. Fiona, who is twenty six and a peripatetic music teacher in Lancashire, expressed the following feelings about this issue,
I think the (repeal) of Section 28 is fantastic. I think if we’d been allowed to talk about it at my school, if it had’ve been something that’d been discussed it wouldn’t have been a problem. It’s a real thing (now), it exists, you know? Before it (wasn’t) a thing. It’s like you know men’ll grow up to fancy women an’ women’ll grow up to fancy men. That’s it. That’s the extent of life.

Fiona, when reflecting back at her own schooling, articulates an understanding of LGB issues as being forbidden, it was ‘not allowed’ within the school that she attended. That she states that ‘it’s a real thing now, it exists’ suggests that LGB issues have been made visible in some symbolic way by the repeal of the Clause.

The extent to which participants felt that an opening up of a dialogue on LGB issues has occurred was varied. One of the main concerns was that Section 28 and its assertion that homosexuality should not be ‘promoted’, has not been replaced by any legislation that says that schools have to discuss sex and relationships in terms of non-heterosexuality. It is still up to each individual school to design their own curriculum around issues of sex and relationships. The UK government currently provide guidelines on sex and relationship education which have not changed or been updated since 2000, predating the repeal of Section 28 (DfEE, 2000). Therefore although schools can now raise LGB issues, there are no curriculum-based imperatives in place for them to do so.

Several key issues arose from the data regarding the way in which non-heterosexuality is approached by the schools that participants worked in. Many participants felt that their schools adopted a reactive approach and only dealt with LGB issues when they arose; and this was usually within the context of bullying. This notion is present within the literature in the field, for example in a study carried out by Claudette McKenzie-Bassant (2007), the author found that sexuality, and particularly that of teachers, was viewed as a ‘personal’ rather than an ‘educational’ issue.

There are several issues to be raised here; firstly many schools do not include LGB relationships in their sex and relationship education curricular and this renders non-
heterosexual identities invisible within them (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Ferfolja, 2009). Additionally if schools only deal with LGB issues reactively and in terms of bullying, then some young people’s first hearing of the words used to describe non-heterosexual identities will be pejoratively. It is in this way that ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ and ‘bisexual’ become, as illustrated by Dee in the previous section, ‘condemned identities’ and in this way that heteronormativity continues to be (re)produced within educational institutions.

It was felt by several participants that staff who address LGB issues in school are inexperienced in terms of how to approach them and often displayed a lack of understanding that could be read as homophobic. During our first interview Fiona, who works at a school in a Lancashire city recalled an incident in which a girl she taught was having sexuality issues,

I was having a discussion with a girl (who was having issues with her sexuality) and the teacher was (who was dealing with it), she said to the girl, ‘Well y’know […] people might have a problem with it now, but when you get older like me, I don’t mind, I don’t mind people being gay’. An’ just…things like that…You know if you said to her, ‘D’you know that’s actually really offensive to me?’ (Laughs), she wouldn’t understand. I did think it was dealt with really badly erm I don’t think that teacher had the skills to deal with the situation.

The teacher Fiona discusses gave the girl ‘permission’ to be a lesbian, and also implies that though younger people may ‘not like it’; it will ‘be okay in the end’. The girl was not given any resources upon which she could draw, no support group contacts. Fiona stated that she later talked to the girl separately; she came out to her and shared some of her own experiences in order to redress the balance.

Participants felt that many teachers are unaware of LBG issues until they are made manifest by a particular incident. It was strongly felt that though homophobia may be dealt with, broader LGB issues were not. One participant stated that she felt that LGB issues were ‘under the radar’ for most staff. They remain unspoken until necessary. Though some of the schools within which participants worked attempted to deal with
LGB issues, this was done within a heteronormative framework. Participants’ schools either brought people in to talk about sexuality issues or sent pupils out to see a play about LGB issues. Gay, lesbian and bisexual identities therefore were not viewed by participants as ‘us’. They were not part of school communities and so needed to be addressed by outside agencies because they are perceived only to exist outside.

Several participants did attempt to challenge the way in which LGB issues are addressed within their schools and this took place within a range of settings within the formal learning space of the classroom as well as in the more informal spaces of participants’ professional remits. As the extent to which participants felt able to challenge the (re)production of heteronormative discursive practices is one of the key questions posed by this thesis, this issue is also raised in chapter six. However here I wish to discuss it within the context of the sex and relationship classroom. Leslie works at a secondary school in the Black Country. Her main discipline is biology, however she also delivers SRE as part of her remit as a form tutor,

I had these lads for (SRE) an’ I showed (them a video about relationships which featured LGB young people) an’ I said to them y’know, ‘I’d like you to sit through it, I want you to hear it all. An’ then you can say what you want about it’. And, I was standing at the back of the room, they were radiating. Literally, you could see this misunderstanding, this aggression, this sort of ‘oh that’s not right is it?’ It was a tangible feeling that they were recognising that, ‘them blokes up there, that’s not right’. An’ it was like, y’know, a visceral effect.

The ‘lads’ in Leslie’s class then were performing what Mutchler (2002) deems ‘appropriate masculinity’. As illustrated in the first section of this chapter, children and young people learn what counts as appropriately gendered and sexual behaviours within particular contexts (Davies, 1989, Davies, 2003, Hammersley, 2001, Jackson & Warin, 1990, Kehily, 2001, Paechter, 2007, Renold, 2005, Skelton, 2001). The ‘lads’ were then acting out one of the key components of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity; homophobia (Chambers et al, 2004).
When the video had finished, Leslie was keen to discuss the issues raised within it with the class. She found that, after discussion, much of the hostility the ‘lads’ had displayed disappeared,

When we’d had an opportunity to talk about it […] that fear went away an’ it was fear […] so I guess in some cases, they can be hyper aware of otherness, an’ they have an instinctive, an’ I dunno whether that’s a socially taught thing or […] maybe they’re in the presence of something that they’ve bin taught is not allowed, an’ that makes them very nervous, an’ angry. Because they don’t know how to respond, an’ then you orchestrate a situation where actually they’re allowed to accept that, an’ it’s okay to accept that. Erm an’ then it’s like ‘oh, what was the problem?’

Leslie raises several points here. Firstly, that in her experience, allowing a frank and open discussion about LGB issues can precipitate understanding and acceptance from those previously hostile to it. Whether this acceptance is carried out of the classroom and into wider social contexts is immeasurable here. Secondly she raises again the issue of children and young people being taught, either by the presence of the invisible within formal educational spaces or by other institutional spaces such as the family, that homosexuality is wrong. By facilitating a discussion about LGB people and relationships, Leslie was able to disrupt and challenge some of these learning processes and discursive practices.

That LGB people and issues are invisible within schools is a moot point. Though many of the schools within which participants worked may not have facilitated open discussions about LGB issues, when reflecting upon changes perceived to have taken place they were pupils, several participants observed that one major change was there were pupils at their schools who openly identified as lesbian, gay and bisexual. This phenomenon cut across social and geographical contexts, however it was observed only by participants working within secondary education. The presence of LGB pupils was surprising to participants because many did not perceive there to be an open dialogue on LGB issues within their schools. Participants felt that the presence of LGB pupils reflected a socio-cultural change that schools have yet to catch up with.
For example Alison, who is twenty nine and works in a Yorkshire city school, stated that,

I mean there’re so many gay kids at my school, there’re loads an’ God knows how, but most of ‘em’re like quite open and quite happy about it. They’re really quite comfortable with it which is great but I don’t think it’s ever really mentioned at school.

LGB people and issues remained an ‘invisible presence’ within the schools that participants worked in. They were invisible in the sense that issues were often only raised reactively and usually within the context of bullying. Schools that did engage with LGB issues tended to frame them as something that existed ‘outside’ of the school community. However non-heterosexual identities did have a presence within schools, they were raised by participants or evidenced by pupils identifying as LGB.

The next sub-section of this chapter looks at the urban/rural divide that was apparent in the data from LGB teachers.

**An urban/rural divide**

A striking finding within the data was that there was an urban/rural divide in the way that participants experienced their schools’ approaches to LGB issues. In some of the urban centres in which participants worked, particularly those in London, attempts were being made to deal with LGB issues in terms of challenging homophobic bullying. Edward co-ordinates the drug education for several schools in his London borough and has observed that an attempt is being made to address LGB issues in the classroom and that this is done under the Every Child Matters charter³.

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³ Every Child Matters: Change for Children is a new approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. The Government's aim is for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being
I think Every Child Matters has made a difference [...] where in the past they’ve caved in to parents [...] um what some more savvy schools’re now turning round and doing is saying, “Okay, but we have a duty under Every Child Matters”, an’ some have even suggested the goods and services thing^4, “That we have to provide for the needs of everybody so actually, you know we’ll do some parental consultation, an’ we’ll see what people think”, um an’ that usually comes out as the vast majority are either disinterested or in favour…

Edward’s statement illustrates the way in which politico-legal changes can impact upon the way in which equalities education is delivered. Schools can frame diversity education within obligatory terms. As Section 28 acted as an officially sanctioned barrier to bringing LGB issues into schools, some of the more recent changes in legislation allow schools to raise LGB issues within the context of tackling bullying or diversity education.

Participants who worked in urban geographical contexts reported generally that LGB issues were dealt with to some extent and that this was usually within the context of anti-bullying. Kate and Fiona’s schools who dealt with LGB issues from outside the school community both work in urban schools. Several participants also stated that they were aware of pupils with LGB parents and step parents within an urban context.

It can be argued that urban geographical spaces cater for the needs of their LGB inhabitants in a way that rural communities do not. Urban locales have witnessed a change in capitalist production from manufacturing to the service industry over the past thirty or so years and it is argued that this, coupled with political change, has precipitated a shift in attitude towards LGB people (Lauria & Knopp, 1985, Hennesy, 1995, D’Emilio, 1999). John D’Emilio (1999) in particular has argued that during the age of manufacturing, the reproduction of the nuclear family was important to this

Source: http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/ - accessed 10/02/09

^4 Since 2007 under the Sexual Orientation Regulations of the Goods and Services Act discrimination on the basis of both sexual orientation and gender identity in housing, employment and the provision of goods and services is illegal.
form of capitalism: it helped maintain social order as well as begetting a new work force. The de-industrialisation of the 1970’s and 1980’s brought about new patterns of production that saw cities become sites of spectacle and consumption. The ‘pink pound’ is a powerful contributor to the revenue of many major cities and the ‘homosexing’ of space, evidenced by the ‘gay villages’ that are a sector of most large British cities reflects this (Valentine, 1996, Spargo, 1990). LGB identities are therefore visible within most urban locales and so the need to address LGB issues in urban schools could be seen as necessary.

This ‘homosexing’ of space is not the case in many rural communities and participants who worked within a rural geographical context experienced work-based understandings of non-heterosexualites in a different way to their urban counterparts.

Like Edward, Kitty has heard reference to LGB issues being made within the context of Every Child Matters. However, the way in which the charter and its references to sexuality, ethnicity and Special Educational Needs, were understood differently by the management team at her school. Kitty works in rural Wiltshire and stated that,

Just talking (through) the Every Child Matters, that we have to include every child regardless of their ‘special need, be that their colour, their sexuality, their educational learning’, you know whether they’re on the autistic spectrum, they’re all kind of grouped together, it was just like, being black or gay isn’t a special need! […] I have heard it in that context recently, that’s the only reference I’ve heard. But otherwise (sexuality) is something that’s just simply not mentioned. It just doesn’t come up at all.

Heteronormative discursive practices are illustrated by Kitty’s statement. Every Child Matters was deployed by Edward’s school in order to provide for the needs of all pupils, in Kitty’s school, it was used in terms of inclusion but highlighted special needs and grouped race, sexuality and learning difficulty together. In this case ‘Every Child Matters’ acts to ‘other’ identities within her school that are not consistent with the white, heterosexual, middle class identities that dominate her staffroom. Ergo race, sexuality and learning difficulties are all seen as ‘special needs’.

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Participants working within rural settings largely felt that lesbian, gay and bisexual identities are not part of the communities that their schools serve. None of the participants who taught in rural schools lived within the vicinity of the school and participants who taught within a rural context evoked feelings of isolation within their workplaces. None of them were out at work within any context; this point is picked up in chapter six. This was largely because participants working within rural contexts felt that their schools reflected the social attitudes of their location. Therefore they wanted a clear divide between their professional and private lives.

This professional/private binary was particularly important for Margaret, who is fifty three and works in a rural school in Shropshire. Like other rurally based participants, Margaret is not out at work. The participant talked about a core of staff at her school that openly express homophobic opinions and regularly make her feel uncomfortable within her workplace,

In the staffroom (the loud crowd say things that) I think are inappropriate. They were talking about an ex-pupil last week, who is undeniably a good looking lad, you know, good physique, good (at) sports. An’ they said there’d bin a rumour that apparently he was gay. So they were saying, “Oh gutted that somebody so handsome should be (gay)”. An’ I was like ‘what year is this?’ I want to say something, but then I think don’t stick your neck out because…y’know it’s gonna be…D’you see the kind of thing I mean? And I find that is quite difficult…and how are those people who think that, how will they be if they’ve gotta deal with a bullying problem, where it is an issue of sexuality?

Margaret’s statement raises several issues. Firstly, the notion that it is a ‘shame’ that a boy who is perceived to be good looking and good at sports is gay reflects the notion that homosexuality equals ‘less than’, that this boy is no longer considered to be hegemonically masculine and therefore is tainted. Davies argues that,
Sport is not just a symbolic signifier of male competence but assists in the embodiment of hardness, particularly of external muscular hardness [...] To be is to be powerful, and anyone who is not is flawed (Davies, 2003, p.98).

The ex-pupils’ possible gay sexuality is jarring to the crowd of people at Margaret’s school who posit capability in sport as synonymous with heterosexual masculinity. The boy disrupts heteronormativity because he is strong, capable, good looking and gay.

The attitudes displayed by the ‘loud crowd’ at Margaret’s school in the staffroom spill over into the classroom and Margaret recounted an incident where she challenged a fellow staff member who picked up on a male pupils’ ‘unconventional’ gender behaviour within Margaret’s classroom,

I remember once, one woman came in and she was talking to this kid in my class, accusing him of something, and she said, “Oh we don’t want you being one of those people do we?” Like he was being a girl or something. An’ I said to her after, “I don’t want you to come in my classroom and say that to my kids [...] ‘cause I don’t like it”. ‘Cause it is inappropriate I feel.

Margaret’s experiences illustrate well the bind for many LGB teachers. Firstly, that she does not feel able to challenge the ‘loud crowd’ within the staffroom shows the way in which LGB identities and issues can be silenced within schools. Margaret separates her professional and private lives as a matter of self-preservation and fears the ‘loud crowd’ discovering her lesbian identity. She was able to challenge an individual incident as shown in the section above because the woman in question was bringing her homophobic opinions into Margaret’s space; her classroom. That she told the woman, ‘I don’t want you to come in my classroom and say that to my kids’ demonstrates the juxtaposition between the communal space of the staffroom and the space of the classroom, where teachers can control, to some extent, what is said and by whom.
Participants who worked in urban environments generally felt better protected and supported by the management structure of their schools. Even in cases where participants were not out, within urban settings LGB identities were visible to some extent within their schools. In rural contexts, participants felt that their identities were marginalised by a discourse that rendered them ‘other’ to the communities within which their schools were situated.

The final sub-section offers an analysis of a ‘hierarchy of prejudices’ that were addressed within participants’ schools, a hierarchy upon which homophobia occupied a lowly position, especially when compared to racism.

**Racism vs. homophobia?**

This sub-section offers an analysis of the ways in which race and sexuality intersect in participants’ experiences of how school is. Several participants evoked a hierarchy of prejudice that exists within their schools and upon which homophobia occupies a lowly position. Many participants reflected upon the way in which homophobia is addressed within their schools by comparing this to the way in which racism is dealt with in their schools; it was largely felt that the former is taken less seriously than the latter and so is not addressed in a consistent manner.

All participants were asked about the anti-bullying strategies in place within their schools. Most stated that racism did feature within the strategies but few reported that homophobia was explicitly present. This can be read as a reflection of national educational imperatives on issues related to bullying. In 2004, the government updated and published guidelines on tackling bullying within schools entitled ‘Bullying: Don’t suffer in silence’. Homophobia was not included within this document. Guidelines for tackling homophobia within schools were published later in 2004 and were entitled ‘Stand up for us’. In 2006, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) issued guidelines on bullying related to race, religion and culture. In 2008, the DCSF published the comprehensive ‘Safe to Learn’ guidelines that offered schools’ advice on how to tackle all forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying, within schools. This is the first set of anti-bullying guidelines to include homophobic bullying. However ‘Safe to Learn’ is a set guidelines only and is not
mandatory for delivery within British schools. ‘Safe to Learn’ was followed in December 2009 by the re-named Department for Children, Schools and Family (DCSF), by a document offering guidelines on preventing and responding to sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying. LGBT issues, it can be argued, have historically not been prioritised in government school-based anti-bullying strategies. They arguably have been ‘tagged on’ to the end of existing strategies because of pressure from lobby groups such as teaching unions or Stonewall. The lag between publications and the separation of issues within the guidelines can be viewed as evidence of this.

Several participants felt that homophobia was not taken as seriously as racism within their schools. One of the perceived reasons for this was because it is sometimes difficult to tell ‘real homophobia’ apart from classroom banter. This ties in to an earlier point that participants’ schools tended only to deal with homophobia reactively and within the context of bullying. Therefore, unless there is evidence of harm being done through the use of homophobic pejoratives or behaviour, it is more difficult for teachers to address. Dawn, who is thirty eight and works in an urban school in Warwickshire stated that,

(Homophobia is not taken as seriously as racism) because it’s not as explicit, I think it’s very easy to determine is somebody’s being racist; it’s very easy to determine that. It’s more difficult to determine if they’re being homophobic, er, unless they’re explicitly so and I think a lot of kids’re too brainy to do that.

As the next section of this chapter illustrates, the use of the word ‘gay’ is often viewed by teachers to be part of classroom banter and not necessarily related to homophobia, therefore, as Dawn illustrates, the line between homophobia and banter is not always clear. This, coupled with the earlier assertion that teaching staff in participants’ schools were perceived as being unequipped to address LGB issues, meant that it was often more difficult for participants to address homophobia within their schools.

There was a perceived clash between some religious groups and the extent to which LGB issues are able to be dealt with within the schools that participants worked in.
Edward talked about resistance to tackle LGB issues within his London borough coming from Catholic and Muslim populations. There was a sense from the data that such religious populations were perceived to be against addressing LGB issues in school, whether they had been asked or not. Kate, who works in an inner city London school with an ethnically diverse population, stated the following,

The only thing I have issues with in terms of the Muslim population of the school is the way in which you challenge them. So clearly you’re very aware you know that their religion will have really strong views, and again you’re arguing against the word of God. There’s little me, there’s little queer me an’ then there’s big God (but) kids are really quite open minded if you give them the opportunity to ask questions.

Kate felt that, as many participants did, allowing the pupils to have an open dialogue on LGB issues was positive and that if dogmatic disagreements could be discussed without repercussions from parents, something that participants wanted to avoid, that this was also a positive thing leading to greater cohesion within school communities. Fear of parents’ reactions to dealing with LGB issues within participants’ schools often intersected with race.

For example Spiderwoman works in a Church of England faith school with a population of mainly African-Caribbean pupils. She is herself African-Caribbean and of Jamaican heritage. She stated that in her school, staff perceive a clash between religion, race and sexuality,

I’m involved with the anti-bullying thing (and) I remember before I joined I read their, y’know, equal opportunities thing. Um an’ they mention everything apart from sexuality (laughs) so it’s not even mentioned. I think in the whole anti-bullying thing they don’t mention it [...] I have a view about it; I don’t just think it’s them and sexuality. Leadership is white and most of the parents are black and I think that they think it’s a cultural issue and if it were a different make up school, I think they would possibly tackle it. I think there’s two things that
interplay [...] that’s what I think and um I dunno, if anybody ever bothered to ask me that’s what I’d say (laughs).

At Spiderwoman’s school then, discussing diversity in sexuality is read by management to be a cultural issue; one which does not sit well with the cultural heritage of pupils, that sexuality is not included within her school’s equalities or anti-bullying strategies is evidence of this. Spiderwoman is out to staff at her workplace so leadership are aware of her identity as African-Caribbean and lesbian, however that she has never been approached about this issue suggests that it is simply not on the agenda for her school as a faith school with a mostly black and minority ethnic population. King (1991) deems such limited and distorted understandings of cultural diversity as ‘dysconscious racism’. It is, she argues, through such uncritical habits of mind that binary understandings of race are (re)produced. In the case of Spiderwoman’s school, dysconscious racism also acts to (re)produce heteronormative discursive practices around race and sexuality.

It can be argued that within any interaction, relations are played out that intersect with race, class gender and sexuality (Davies, 2003). Within many participants’ schools these intersections played out hierarchically and homophobia was less of an issue than racism which was addressed, to a certain extent, effectively. Because homophobia did not appear on many participants’ schools’ anti-bullying strategies, it was deemed as difficult to deal with because there was not a policy adopted by all teachers. Therefore, challenging homophobia often became an individualised pursuit whereas challenging racism was part of the schools’ ethos. This can be said to reflect UK government policy because of the lag in publication time between guideline publications ad the separation of LGB from other diversity issues.

The next section of this chapter offers an analysis of the way in which participants experience the use of the word ‘gay’ as a pejorative by pupils as well as the extent to which they are able to challenge this within the schools that they work.
Section three: “That’s SO Gay!”

The way in which children and young people use the word ‘gay’ as a generic put down for anything that doesn’t work properly, isn’t cool or that they generally don’t like, including each other, is well documented within research into sexuality and schooling (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Rasmussen, 2004 Rivers & Carragher, 2003, Richardson & May 1999, Robinson, 2005, Skelton, 2001, Thurlow, 2001, Valentine et al 2001). It is generally understood that although individual instances of using ‘gay’ in this way may not be meant to cause homophobic injury, the widespread use of the word nevertheless contributes to the (re)production of heteronormativity because of the negative connotations of ‘gay’; it is not used to describe things positively, rather it is always used pejoratively. Therefore it can be read as reinforcing the notion that ‘gay’ is defective, uncool and wrong.

Participants frequently heard the word ‘gay’ being used by pupils at their schools; one participant stated that hearing it was ‘like the air you breathe’. Participants had mixed feelings about whether pupils know or understand the potential homophobic injury that can be caused by the use of the word and also had mixed feelings about whether it is an injurious word at all. That this was the case reflects a debate within research that is explored within this section.

This section also seeks to illustrate the way in which both sexuality and gender are framed within heteronormative paradigms through the use of the word ‘gay’ as a playground pejorative. It will also offer an exposition of the extent to which participants are able to challenge the use of the word gay within their schools. This section also asserts the notion that there is an evolutionary process to playground pejoratives and that they act as normalising discursive practices through highlighting the abnormal. Therefore the development of pejorative use based upon physical ability to race to sexuality and finally to a new phenomenon reported by participants; that of using the word ‘Jew’ as a playground pejorative will be put under the lens.
The section is then split into four short sub-sections entitled, ‘Is ‘gay’ injurious?’, ‘Gay’ as (re)producing heteronormative gender identities’, ‘Challenging ‘That’s SO Gay!’ and ‘(Hetero)normalisation through playground pejorative use’.

Is ‘gay’ injurious?

All participants were asked what they perceived pupils meant when they used the word ‘gay’. The responses to this question were complex and reflected a debate present within research into the use of ‘gay’ as a pejorative. On one hand, it is argued that ‘taboo slang’ such as ‘gay’ can act as a signifier of group membership, of a shared disrespect for authority through mutual knowledge and interests (Thurlow, 2001). Thurlow’s line of argument continues and makes the claim that although ‘gay’ may not necessarily mean ‘homosexual’ when used as a casual playground pejorative, it still acts to (re)produce heteronormative understandings of sexual and gender identities,

It cannot be assumed that (homophobic language use) is necessarily indicative of young people’s attitude towards the social group which these words apparently describe. It should be remembered that a word like ‘gay’ can often be used loosely to describe anything undesirable such as a lack of interest in sport, academic success or a lack of aggression (Thurlow, 2001: 33)

A ‘lack of interest in sport, academic success or a lack of aggression’ denote a failure to ‘be’ masculine in an appropriately normative way, therefore, to use the word ‘gay’ is to associate gay with those things, to be gay is to be un-masculine and it is in this way that ‘gay’ as a playground pejorative (re)produces heteronormative discursive practices.

The notion that ‘gay’ acts to reinforce what is considered to be ‘normal’ amongst pupils was reflected in the data. Most participants felt that pupils use the word ‘gay’ without thought, that it is a fashionable put-down that has been adopted by young people. However most participants did feel that though pupils might not mean lesbian, gay and bisexual people when they use the word ‘gay’, when it is used it always
highlights a lack in the thing (or person) it is used to describe. John who is the assistant head in a London secondary school stated that,

I think it’s often used as a flippant remark meaning that something is bad, erm an’ […] a child won’t sit on a chair if a child doesn’t like the chair because the chair is gay. But that just might mean that there is y’know, some Tipp-ex on the chair and therefore they don’t wanna sit on it. So it’s that the chair is bad, which I guess equally, the fact that it’s got Tipp-ex on it means that it’s not a normal chair. But I think many of those remarks are just flippant comments because it’s become quite commonly used in kind of youth culture as something that isn’t good. Erm but when challenged, those individuals or those groups say, ‘Oh but I don’t mean anything against gay people’, an’ it’s just their poor use of language.

John’s statement reflects the claim made by Thurlow about the use of ‘gay’. Although pupils don’t ‘mean anything against gay people’ when they say it, the notion that a chair is bad or abnormal acts to reinforce ‘gay’ as wrong, abnormal or lacking and therefore something that does not belong within John’s classroom.

Participants illustrated the complexities that existed within children and young people’s use of ‘gay’ and many understood it as treading a line between homophobia and a word that is en vogue with young people. Mary Lou Rasmussen (2004) argues against the victimhood of the pejorative use of ‘gay’. She argues that there are other consequences to the use of ‘gay’ and that there is not always a readable connection between ‘gay’ and LGB identities. Rasmussen posits the notion that it is in the knowing use of words that injury occurs and that if pupils don’t know that gay is connected to gay identity then its power as a homophobic slur is questionable (ibid.). John states that ‘gay’ is often reflective of pupils’ ‘poor use of language’ and therefore not necessarily connected to gay people. When challenging pupils’ use of ‘gay’ participants reported that they argued against its use by stating that ‘a pen/computer/school subject cannot have a sexuality’ and therefore using ‘gay’ is a redundant speech act. This however closes down a potential discussion about how pupils understand the way in which identity is created through language, something
that Rasmussen argues can be facilitated during the moments within which ‘gay’ is deployed by pupils.

There was a perceived difference between the ways in which pupils label inanimate objects as ‘gay’ vis-à-vis calling another person ‘gay’. Kitty works in a primary school in Wiltshire and her opinion of this issue had changed between interviews,

(When we spoke last time) I remember saying (that) I never associated ‘oh that’s so gay!’ as being something to do with being gay. I just thought it’s just a word, one of those words that has no meaning in the same way that you say ‘oh that’s cool’, it’s not actually cold in temperature. But since I gave you that opinion […] I have heard kids in the playground say, ‘Urgh you’re so gay!’ if they’ve done something wrong, and they will respond with something […] which will make it quite clear that they know what gay means. Um an’ it is used as an insult, it is reinforcing the idea that it’s not normal.

When ‘gay’ is used without thought to describe an inanimate object it is then sometimes difficult to read homophobic injury into the use of the word. It may reinforce the notion that an object is not normal but ‘gay’s’ association to sexual identity is precarious. However, as Rasmussen (2004) argues, when there is knowing in a speech act, its injuriousness becomes clearer. Therefore Kitty’s experience illustrates that, when related to a person, ‘gay’ is a ‘dirty word’ and one that is used with injurious intent. Kitty’s experience also supports Renold’s (2003, 2005) assertion that far from being a sexless space, primary schools are the site for much informal work on the construction and (re)production of sexual identities and are spaces where heteronormative discursive processes are practiced by pupils.

The following sub-section picks up on a point made earlier and offers an examination of the way in which the effect of ‘gay’ as deployed by pupils in participants’ schools acts to uphold heteronormative constructions of gender.
Gay’ as (re)producing heteronormative gender identities

The previous sub-section demonstrated the way in which ‘gay’ can act to uphold hegemonic constructions of masculinity through its assertion that ‘gay’ is deployed to highlight a ‘lack of interest in sport, academic success or a lack of aggression’ (Thurlow, 2001). Indeed previous research has argued that it is largely boys who use homophobic language as a way to assert ‘normal’ masculinity within educational spaces (Chambers et al, 2004, Epstein, 1997, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Robinson, 2005, Thurlow, 2001).

The extent to which participants felt that it is largely boys who use ‘gay’ varied and was dependent upon the demographics of the school population. John’s school is located within a London suburb, the school population is mostly white and there is a visible British National Party presence within the local community. John’s understanding of the way in which pupils use ‘gay’ contradicts the notion that it is mainly boys who use it,

(Pupils use gay) just as a derogatory term, not necessarily in terms of sexuality…I don’t think there is a particular type of pupil, I mean I…I’ve heard 6th form girls, I’ve heard 12 year-old boys …

In this case, then, it becomes more difficult to pick out ‘gay’ from a popular playground pejorative and to isolate it as a device for the (re)production of heteronormative gender constructions.

In contrast, Spiderwoman works in a Church of England faith school with a mostly African-Caribbean population. Within her school, ‘gay’ is used exclusively by male pupils. However, as the following statement demonstrates, normative gender constructions are reinforced by both male and female pupils,

Girls don’t ever use it. (I think this is) because there are lots of different ways to be a girl. Unless you’re like (laughs) there is this phrase, it’s really out of order but it’s quite funny (laughs) they sometimes call people a ‘man beast’. (Laughs) basically they’re the
only girls that get any trouble so like if they’re a bit tall or, y’know, the stupid stuff a bit more (butch) which is nothing to do with them, it’s just their genes. So occasionally you get a few man beast’s right erm but other than that, you know, they don’t really tease girls very much about anything whereas er for boys y’know I think they have to be more macho and er it seems like there’s a very narrow way of being a boy and especially like for black boys, you know it’s all about how you look and it’s about how people perceive you an’ are you respected and all this kind of thing an’ it’s…So anything outside of that an’ they feel quite threatened by it.

Several interesting issues come out of Spiderwoman’s observations. Firstly, her statement implies that, at her school, gay is used less to describe inanimate objects than it is people. ‘Gay’ is used by boys in her school as a put down to directly police a particular kind of masculinity associated with aesthetic signifiers and being respected; gay does not equal respect within this context. Here, we can see again the way in which gender, sexuality and ethnicity intersect in order to (re)produce appropriate gender behaviour (Mutchler, 2001, Renold, 2005).

Spiderwoman’s assertion that there are ‘lots of different ways to be a girl’ is contradicted by her following remark that girls who are not feminine enough are labelled ‘man beast’. ‘Gay’ is not an insult used against girls whose embodiment is unconventional. However ‘man beast’ implies masculinity, something women ‘should not be’ and therefore this acts to (re)produce a heteronormative discourse in the same way as ‘gay’. Jackson & Warin (2000) argue that,

Awareness of one’s gender and the gender of others is knowledge that is laid down early on in life and which then proceeds to be a salient aspect of the sociocultural world (p.375).

Spiderwoman’s statement shows us how a masculine gender identity is (re)produced through use of the word gay and feminine gender identity is policed through the use of ‘man beast’. Binary gender identities are then present and (re)produced within pupils’ everyday discourse.
Several participants reported that staff use ‘gay’ within their schools and the way in which this is deployed by staff members acts to uphold normative constructions of gender as well as sexuality. Earlier in the chapter we saw how a ‘loud crowd’ of staff within Margaret’s school police the gender and sexual identities of pupils. Margaret works at a rural school in Shropshire, the school is all white British in terms of its demographics and Margaret stated that ‘boys dominate’ within her school and that expectation, in terms of girls’ post-school trajectories, were envisioned to lead them into the domestic sphere.

Male pupils’ gender identities were then rigidly policed by both pupils and staff within Margaret’s school and this was made very apparent within the context of sport. We have already seen how the ‘loud crowd’ expressed disappointment that one of the schools’ former sporting stars had come out as gay since leaving the school. The participant recounted the following incident which had occurred within the last twelve months,

The P.E. department had got these shorts and dyed them pink. And when boys forgot their kit they made them wear ‘em (laughs in disbelief) an’ I said, ‘Why pink?’ An’ they went, ‘Yeah well it’s because it’s a gay colour’, an’ I said, ‘Is it?’ an’ ‘why?’ You know, ‘couldn’t you have dyed them another colour?’ So they were doing it to make the boys, y’know, prance around in pink shorts and they thought this was really funny.

Being a competent and enthusiastic sportsman can be read as an essential component of heterosexual masculinity. It is a signifier of strength, competence and power (Davies, 2003, Jackson, 2010, Renold, 2005). For a boy to forget his kit is, in some way, a rejection of this dynamic. Forcing boys who forget their kit to wear pink shorts is then both a symbolic and literal interpretation of a lack of interest in sport as a signifier of faulty, and therefore gay, masculinity. That the P.E. department found this to be amusing illustrates the extent to which heteronormativity dominates the construction of ‘appropriate masculinity’ as well as the way in which humour and insult are deployed simultaneously within regulatory discursive practices within

‘Gay’ is then deployed within participants’ schools in order to police contextually appropriate constructions of masculinity. Spiderwoman was the only participant who reported that pupils’ also police femininity through highlighting what is lacking in those girls labelled as ‘man beast’. This illustrates the notion posited by Thurlow (2001) who argues that most sexual pejoratives, whether used homophobically or not, refer to gay men, thus rendering the lesbian an invisible presence within educational spaces.

The following sub-section offers an analysis of the extent to which participants are able to challenge the use of ‘gay’ within their workplaces.

Challenging ‘that’s SO gay!’

There is scarce literature that is explicitly concerned with the experiences of LGB teachers (Endo et al, 2010, Nixon & Givens, 2002). What is argued within the existing literature on LGB teachers is that staff members who do not fit into the heteronormative paradigm that dominates most schools are marginalised within the workplace and that this makes teaching a difficult career for LGB people (Dunne, 1997, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Ferfolja, 1998, 2009, Lehtonen, 2004, Nixon & Givens, 2002, Renold, 2005, Russ et al, 2002).

Furthermore it is argued that LGB teachers are in a unique position to understand and tackle homophobia within schools because of their own potential experiences of homophobia but that a teacher’s homosexuality can be a barrier rather than a facilitator to discussion because of real or perceived homophobia within individual schools and the school system (Ali, 1996, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Sykes, 2004). Power dominates the relationship between teacher and pupil (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Conrad & Crawford, 1998). This relationship of power is fragile, and can be reversed by signs of vulnerability in staff. As ‘gay’ is used as a pejorative by many children to describe something that is lacking, then any staff member who declares him/herself as such is vulnerable to scrutiny by both pupils and other staff members.
Chapter six offers an explicit analysis of participants’ choices around coming out at work, however this sub-section offers an exposition of the extent to which participants’ were able to challenge the use of ‘gay’ within their schools.

Although there are multiple readings of the way in which ‘gay’ is deployed within schools, most participants felt wounded in some way by the liberal use of the word and their abilities to challenge this was varied and influenced by the extent to which participants were out at work.

For Alison, the endemic use of ‘gay’ makes her feel self-conscious within her classroom,

It makes me really, really conscious of it. ‘Cause I think especially like some of the kids that I teach, I’m aware that some of them know that I’m gay so I’m a little bit, you know, I just cringe I think ‘cause I think ‘oh God this is gonna…’, you know, am I gonna have to say something. An’ I don’t really like to, I s’pose my way of dealing with it is [that] I’d rather not make a big deal about my sort of personal life so I tend to sort of steer clear.

Alison has not explicitly come out to her pupils so it is her perception that they assume that she is gay. Endo et al (2010) argue that pupils’ perceptions of their teacher’s sexualities are dependent upon heteronormative gender assumptions. Because Alison does not embody ‘femininity’ in the heteronormative sense, she assumes that her pupils read this as a signifier of her sexuality. Alison’s desire to keep her professional and private lives separate is compounded by the constant use of the word gay and her desire not to make ‘a big deal’ about it. This ties in with a discourse around what it means to be acceptably different within context-specific situations. For Alison, making a ‘big deal’ about pupils using the word ‘gay’ would be to out herself in the classroom, a situation she would not be comfortable with.

Participants who were out to pupils felt more able to challenge the use of ‘gay’ than their counterparts who were not out to pupils. This challenge often took the form of
light-hearted banter with pupils during the moments after ‘gay’ was spoken. For example Elaine, who is out to pupils, often challenges ‘gay’ as follows,

You know, because I’m out and everything at work I’ll say something like, “Well how’s that book gay? Doesn’t look very gay to me! Does it mean it’s kissing the other book?” and they’ll just go, “No, no, no, it’s stupid!” and I’ll sort of laugh it off but make a point of every time I hear it picking up in it rather than make a very big issue out of it. Erm, and the only time I have made more of an issue out of it was when I knew I had a lad who was gay in the class. And I really wanted to make a point a very big point that, hang on, they were insulting me and I really wasn’t taking that. Erm, but on the whole I treat it more as a joke.

Elaine discusses two separate strategies here. One is to treat the use of the word gay in a light hearted manner; the pupils know that she is in a lesbian relationship and so the humorousness of the physical impossibility of a book having a gay sexuality can be enjoyed equally by pupil and teacher. In this way Elaine is able to share a joke with the pupils whilst simultaneously making a serious point about the use of the word gay as a pejorative. However this strategy also acts to close down a discussion of the way in which pupils understand identity and its construction through language (Rasmussen, 2004).

That Elaine made ‘more of an issue out of it’ when there was a pupil whom she knew to be gay present in the classroom can be read as both a reactive and preventative measure. Elaine sees no reason to make an issue or to open a discussion about ‘gay’ when she is the only LGB person in the room. It becomes a more important issue when gay pupils are around because Elaine, as a teacher and as an LGB-identified person, does not want the pupil in question to feel ostracised or wounded by it, something that research has shown can happen (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Rivers & Carragher, 2003, Richardson & May 1999, Thurlow, 2001, Valentine et al 2001).

This calls into question participants’ understanding of the notion that pupils use ‘gay’ as ‘just a word’. Several participants talked about tackling the use of the word ‘gay’ in
a similar way to Elaine. Though pupils use ‘gay’ casually, participants did have an understanding of the deeper damage the persistent use of the word might do. For example Spiderwoman stated that,

It doesn’t bother me personally but I just think, y’know, how would I feel if I was a kid who knew they were gay um sitting in that kind of environment and I’d be…I wouldn’t wanna come out it’d just be horrible.

Spiderwoman’s statement, like Elaine’s strategy shows an understanding of the deeper discursive forces at play, forces that construct ‘gay’ as negative through the casual adoption of the word to describe anything lacking in some way.

Another strategy for challenging the use of the word ‘gay’ was to liken this kind of casual homophobia to racism. For example John stated that,

I would tell (the student) that it is unacceptable to use that kind of language in that context, I would ask them why they were using it, erm…I would kind of out bullying into another context and say, you know, just like with some racist abuse that they were giving I would also let them know that it wasn’t appropriate.

However as we saw in the previous section, homophobia was not dealt with in the same way as racism within participants’ schools and therefore it is possible that schools, and therefore pupils, do not understand homophobia with the same level of gravity as they do racism. Many participants reported that they felt as though they were the ‘only ones’ who challenged pupils’ use of the word ‘gay’ and that homophobia in general was not taken seriously. Again, John raises the issue of homophobia only being dealt with reactively and with regards to bullying therefore closing down a debate around deeper issues of pupils’ understanding of identity and its construction through language.
Several participants alluded to the notion of homophobia as being the ‘last socially acceptable prejudice’ present within the schools in which they worked. Spiderwoman felt that this was because,

> People are not able to say anything er against race anymore, so I think homophobia’s the last acceptable (prejudice). Like no-one in my school would ever dream of saying ‘I hate all white people’, or ‘I hate Chinese people’ or whatever […] but a kid doesn’t mind saying ‘Oh well actually I’m homophobic’. Um y’know, I’m not gonna send them out for saying that kind of thing so I think it’s the last thing that you are able to be quite negative about without people thinking you’re a terrible, terrible person.

Spiderwoman’s statement raises again the issue of there being a ‘hierarchy of prejudice’ upon which homophobia occupies a lowly position. That she herself would not send a pupil out of her class for stating that they are homophobic, something she suggests she might do if the issue was race, acts as illustration to this.

Participants felt able to challenge ‘gay’ to varying degrees. Some, like Alison, felt uncomfortable in doing so because, as a school, homophobia is not dealt with centrally; therefore it becomes a singular issue and so addressing homophobia might be read as an admission by pupils. Other participants were able to challenge ‘gay’ and used several strategies in order to achieve this. Race and sexuality intersected here as homophobia could be likened to racism. However this was a precarious strategy because of the ‘hierarchy of prejudice’ upon which homophobia occupies a lowly position.

One interesting feature of the data on the use of ‘gay’ was the way in which participants were able to chart the development of playground pejoratives. ‘Gay’ was perceived as the latest in a long line of words pupils use as put downs. The following section offers an analysis of this phenomenon as well as exposing a new trend, reported by several participants between interviews, of pupils using the word ‘Jew’ instead of ‘gay’ within their schools.
(Hetero)normalisation through playground pejorative use

Heteronormativity (re)produces itself through discursive practices which act to ‘other’ behaviours and identities that challenge hegemonic versions heterosexuality as the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ way to be (Robinson, 2005). Heteronormativity therefore needs the deviant in order to reproduce itself in its own image. It is in this way that theorists argue that heterosexuality is an invisible identity (Berlant & Warner, 1998, Butler, 1990, McRuer, 2006). Heterosexuality forces silence upon its opposites, laws such as Section 28, and more recently in the USA, Proposition 8 are put in place so that populations know what they are preferred, by the institutions of state and law, not to be.

The deployment of ‘gay’ as a pejorative can be read as a heteronormative mechanism which, even when not meant homophobically, acts to highlight that which is undesirable, lacking or wrong.

‘Gay’, when used in this way, is a relatively new phenomenon and many participants felt that ‘gay’ as a word to describe the undesirable within educational spaces has been reinforced by figures in the media figures such as Chris Moyles and Jeremy Clarkson and it is this way that it has become immersed within the language of youth.

Many participants remembered using words such as ‘spaz’ or ‘mongol’ as a pejorative when they were at school. Words such as these are obviously loaded with an abnormalisation of the disabled body. Therefore, playground pejoratives can be seen to regulate the normal through highlighting that which is deemed to be abnormal or lacking.

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5 Proposition 8 was a California ballot proposition in the US general elections of November 4, 2008. It changed the state Constitution to restrict the definition of marriage to opposite-sex couples and eliminated same-sex couples right to marry. The legality of Prop 8 is currently under debate.

6 Chris Moyles is a BBC Radio 1 DJ. He came under criticism from the gay lobby group Stonewall after he described a mobile phone ringtone as ‘gay’ on air in 2006. The BBC defended Moyles, arguing that “The word gay is often now used to mean ‘lame’ or ‘rubbish’. This is a widespread current usage [...] among young people”.

7 Jeremy Clarkson is one of the presenters of BBC 2’s car programme, ‘Top Gear’. In 2006 the BBC received complaints after he labelled a car ‘ginger beer’, the cockney rhyming slang for queer, and ‘a bit gay’.
As illustrated within the previous section, the use of ‘gay’ precipitates complexity of debate. Although ‘gay’ might not necessarily carry with it a homophobic slur, it nonetheless can act to (re)produce heteronormative gender and sexual constructions because it positions ‘gay’ negatively in its reference to inanimate objects (Rasmussen, 2004, Thurlow, 2001). Participants’ recollections of their own uses of playground pejoratives can be read similarly. Fiona, who is twenty six and grew up in Edinburgh, stated the following,

> When I was at school I used to say, “Oh God you’re such a Mongol” I wouldn’t say that now and it’s exactly the same as I meant it (then). I don’t mean ‘God you’re such a disabled person and I hate all disabled people’, it’s the thoughtless things kids think to say.

Though ‘mongol’ may have been used thoughtlessly by Fiona in the same way that pupils at John’s school label a chair with Tipp-ex on it ‘gay’, it nevertheless (re)produces the notion that to have Down’s Syndrome is to be lacking, abnormal, undesirable and an inappropriate presence within school.

Children say unkind things to each other and the effect of such linguistic techniques signify group membership, demonstrate a rejection of authority and, in doing so, (re)produce the notion of ‘normal’ within educational spaces (Davies, 1989, Davies, 2003, Epstein, 1997, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Thurlow, 2001, Rasmussen, 2004, Robinson, 2000, Robinson, 2005, Skelton, 2001). (Hetero)normativity is then discursively (re)produced through a set of intricate constructions and subtle reinforcements. The way in which sexuality, gender, able-bodiedness and ethnicity are understood and performed is through the constant scrutiny of a lens which identifies the normal though highlighting the abnormal.

As previously stated, all participants were asked what they thought pupils meant when they used the word ‘gay’. One participant, Nicole, stated ‘I think it’s just another word for lame’. Gay and disabled then go hand in hand within the playground pejorative. The crip theorist Robert McRuer argues that there is a ‘system of compulsory able-bodiedness’ that interweaves with compulsory heterosexuality and
that (re)produces the queer as that which is lacking (McRuer, 2006 p.2). (Hetero)normativity can be read as relying upon a discourse of able-bodiedness as well as upon heterosexuality for it’s (re)production. It is in this way that the ‘gay’ like the ‘disabled’ can be made to signify the undesirable body that is positioned as opposite to the appropriately gendered and sexualised bodies of the normatively heterosexual.

There was a six month gap between first and second interviews and some participants observed a change in the preferred playground pejorative in the interim. Several participants reported that they had noticed a decline in pupils’ use of ‘gay’ as a general pejorative. Two participants, living in opposite ends of the country, reported that it had been replaced by a new one: ‘Jew’.

Valerie works in a school in London and she stated that,

Erm yes they (use gay) much less than before. I think they’ve got other words now that they use, that’s probably why. They say Jew. I heard that several times. They do call each other Jew […] I’ve had it several times an’ I was so shocked I just didn’t know what to do. Um an’ I’ve talked to the kids in question, I have talked to the parents about it, an’ they were completely horrified that their kids would use that kind of word, you know to talk nastily about someone. (They say) ‘You’re such a Jew’. Instead of saying, y’know, ‘eff off’, no, that’s not something you use it’s, ‘You’re such a Jew’.

Several issues are raised by Valerie’s statement. One of the concerns of participants’ in this research was that other, and by that heterosexual staff members were ill-equipped to deal with LGB issues when they arose within their schools. Valerie here articulates a similar bafflement in her inability to immediately know ‘what to do’ when she heard ‘Jew’ used pejoratively. Secondly Valerie illustrates the way in which ‘Jew’, like ‘spaz’, is used to describe other people unlike ‘gay’ which is deployed in the description of inanimate objects as well as people.
There are several reasons why ‘Jew’ might be deployed as a playground pejorative and for why it might replace ‘gay’ as the preferred pejorative of choice. Firstly, the metaphorical spaces for the separation of the normal from the deviant both remain in place and are subject to change (Foucault, 1967). Butler argues that,

The terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable. Sometimes the very terms that confer ‘humaness’ on some individuals are those that deprive others of the possibility of achieving that status, producing a differential between the human and less than human (Butler, 2004, p.2).

Therefore to be disabled, gay or Jewish can mean to have an undesirable body, to be deviant or to be less than human and this notion is (re)produced through normalising discursive practices such as playground pejorative use.

Secondly it can be argued that the twenty-first century has seen resurgence in neo-conservatism and religion. Religion has therefore become significant within macro socio-political debates and therefore has filtered down to the micro level. As a result, within some social and institutional contexts, to be Jewish is to be on the wrong side of a dichotomy.

Naomi Scheman (1999) argues that heterosexuality and Christianity intersect to marginalise both the queer and the Jewish. She argues that because the Christian faith upholds the notion that ‘everyone is loved by Jesus’ (regardless of whether or not they love him) and that this implies a naturalness to its dogma (Scheman, 1999, p.63). She argues that,

Heterosexuality can be seen as part of essential human nature, so that homosexuality counts as the wilful denial of one’s true self, as Jewishness counts as the wilful denial of God’s love (ibid.).

Like Foucault’s account of nineteenth century discourse on homosexuality as being ‘everywhere present within him’ so Jewishness has historically come to be seen as written on the body, present in corporeal signifiers. Perhaps this is why ‘Jew’ is
joining or replacing ‘gay’ as the preferred playground pejorative. Heteronormative discursive practices position bodies, behaviours and practices as abnormal and in this way (dis)ability, sexuality, gender and religion intersect, relying upon one another to (re)produce the ‘normal’, reified and preferred institutional subject.

Summary

This chapter is wide in scope and far reaching in its aims. The first section, ‘How school was’, introduced the reader to participants and to their reflections upon their own school days. This was important to include within the thesis because we do not live in temporal vacuums, rather we take with us what we have learned through an engagement with or a rejection of normalising discursive practices. This section engaged with participants’ recollections of primary and secondary schools and argued that both of these educational spaces are sites for the (re)production of heteronormative discursive practices. This (re)production was evidenced by participants’ recollections of gendered play and an understanding of their own preferences for play as being ‘inappropriately gendered’ (Mutchler, 2001). The section also illustrated that primary school can be a site for sexual attraction and argued, reflecting a notion posited by Epstein & Johnson (1998), that boys are able to identify moments of same-sex attraction at an earlier age than are girls.

This section also offered an analysis of participants’ secondary education and argued that heteronormative gender expectations were pertinent within the lives of female participants. This sub-section also illustrated the way in which academia was used by several participants as an academic shield but that this was read positively within female participants social worlds and negatively within the social worlds of male participants. This section also illustrated the way in which ‘negative modelling’ of LGB sexuality impacted upon the subjectivity of two participants.

Finally, this section demonstrated the way in which the homophobically motivated bullying several participants experienced whilst at school impacted upon their subjective understandings of their sexualities and argued that this, in some way, prompted them to undertake LGBT activist activities within their adult lives.
The second section of this chapter, ‘How school is’ offered an examination of the way participants experience school as LGB teachers. It argued that the repeal of Section 28 was largely understood by participants to be a positive thing, however that it has not been replaced by any mandatory spaces within curriculum for raising LGB issues means that staff who deal with LGB issues, usually within the context of bullying, are often ill equipped to do so. This section also highlighted the urban/rural divide within participants’ experiences and argued that participants working within urban settings find that LGB issues are dealt with more effectively than their rural counterparts.

Thirdly, this section demonstrated that participants perceived there to be a ‘hierarchy of prejudice’ that is operationalised within their schools and upon which homophobia occupies a lowly position, especially when compared to racism which is dealt with severely and taken seriously by the management teams at their schools.

The third section of this chapter, ‘That’s SO gay!’ had four aims. Firstly, it questioned the extent to which ‘gay’, as deployed by pupils, can be understood as always homophobic. It posited the notion that injury through ‘gay’ is dependent upon its knowing use but that nevertheless ‘gay’ acts to (re)produce the notion that things or people associated with the word are lacking, abnormal or wrong.

Secondly, this section offered an exposition of participants’ experiences of ‘gay’ as (re)producing normative gender identities. It argued that both pupils’ and staffs’ deployment of ‘gay’ act to uphold heteronormative constructions of gender and that both masculinity and femininity are (re)produced through discursive practices.

The third sub-section of this chapter explored the extent to which participants felt able to challenge pupils’ use of ‘gay’ and argued that this was often related to whether participants were out to pupils or not, the former feeling generally more able to challenge ‘gay’ than the former. It also demonstrated that when tackling ‘gay’ participants often compared ‘gay’ to racist slurs which were deemed unacceptable within participants’ schools. This again raised the issue of there being a ‘hierarchy of prejudice’ upon which homophobia occupies a lowly position.
Finally, this section demonstrated the ways in which normative constructions of able-bodiedness, heterosexuality and religious belief collide within heteronormative discursive practices in order to construct the normative subject. It charted the evolution of playground pejoratives and argued that metaphorical spaces exist for the construction of the normative subject and that these spaces are subject to change and redefinition.

The next chapter of this thesis offers an examination of broader social pedagogies of gender and sexual identities as experienced by participants through informal learning strategies. It engages with participants’ coming out narratives within the context of their private lives as well as with participants’ understandings of their gender and sexual identities, the ways in which they embody their sexualities and the ways in which these understandings are played out within their private and professional worlds.
Chapter Five

“I’m happy for people to look at me and say, ‘She’s gay’”: Participants’ experiences of coming out and their understandings of the embodiment of gender and sexuality within their private and professional worlds

Introduction

The previous chapter illustrated participants’ rememberings of their own schooling and of moments during their childhood and adolescence that they have come to interpret as signifiers of their adult gender and sexual identities. It also opened up a discussion of how participants experience school as an LGB teacher. This chapter furthers this discussion as well as examining broader social pedagogies of gender and sexual identities as experienced through informal learning strategies. Informal learning strategies are understood here as being processes through which a lesbian, gay and bisexual subject is achieved through a process of becoming (Phelan, 1993). In other words ‘being’ or embodying a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity is not something that occurs overnight as it were; rather it is a process that is developed over time and achieved through the recognition and adoption of social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers. The chapter is then concerned with how such informal social learning practices are understood by participants and with the ways in which they play out within their private and professional worlds.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold and is split into corresponding sections. The first section, “I think it’s best to be out, whatever other people think”: Coming out as internal monologue and external dialogue’, introduces the reader to participants’ coming out narratives. For many lesbian, gay and bisexual people, coming out is an ongoing process and one that evolves over time. Consequently, coming out is a major theme throughout this research. This section engages with participants’ first significant coming out stories, which often encompass a declaration made about sexuality to a family member or other significant figure in an LGB person’s life. However before one can externalise one’s sexual self there is an internal process of
negotiation, of coming to terms with one’s desires (Plummer, 1995). This section then engages with the meaning of coming out to participants and with the nature of the closet as a social space from which one is compelled to emerge. It is therefore split into two sub-sections entitled ‘coming out as an internal monologue’ and ‘coming out as an external dialogue’.

It has been argued that coming out stories often follow a narrative plot of ‘awareness, struggle and epiphany’ (Plummer, 1995, p.131). In this section I therefore demonstrate how participants’ coming out stories follow this pattern. Plummer also argues that it is important to examine the social roles that sexual stories such as the coming out narrative play; this is also a concern of this research. Queer theorists have argued that coming out, and indeed identifying oneself as lesbian, gay, or bisexual act to uphold the notion that sexuality is essential or fixed ergo reinforcing the binary structures that heteronormativity depends upon for its (re)production. It is here that the notion of informal learning strategies comes into play. The extent to which participant’s coming out stories mark entrance into dichotomised and hierarchically organised sexual identity categories will be put under the lens in this section.

The second section of the chapter, “I pass as straight generally, that’s what I feel I have to do”: Participants understandings of their gender and sexual identities and embodiments within their private and professional worlds’, engages with participants’ understandings of their gender and sexual identities, the ways in which they embody their sexualities and the ways in which these understandings are played out within their private and professional worlds. The intersections between nationality, race, class, age and so on also come into play here and, by deploying a queer analysis, will demonstrate the challenges that LGB people’s understandings of their gender and sexual identities pose to the notion that sexuality is a stable and coherent facet of identity. This is an important aspect of this research because the thesis does not seek to simply examine participants’ lives as teachers, or as LGB teachers, rather as sexual beings whose varying experiences have shaped and influenced them as they move through social worlds and temporal moments.

This section will also demonstrate the ways in which participants’ understandings of gender and sexual identity are carried with them into the workplace. Here, we engage
with the notion of LGB teachers being able to read the social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers of gender and sexual identity categories on to the bodies of the pupils they teach.

Section one: “I think it’s best to be out, whatever other people think”: Coming out as internal monologue and external dialogue.

This thesis is concerned with the notion that LGB teachers’ private and professional worlds do not necessarily co-exist coherently. Rather, being a teacher with an LGB identity can often involve a negotiation between how one ‘is’ in private and one’s professional conduct. This is indeed an issue for most people; we embody ‘workse selves’ and ‘homeselves’. However these distinctions are often more acute for LGB people because of fear of and/or actual homophobia within the workplace, and with the precariousness that can accompany a minority identity often rendered invisible by heteronormative discursive practices. Therefore coming out is a key issue within this research. Coming out here is understood to not to be a solitary speech act but rather an ongoing social process, therefore it is important to engage with participants’ experiences of coming out within their private and professional worlds in order to obtain a deep reading of the contextual processes of coming out. This section then offers an examination of significant comings out, and of the internal struggle that often precipitates the act of speaking one’s sexuality to another. Though this section does not deal explicitly with school as an institutional space, this being the site of analysis in chapter six, it is worth noting that some of the participants that figure within this section came out or had their first lesbian, gay or bisexual experience within the educational spaces of school as a workplace, or at university. It is also important to note that participants’ experiences of coming out and of the internal and external struggles that the coming out process precipitates is something that shapes their experiences as teachers. As we move through life we take with us what we know, and that knowledge is never purely academic, or vocational or personal. Therefore the coming out process and living as lesbian, gay or bisexual in the private realm shapes participants’ experiences within their professional worlds.
The intersections between social worlds and facets of identity have been the concern of much recent feminist, poststructural and queer projects. Additionally a poststructuralist/queer analysis of coming out positions the phenomenon as a social process made necessary by heteronormative discursive practices that ‘other’ non-heterosexual desires and relationships. These processes hierarchically dichotomise sexuality, normalising the heterosexual and othering the homosexual. Therefore, if one’s sexual desires are not normative heterosexual desires, it becomes necessary to speak them into existence, to make them visible, to own them (Califia, 1994). As shown in the theory chapter, as a result of such discursive devices, coming out has evolved over time into a political, as well a personal, statement of being.

Queer theorists, however, argue that it is never truly possible to own any statement of being, for they are all riddled with contradictions, troubles and hierarchical power structures. For example Judith Butler (1990) deems the language used to describe non-heterosexual sexual practices, i.e. ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ and ‘bisexual’, as ‘instruments of regulatory regimes’. In other words that to identify oneself as ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’ is to capitulate to the oppressor, in this case to the social institutions that discursively position non-heterosexual desires as ‘other’.

A queer ontological position seeks to trouble categories, to deconstruct them and to illustrate the notion that categories of identity are relational, social and contextual phenomena (Rust, 1993). This, to some extent, is the project of this thesis. However, it is also the project of this thesis to highlight the limitations of a purely poststructuralist/queer approach. I feel that such an approach is too reductive; it takes place too often in a textual realm that does not and cannot engage with the lived experiences of people and their daily struggles to exist through the identity categories that are so firmly entrenched within the social worlds that we inhabit.

My position on the process of coming out concurs with that of Shane Phelan who, as exposed in the theory chapter, views coming out as participation in historical social discourses. It involves a fashioning of a new self, a ‘lesbian, ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’ self that did not exist prior to the beginning of the coming out process (Phelan, 1993). Phelan states that too active a take-up of the queer perspective that identity is a performance, a ‘copy with no original’ (Butler, 1990), that one cannot truly be
‘lesbian, ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’, is to ignore, or to render redundant, the processes of coming out that are often personal and political struggles. Identity categories ‘exist’, they are pertinent features in social and political lives, they matter to people who proudly call themselves lesbian, gay or bisexual. Phelan also coins the term ‘(be)coming out’ in order to illustrate coming out as participation in social processes that involve informal ways of learning. The role that informal learning strategies play within participants’ coming out narratives is discussed within this section.

Though my position on identity politics has already been exposed within the theory chapter, it is important that I raise this issue again in order to offer an analysis of participants’ coming out narratives. I wish to do this by grounding participants’ coming out stories within a context that views them as statements of self but also to illustrate the challenges that participants’ understandings of themselves pose to the heteronormative discursive practices that attempt to shape them.

Coming out and the coming out narrative or story is a firmly entrenched part of lesbian, gay and bisexual lives. The sociologist Ken Plummer argues that coming out stories are ‘modernist tales’ enabled by the socio-political context of the late twentieth century (Plummer, 1995). Plummer makes the claim that such stories,

Show the speaker moving out of (a) world of shadows, secrecy and silence – where feelings and pains had to be kept to self and where tremendous guilt, shame and hidden pathology was omnipresent – into a world which is more positive, public and supportive (ibid. p.50).

Participants’ coming out narratives often followed this line, reflecting back upon coming to terms with their sexualities, of the internal and external worlds that they then inhabited compared to their lives as lived during the moments I interviewed them, were framed as an emergence from suffering into a world in which participants were largely comfortable with the sexual aspects of them selves.

In light of this, participants were asked whether or not they thought that coming out was a necessary part of being lesbian, gay or bisexual. Steve gave the following reply:
To yourself yes, and to others around you, yes. Very definitely yes. Coming to terms with it yourself first of all but you’ve gotta have that inner monologue before you can have that external monologue.

The notion, illustrated by Steve, of coming out being both an internal and external process was one which ran through much of the data on this issue. Participants articulated the notion of having to come out to oneself before being able to come out externally to those around them. These processes are then interlinked, in order for coming out as LGB to be considered ‘necessary’, the subject engages with several types of knowledge; personal knowledge, an acknowledgement and understanding of one’s desires as lesbian, gay or bisexual; cultural knowledge of the existence of such categories of identification; and social knowledge of the role that the categories of LGB play within micro and macro social contexts. Coming out is then a complex process, one which is a constant feature of the lives of many LGB people. The final chapter of this thesis examines participants’ decisions about coming out within their professional worlds and argues that such narratives often mirror the internal/external narratives that accompany the initial significant comings out that this section engages with.

**Coming out as an internal monologue**

Much of the psychological work done by participants during the internal phase of the coming out process took place within the metaphorical space of the closet. One, as Plummer (1995) argues, has to ‘come to terms’ with sexual desires that are discursively positioned as ‘other’. The closet, then, is a hiding place where secrets are left untold, desires remain unfulfilled; it is a place where guilt, shame and dishonesty are present and it is a place familiar to the majority of people who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual. It suggests restriction, keeping secrets and for many participants, the closet was a place reflected upon as somewhere they had been, it wasn’t necessarily a space that they inhabited in the present tense.

The closet, as a metaphorical space, can be said to shape the experiences of LGB people and to influence their understandings of themselves as social actors (Sedgwick, 1990). Most participants had an understanding of what it meant to ‘be closeted’,
reinforcing Sedgwick’s notion that it is a ‘shaping presence’ in the lives of LGB people. Many participants talked about having ‘lived double lives’ before coming out and articulated the psychological injury that this can cause. The most pertinent example of this came from Leslie, a 45 year old woman who identifies as lesbian. Leslie was in her mid-thirties, married and had two children at the time of her first lesbian sexual experience with a work colleague. This, for her, was an emotional as well as a physical experience and was the start of her internal (be)coming out process. The participant’s professional and private lives became entwined in a way that forced her, until she had ‘come to terms’ with her emergent lesbian identity, to lead a double life. For Leslie, the closet became a literal place to hide her secrets. This was bound up with the intersections between her job as a teacher, the environment within which she worked, as well as her shifting sexual identity,

It was an agonizing process […] but I couldn’t tell anybody because […] I worked in a girls’ boarding house, erm an’ it was a private school an’, you know, out of the question, it was (a) completely heteronormative heterosexual environment erm…so, for a long time, probably twelve or eighteen months I lived a totally double life. (But) I wanted to meet other gay people. So I started going to (the gay village) in (the city). I would go on a Saturday night, because by then I’d split up with the children’s dad […] it meant that the children were away every weekend (and) I could go an’ explore […] for weeks and weeks and weeks I’d take myself in, and I’d get myself a Pink Paper8 an’ I’d come home an’ I’d hide the Pink Papers in the wardrobe because I didn’t want anybody to find out […] I was so frightened because it was a total double life and I was completely hidden.

There are several points to consider in an examination of Leslie’s statement. Firstly, there is her take-up of heteronormativity as she reflects upon her experience of working within a private boarding school for girls. Several participants, including Leslie, had prior knowledge of the concept of heteronormativity before I interviewed them. Leslie then acknowledges the presence of normative, heterosexual discursive

8 The Pink Paper is an LGBT publication founded in 1987. It is often available free of charge within LGBT social and community venues throughout the UK.
practices that were operationalised within her workplace and that prevented her from being open about her sexuality at work ergo forcing her to compartmentalise her private and professional selves and to live a ‘double life’.

Secondly, Leslie talks about wanting to meet other gay people and to ‘explore’ LGB social spaces. This acts as illustration to the notion of (be)coming out, of an informal learning process within which the social actor immerses her/himself within a new social context in order to learn how to participate in ways of being that differ from those that were previously available to the social actor. Leslie then learned about being a lesbian through her participation in these informal learning strategies. This point will be discussed further throughout this section.

The third point to consider from Leslie’s statement is her act of physically hiding her emerging lesbian identity within the closet. For Leslie, this took the form of stashing her Pink Papers in her wardrobe, a physically existing closet. This both literal and metaphoric act illustrates the internal process of coming out. That Leslie felt that she had to hide her Pink Papers in her closet suggests an element of shame that was precipitated by her ‘double life’ and her fear of being discovered. Sally Munt (1998) argues that, in the lives of LGB people, the notion of shame encompasses what one ‘is, or made to be’ through the discursive practices that act to ‘other’ non-heterosexual sexual practices. This element of shame can, argues Munt, be transformative; it forces an acknowledgement by the social actor of a new self (ibid.). Leslie’s internal struggle to come to terms with her lesbian self acts as illustration to the notion of transformation and (be)coming because her struggle is placed within the context of having to learn how to be lesbian and having to conceal this personal knowledge within the closet.

Finally, Leslie talks about her emergent lesbian sexuality as being ‘completely hidden’. That one cannot see homosexuality is a moot point; being able to be ‘read’ as lesbian, gay and bisexual was important to some participants in this research and was part of their ongoing process of coming and being out. However for the most part, non-heterosexual identities are physically and socially invisible and often deliberately hidden until they are spoken into existence. This renders coming out a complex, contextual and continuous process, Leslie later stated that, ‘You have to come out
over and over and over again’. Every time a gay, lesbian or bisexual person meets someone new, or finds themselves in a social situation that demands it, being asked if you are married in the staffroom on the first day of a new job for example, a decision about whether or not to come out has to be made and the risk of alienation, scrutiny and other effects of doing so must be assessed (Epstein & Johnson, 1994).

I wish now to further the discussion of informal learning strategies the notion of (be)coming lesbian, gay or bisexual and the role that such practices played in participants’ coming out narratives. It is important to engage with the notion of informal learning strategies and social pedagogies in this research for several reasons. Firstly, poststructuralist/queer researchers continue to make the point that heteronormative discursive practices dichotomise and reify the notion of hierarchical identity categories. Within this paradigm, coming out and the process of (be)coming lesbian, gay or bisexual is achieved through locating the self within prescribed identity categories and through a recognition of the social, cultural and aesthetic cues that denote their existence (Butler, 1990, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Foucault, 1976, Munt, 1998, Phelan, 1993, Rust, 1993). Because this research seeks to further this line of discussion as well as to identify its limitations a postructuralist/queer analysis is deployed as a tool for the analysis of participants’ coming out narratives.

Secondly, as the third section of this chapter illustrates, there is often little space within LGB teachers’ professional worlds to open up a discussion about LGB issues and of the informal process of learning which can accompany the process of coming out. It is important then to allow participants to articulate their experiences of informal learning strategies in order to fully understand the difficulties they encounter when negotiating their private/professional worlds as well as to further academic knowledge of informal learning processes and the role that they play within LGB lives.

I have previously mentioned the role that shame can play within LGB lives as well as to the coming out process. Munt argues that shame can be transformative, that it calls for the development of a new self that is developed within predetermined spaces that, like the self, are ‘amenable to flux’ (Munt, 1998, p.7). I will talk later about the nature of LGB spaces and the role that they play within participants’ coming out narratives.
However I wish firstly to focus on the notion of shame and the extent to which participants were able to move past it through an engagement with informal learning strategies.

Dee, who is 40 and identifies as bisexual, had her first sexual experience with a woman whilst at university. In the previous chapter we learned that Dee grew up in a middle class military family that she feels was not supportive of her and led to her viewing lesbians as ‘condemned people’. When she talked about her first relationship with a woman during our first interview the notion of shame figured within her narrative,

When I first got together with (a) woman at university, I sat with myself in the bath an’ I remember slapping the bath water going, ‘I’m not one of those, I’m not one of those’, an’ actually trying to get familiar with the concept of lesbianism and because my life is often lived with not much support, that I can feel anyway, I did all that on my own.

Dee’s statement offers a juxtaposed perspective. On one hand she articulates an active rejection of a lesbian sexuality during the ‘coming to terms’ phase of her coming out process, this denotes an element of shame. That this episode took place in the bath is significant because dirt is often deployed as an adjective in physical and linguistic homophobic acts (Mason, 2002) and this can lead to an internalisation of the notion that to be lesbian, gay or bisexual is to be physically dirty, psychologically unclean and ultimately wrong. However, Dee also talks about a need to ‘get familiar’ with lesbianism, to engage with it and to learn about it through informal learning strategies. She talks, like Leslie, about having to do this on her own.

Munt suggests that one is made to be ashamed by heteronormative discursive practices that position LGB identities as ‘other’. She argues that this precipitates a split from a previous self and an acknowledgement of a different self. It is in this way that shame can be transformative and eventually, and to varying degrees, rejected in favour of pride in the new self. This reading of shame also relates to Plummer’s notion of the coming out narrative as evolving from guilt, shame and secrets towards
a narrative of triumph and personal growth. Informal learning strategies are necessary for many LGB people because their identities are often rendered invisible within social institutions such as the school and the family. There is therefore little in the way of positive reinforcement within the lives of people who are questioning their sexuality. Kate, a 30 year old woman who identifies as lesbian highlighted this issue when she made the point that,

If you’re black and you’re brought up (in a black family) you learn about black history. Well if you’re gay you don’t.

In other words, there are few social institutions which allow for the development of an LGB identity that is visible, knowledge of LGB lives is something one seeks out through informal learning processes and social pedagogies.

Leslie described an experience which illustrates the efficacy of informal learning strategies as well as the personal transformation that signifies a moving away from shame towards pride in identity through becoming part of a different social world,

When I was still working in the boarding school an’ I was educating myself […] we used to take the pupils to the pantomime. And at the interval, my colleagues wanted to have a cigarette. So we went an’ stood out at the front of the (theatre). And it was like the scales had fallen from my eyes because as we stood (there) I could see something I’d never seen before. I could recognize all the gay people walking past the (theatre) down to (the gay village). An’ it was like I could see it, but my colleagues were like completely oblivious to it. An’ that was a real moment, you know, that I hadn’t been able to see people an’ then suddenly, suddenly it’s like, you can see a new dimension. And they’re everywhere (laughs)!

Here we see Leslie split from her former way of being as a married heterosexual mother and her emergence as a lesbian identified mother. It was through her knowledge of the social, contextual and aesthetic signifiers of sexual identity that Leslie was able to see what her colleagues could not. Lehring (1997) argues that this
recognition, this awareness, this being sure of one’s place in the social world is an essential part of the coming out process because it provides one with a place to belong and with social, cultural and aesthetic cues to read.

During this moment Leslie felt in a position of power precipitated by personal knowledge. She was able to see the LGB people moving through the city, she read their social, cultural and aesthetic cues and assumed that her colleagues did not, she had learned how to ‘spot’ another gay person, to read the embodied signs and to feel empowered by this, thus this incident marked an important phase of Leslie’s coming out process.

Many of the informal learning strategies deployed by participants took place within LGB community spaces and the gay ‘scene’. However, LGB spaces are predetermined and are subject to heteronormative discursive practices which position them as ‘other’ spaces (Munt, 1998) as well as to homonormative practices that determine and normalise the social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers of being LGB and of embodying LGB identities. When Kate, who is thirty, had her first lesbian experience during her twenties, she discovered that she had no idea about what it meant to ‘be’ a lesbian, that there is a community to chose to be a part of (or not) and a ‘scene’ made up of pubs and clubs to socialise in. This takes us back to a point made earlier about visibility and how, unlike other minority groups, LGB people are not necessarily marked and, if they are as Leslie’s experience suggests, it is only through an engagement with informal learning processes that one is able to recognise the aesthetic signifiers.

For Kate, who had also been married, (be)coming out was difficult because she had no prior knowledge of what it was to be a lesbian. Her early experiences of the lesbian world were coloured by her first same sex partner,

Suddenly you get into this community an’ you have to fit in an’, y’know, (my first lesbian lover) was okay, she was a reasonable teacher, but she was like, ‘This is Kate, she’s the current one’. And I thought my God! Is this what it’s like? Do you have to be this cut throat and horrible?
There are several point to discuss here. Firstly, there is the notion that many of the informal learning strategies employed by LGB people lead them to the LGBT community through the gay scene which, like any sub-cultural or minority space, has its own rules and is policed both formally and informally. In section two of the chapter we will see that lesbian femmes are often turned away from gay venues because they ‘don’t look lesbian enough’. Kate then suddenly found herself immersed in a world that seemed abrasive to her, but, at the time, this was all that was available to her.

Secondly, Kate’s lesbian ‘teacher’ led her to question her place within the community or scene, this is something referred to in the previous chapter where we saw LGB identities being ‘negatively modelled’ to two participants whist they were at school. Kate’s experience further illustrates the notion that a lack of formal pedagogical practices around LGB issues can result in a further internalisation and isolation during the internal monologue phase of the coming out process.

Participants’ experiences of the internal coming out process and their engagement with informal learning strategies offers empirically-based evidence that supports queer theory’s argument that identities are formed through participation in historical communities and discourse (Phelan, 1993). The experiences of Leslie, Dee and Kate suggest that (be)coming out as lesbian or bisexual involves a complex internal process and an engagement with informal learning strategies. One is not simply ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’, one can only lay claim to that, or any, identity in relation to other individuals, groups and social institutions (Butler, 2004, Rust, 1993).

The next sub-section of this section of the chapter offers an analysis of the initial externalisation phase of the coming out process. It will continue to question queer theory’s notion that sexuality is a relational phenomenon as it explores participants’ first significant coming out narratives.
Coming out as an external dialogue

Coming out is an ongoing process and one that is both a feature and a consideration throughout most LGB people’s lives. To return to Plummer’s analysis of the coming out narrative as modernist tale, the external dialogue phase of the coming out process encompasses a shift from ‘coming to terms’ with a non-heterosexual identity within an internal monologue towards a personal struggle for acceptance by other significant figures in an LGB person’s life that, usually, is not LGB themselves but rather a family member or other significant figure.

Plummer also makes the claim that before coming out to family, LGB people often have a support network of place in place before they make a declaration about their sexuality to family members. For participants in this research, this support network was made up largely of other LGB people. As with informal learning strategies and social pedagogies that participants’ accessed in order to ‘learn’ how to be LGB, the existence of LGB support networks lends weight to queer theory’s argument that one ‘becomes’ LGB through participation in particular communities and discourses. Institutional and social spaces are marked along lines of sexuality and this presupposes the differentiation of personal life from the professional sphere (Berlant & Warner, 1998). This differentiation led many participants to lead ‘double lives’ before they came out externally. This is one of the means through which the discourse of heteronormativity (re)produces itself and continues to dichotomise hetero and homosexuality. Therefore, to make a declaration about one’s non-heterosexuality is to align oneself with categories of identity that are subject to political, social and discursive regulation. However, as we shall see in this sub-section and throughout the thesis, sexuality and the way in which participants understand it is a lot messier than this and posed challenges to heteronormativity and the way in which it attempts to (re)produce binary categories of gender and sexual identity.

To continue the line of argument posited in the previous sub-section, many participants, during the internal monologue phase of their coming out processes engaged in informal learning strategies which led them to participate within LGBT community spaces through the gay scene. This led many participants to come out strategically within their private social worlds. When he was in his early twenties,
Edward moved from Worcestershire to London partly in order to pursue his career as a teacher and partly because of his sexuality. Here, he frequented gay venues in the SoHo area of the city but kept his sexuality hidden from his family,

I was doing damage to my mental health by […] living in the shady world of the homosexual (laughs). Erm, and then going home to my parents at weekends and talking about friends as in female friends and they would be implying, you know, that they would be girlfriends. “Oh he’s got so many girlfriends, he’s so popular”. It was really corrosive (and) I think I was teetering on the edge of doing something daft, having a nervous breakdown or whatever.

Edward then, had ‘come to terms’ internally with his sexuality. He lived in London as an out gay man and participated in the gay scene. The ‘corrosiveness’ came into Edward’s experiences because of the way in which his life in London was framed by his family as being heterosexual. Being read as heterosexual by family members was a contradictory experience for participants. On one hand, it helped them to maintain the boundaries between the social and institutional worlds they moved between, on the other it was psychologically tricky and often involved complex webs of storytelling as the following passage illustrates.

Natasha was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in South Africa. Because the social climate within which she was immersed was negative towards non-heterosexual people, the closet for her was a place of personal safety and she decided strategically to whom she could disclose her sexuality,

(I came out at) university. Yeah but just to er close friends, not very many people. Because where I’m from they’ll beat you up in the street […] you’re kind of risking your life if you go too far with it. I told my friends, they were obviously gay themselves so that helped it. Insurance policy. Yeah, for me (coming out) was a personal victory to actually make the final decision, and not just ponder as to…for what team I’m gonna bat if you like. But um also it was a very stressful situation because my parents didn’t know […] it was sort of leading
two lives. At university I was this person, and when I went home, saw my family, I had to cook up boyfriends and make up stories as to why I don’t have a boyfriend and that kind of thing.

There are several issues arising from Natasha’s statement. Firstly, there is the issue of personal safety. To be ‘too open’ about a non-heterosexual identity involved the threat of physical violence. This is a complex point which brings up the notion of visibility. Though Sedgwick argues that the closet is so resonant in the lives of LGB people because one cannot necessarily ‘see’ homosexuality, she also makes the claim that one can never be completely free of the closet, or of the coming out process, because one can never truly know who does and does not have knowledge of your sexuality (Sedgwick, 1990). Much homophobic violence occurs either because the victim is in a marked social space or are suspected of ‘being one’ (Mason, 2002, Richardson & May, 1999). Therefore, there are certain spatial and aesthetic ‘cues’ that can betray one’s sexual orientation. The adoption of these cues will be explored more fully in the next section of the chapter. However it is important to flag the existence of such spatial and aesthetic cues in light of Natasha’s statement about not going ‘too far’ into her coming out process because of the threat of violence. Natasha, at this time, lived in South Africa. However two male participants, who have always been UK residents, were physically attacked because of their perceived sexual orientation and others felt hyper-aware of their sexuality in spaces that they did not feel safe within. Therefore, although social, cultural and political institutions draw lines which dichotomise sexuality and LGB people feel that they are living ‘double lives’, the demarcations that are perceived to exist appear not to be as binding as the heteronormative discourse which keeps them in place might suggest.

Natasha’s statement also illustrates the notion that a heteronormative discourse (re)produces binary categories of sexual identity. She explicitly states that coming out was a victory for her because it encapsulated a ‘final decision’ about ‘what team she was going to bat for’. Natasha’s thinking about her sexuality was clearly influenced by dichotomous thinking about sexuality (Rust, 1993), she had two choices and coming out announced her alignment.
Natasha’s experience also mirrors Edward’s, it is the *knowing* that you belong to one category of sexual identity and the *assumption* that you belong to the ‘other’ which causes the psychological difficulty that often precipitates coming out. Edward and Natasha both felt that they were not being true to themselves by leading ‘double lives’ by having a gay or lesbian identity in some circumstances and then going home to family and having to lie, either by omission or deliberately, about living heterosexual lives within the other social worlds within which they moved. The assumption of heterosexuality and the pressure upon many LGB people, at some stage in their lives to ‘go along’ with this tells us much about the way in which sexual identities are dichotomised within hierarchical categorisations. Within this paradigm the pressure to negotiate the boundaries between social, private and professional world can manifest itself as an ‘authentic’ inner self and an ‘inauthentic’ public persona (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). The pressure to perpetuate these two selves can become too great and it is at this moment that coming out becomes necessary. This is true of both private and professional situations.

Edward illustrated the above point when he talked about coming out to his parents in the early nineties. During a visit to his family there was a televised Commons debate about lowering the age of consent for gay male sex from twenty one to eighteen. His parents expressed homophobic opinions about this issue and Edward ‘blurted out’ that he was gay,

> I kind of fairly rightly guessed what their response would be […] an’ it came out as a huge argument. I’d always intended to protect them from that side of me. And now it’s the best thing I could’ve ever done really. Because […] it’s made a much stronger connection with me and my parents. They were vile at the beginning, um, but then if you’re informed (laughs) if that’s the right word, about what being gay is by the Daily Mail, you know, me coming out to my parents basically […] to them, was saying, “Hey mum, I’m a paedophile and I’m gonna die of AIDS”.

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9 On 21st February 1994 there was a televised debate in the House of Commons that discussed lowering the age of consent for sex between males from twenty-one to eighteen.
Coming out narratives are often read as following a structure that tells a story of inner turmoil, suffering and eventual triumph, a process that brings about change and emotional growth (Plummer, 1995, Valentine, 2003). Edward’s story of eventual triumph in his coming out story reflects this. His parents eventually accepted and ‘came to terms’ with their son’s sexual ‘otherness’ and this has strengthened familial bonds. When he talks about his initial coming out as informing his parents that he was ‘a paedophile who will die of AIDS’, he also demonstrates the way in which heteronormative discursive practices position homosexuality as the dark ‘other’ to heterosexuality.

For most participants in this research coming out to family, whatever their reaction and living an open life wherever possible is a conscious and deliberate process and one which has positive effects on their mental health. Many came out to family once a support network was in place and so having other LGBT people in their lives was something participants felt was important because of shared understanding of, and support during, the coming out process. For example John stated that his initial coming out was followed by feelings of,

Liberation, liberating, I didn’t feel quite as repressed, erm, a sense of relief, and I think quite soon after that I had my first gay or male partner in my late teens and at that point everybody within my social circle of friends in London knew. (It was a process of) self-discovery and feeling more confident.

Many participants’ narratives of their coming out processes were narrated through other peoples’ reactions. This lends weight to Foucault’s arguments about the act of confession as something that has, through discursive practices, become an internalised need to tell a ‘truth’ about oneself,

It is (a) ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence […] of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession […] in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile […]. (It is) a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external
consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation (Foucault, 1976, p.61).

Participants generally, felt that their sexualities were stable and essential facets of their identity and that coming out was a necessary declaration because it reified this self. In this way, coming out was positioned as a liberatory confession. In order to come out, and for the coming out process to encompass this sense of liberation, an interlocutor is necessary. It is this statement of self that signifies an entrance into a predetermined identity category and in this way that coming out can be positioned as a discursive act that, itself, (re)produces the binary sexual identity categories that are entrenched within social, cultural and political institutions.

The necessity of the interlocutor, or authority, to the coming out process was illustrated within participants’ coming out stories through the use of phrases such as ‘I’ve been lucky’ and ‘everyone was fine about it’, and with statements of defiance like the following from Spiderwoman,

I mean um if I could talk to everybody y’know I think it’s best to be out, er whatever other people think, ‘cause it just makes you happier in yourself an’ fuck them basically (laughs). […] I mean it wasn’t all plain sailing but I still think it was the best thing to do.

However in order for a coming out narrative to incorporate the characteristics of the confession that leads to triumph, the teller of the story requires agency; they have to make a declaration in order for someone ‘to be fine’ or to achieve a sense of personal liberation. Where participants were denied agency through being outed, the coming out narrative was quite different. Dee had her first relationship with a woman whilst at university. This, in her words,

Caused an awful lot of trouble erm…Because some weird bloke in her year wrote an article (about us) that was published. So everyone found out about my sexuality […] all in one go because it was published and
delivered to every single person in my college. And the article was basically saying that she was a skirt bandit and she’d nicked me off this guy. (I was outed in) a really horrible way.

The linearity of suffering, personal struggle and triumph that characterises many coming out narratives (Plummer, 1995) was therefore fractured for Dee. She later told me that her sister had outed her to her parents and so agency was further denied to her in terms of coming out. This acts as illustration to the notion of power relations within speech acts such as coming out. Dee talked about her coming out process as being a struggle for personal safety and that, for her, coming out remains a complex and painful process,

I mean you know with individual people it’s been nice but […] I come from a pretty homophobic family, see, like my uncle was pretty cool about it, my parents were very very ambivalent. I wouldn’t say it’s a particularly happy ending, I don’t think it ended at all. And I still work with it, you know.

When parents expressed ambivalence or continuing disapproval, participants’ coming out processes were more fractured and troublesome than those who received more positive responses to their declarations. As further illustration of this point, Kitty recounted being outed by her mother during her late teens,

When I was seventeen or eighteen I had my first sexual experience with a woman erm…and for me it was good, but my mother found out about it and went absolutely ballistic, disowned me and outed me to the family and wouldn’t speak to me for months and so then I had to say to her “Look, you know, every teenager goes through a phase and that was just a phase and don’t worry, I’m not gay” and I had to kind of deny myself to her and I think in order to be convincing, I almost denied it to myself.

Kitty’s denial impacted upon her own sense of self and led her to adopt a sexual identity that she was not truly comfortable with. She married and had a child and, in
the following section, we will see how she adopted a bisexual identity in order to live a bearable life. Her mother’s negativity towards lesbian sexuality stemmed from her own mother leaving her father for a woman. Kitty’s mother’s reaction to her sexual experience with a woman was then placed within the context of family trauma and a deep seated belief, learned through social, cultural and political discursive processes, that being gay is wrong. Valentine’s work (2003) supports this reading by making the claim that,

Given that most heterosexual parents assume that their children will also be heterosexual, family members are often an inadvertent source of negative attitudes towards […] lesbian and gay sexualities long before young people identify as such (Valentine, 2003, p.484).

Therefore coming out as an external process is one that is fraught with tensions. Coming out is at once necessary in order to avoid the continuation of living double lives, and precarious because the interlocutor to the confessional act of coming out may not offer exoneration, redemption and purification, rather can perpetuate the internalised notion that having a non-heterosexual identity is wrong.

Coming out is then an internal monologue and an external dialogue. It is a speech act, a state of mind. It is the story of a process, a narrative that can be subject to interruption. It is something that non-heterosexual people have in their consciousness, something that heterosexual people do not because their sexuality is not required to declare itself in the same way. The act of coming out acts to illustrate the binary distinctions that surround a heteronormative discourse of sexuality; one is, or is not heterosexual and if one is not, one needs to confess their ‘otherness’.

In the following section I will demonstrate the ways in which participants understand the ways in which they embody their gender and sexual identities. This is linked to the coming out process because of the way in which social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers represent sexual identity within public and professional worlds.
Section two: “I pass as straight generally, that’s what I feel I have to do”:
Participants’ understandings of their gender and sexual identities and embodiments within their private and professional worlds

As this research is concerned with formal and informal learning processes and the ways that they play out within private and professional worlds, it is important to offer an analysis of the ways participants understood their gender and sexual identities. This is important because of the way in which knowledge about non-heterosexual gender and sexual identities is often obtained through informal learning strategies. Therefore participants often have knowledge of informal learning strategies pertaining to (be)coming out as LGB and there is often little space within their professional worlds as teachers to impart these knowledges.

This section then engages with the ways in which participants understand their sexualities as part of their identities and with how they embody their gender and sexual identities and with how these understandings and embodiments play out within their private and professional worlds. This is important in the light of the project of queer theory which has illustrated how identities are complex, shifting, fluid and bound up with the history of discourse as well as with how the intersections of class, race, gender, physical ability and so on influence the way people think about themselves as they move through the social world.

Because heteronormativity (re)produces itself through discursive processes that hierarchically dichotomise masculinity/femininity, male/female and heterosexual/homosexual, with the latter category being historically positioned as inferior, people who understand themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual internalise the notion that they belong to these specific social groupings and that these are fixed and essential components of the self (Foucault, 1976, Richardson & May, 1999, Rust, 1993).

As a result heterosexual and lesbian, gay and bisexual identities have social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers that denote one’s existence to other members of these social groups. We saw in the previous section how, for many LGB people, these signifiers
are learned through informal learning processes such as participation in LGBT social and cultural spaces. However it was also noted that these signifiers are not necessarily group-specific and that they can be ‘read’ by people outside of LGBT social worlds.

This section then engages with the ways in which participants understand their sexualities as part of their identities as well as offering an analysis of the social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers of being and embodying lesbian, gay or bisexual that participants were aware of and deployed within their private and professional worlds. It is split into two sub-sections, ‘understanding sexuality’ and ‘embodying sexuality’.

**Understanding sexuality**

In order to test Rust’s (1993) assertion that individuals do not experience their sexualities as socially constructed rather as stable or fixed expressions of a ‘true self’, participants were asked whether or not they thought there were reasons for same-sex attraction. Several participants initially articulated a belief that sexuality was a fixed, innate and essential component of identity. For example Kitty stated that,

> I don’t think you are made gay or LGBT, I think you are it. I do firmly believe that you are born it. It’s not a choice because dear God none of us would choose to be outcasts or part of a minority […] I do think it’s a gene or a hormone, not imbalance ‘cause that infers that there’s something wrong but a balance of different hormones perhaps or um I dunno what the gay gene is.

Kitty, like other participants, articulates an understanding of sexuality that is grounded within the discursively positioned belief that sexuality is a biologically pre-determined and essential human quality. However, as with other participants, this understanding was riddled with contradictions. When Kitty first contacted me by e-mail and agreed to participate in the research, she identified as bisexual and stated that she was in a relationship with a transgender bisexual man. However when I interviewed her for the first time she stated that,
I’m feeling a little confused at the moment because I think I’m gay and I probably always have been. But I think that erm I’ve been living a bisexual life, and my main reason was because when I was 18, I sort of made this mental note to myself, ‘yes, I know you’re attracted to women, but you want a child, and you can’t have a child without a man […] now I’m thinking to myself ‘I don’t need to be with men anymore’ and d’you know I’m just not comfortable with men, I don’t want to be with them, the idea of going to bed with them is just…I just can’t you know, it’s almost like a door’s opened again and it’s sort of, ‘actually now you can finally say, “Yes I’m gay” an’ it’s fine’.

Kitty then illustrates the ‘shiftiness’ that can accompany sexuality. According to one’s social location at particular temporal moments, one’s understanding of one’s identity can vary (Rust, 1993). Rust argues that this ‘shiftiness’ reflects a search for a true and essential sexual self (ibid.). Kitty’s experience substantiates this claim because she has understood her sexuality differently as she has moved through her life, from lesbian to bisexual to lesbian. Identity construction is then an ongoing process one engages with over time, it can be changeable, fluid, and subject to different interpretations at different times and is dependent upon the agency of the individual (O’Driscoll, 1996).

However several participants articulated a deliberate moving between and/or living between categories. For Dirk this ‘shiftiness’ was bound to his spiritual practice as a Buddhist as well as to his sexuality,

I do sometimes really upset Buddhists because if people make a statement like, ‘Do you believe in reincarnation?’ To me that’s a completely illogical question […] I’ll tell you once I’m dead […] so I’m not a normal Buddhist, y’know? Er I’m gay [and] I had quite a long relationship with a woman, and (it) was a good relationship, a happy relationship. I thought I’d just give it a go. So for some gay (people) maybe I don’t fit but I’m not bisexual, I would say I’m gay. I’ve found myself not fitting in to categories very easily. So it seems to me that I’m about one of the most abnormal people I’ve met in my life.
There are several points to make about Dirk’s statement. Firstly, there is his use of the word ‘normal’; he is not a ‘normal Buddhist’ and, because of his relationship with a woman and the way that it has been inferred by others makes him an ‘abnormal’ gay man. This brings to the fore the notion of ‘homonormativity’. Though Berlant & Warner (1998) assert that one cannot speak of homonormativity as a totalising discourse like heteronormativity, there exists, within LGBT communities social, cultural and aesthetic cues that signify one’s membership of the community. In Dirk’s case, the fact that he had a long-term relationship with a woman makes his identification as a gay man troublesome within the gay community. This further reifies the notion that identity is subversive, shifting over time and troublesome (O’Driscoll, 1996, Rust, 1993).

Both Dirk’s and Kitty’s understandings of sexual identity then contradict the notion that sexuality as is stable, fixed and essential despite the acknowledgment of the existence of such a discourse by Kitty. Their experiences also bring up issues about gender identity and the way that gendered and sexualised bodies perform, or are expected to perform. Dirk and Kitty trouble the notion of stable sexual categories of identity that do not shift, even though Kitty herself subscribes to the notion that you are ‘born’ a certain way.

Butler (1990) argues that as a result of the intersections that interweave within notions of the self and personhood, it is virtually impossible to separate ‘gender’, and indeed ‘sexuality’ from the socio-cultural and political conditions through which such identity formation takes place. Participants acknowledged this through their articulations of the ways in which they understand their sexual identities and the ways that these identities are placed within social, cultural and political contexts.

For example Dee identified as bisexual and understood herself and the way she thinks about the world as ‘queer’. She described being a tomboy during the early years of her childhood, and of in fact wanting to be a boy. For Dee, this early gender identification was bound up with the intersections between her upbringing and her sexuality and she made sense of this in the following way,
I (think) sexuality is much more fluid than people think it is […] Yeah an’ I s’pose my early experiences are also of wanting to be a boy but I sometimes re-evaluate that saying well is that because I was basically in a really masculine environment, a military environment in which women were like over run by men. They were the dominant thing […] in fact I do feel overly penetrated by that kind of sense of masculinity.

As with all memories, Dee was able to re-evaluate her desire for masculine embodiment within the context of her socio-cultural position at the time. Dee’s assertion that she was ‘overtly penetrated’ by masculinity as a child brings the notion of patriarchy to the fore. It was patriarchy, one of the mechanisms through which heteronormativity (re)produces itself, which influenced her early gender identification. The phallic influence within her upbringing led her, as an adult, to challenge categorical ways of being and to rail against them. The participant talked about having to learn to be comfortable with her womanhood, with her bisexuality and, as a result of this self-questioning, actively rejected the lesbian and gay scene and sought out a queer way of being. She stated that,

For the group of people that I hang out with, queer is much more of a creative identity an’ includes gay men an’ straight people, […] an’ lesbian women an’ people who’re bisexual, includes single people and […] I think that’s a real challenge to heteronormativity whereas I think stuff around gay and lesbian sometimes is kowtowing to heteronormative behaviour. Its saying ‘yeah we’re just gonna get a car and have a normal job’ an’ I dunno there’s something much more radical and revolutionary about the queer thing an’ so you know, why do you need one monogamous partner? Maybe we do but I kinda wanna find that out for myself rather than say well that’s what I’m s’posed to do.

For Dee then being queer is political, it does pose a challenge to heteronormativity. Queer can include anyone, it is not bound to sexual identity, not just another category, it is a way of being in the world, and encompasses an understanding of the social world as it is and recognition of the need to challenge it. Dee demonstrated a
sophisticated understanding of queerness and the way in which it is relevant to her life. She highlights the notion of homonormativity by stating that gay and lesbian politics is often based upon egalitarian principles; the notion that we all have the same basic wants and needs. Dee shows us that outside of theoretical understandings of queerness it is possible to offer a challenge both to heteronormative and homonormative discursive practices, to reject them and to seek out other ways of being.

In light of Dee’s comment about gay and lesbian politics ‘kowtowing to heteronormativity’ it is important to assess the extent to which homonormative structures can be seen as being discursively (re)produced through social, cultural and political media in the same way as heteronormative structures are. I interviewed one couple, Elaine and Dawn who were Civilly Partnered and who parented a child, conceived by sperm donor, together. They demonstrated an understanding of their relationship that acknowledged that it could be read as ‘replicating’ heterosexual family structures. Dawn’s gendered embodiment was masculine, Elaine described Dawn as wearing ‘bovver boots’ and Dawn stated that people ‘assume you’re straight, don’t they babes’. Both participants were out within their workplaces and within the wider community within which they lived. Dawn stated that,

I say I’m married. I refer to (Elaine) as my missus, my wife [...] we’ve had a kid. So is that conforming to the heterosexual world? I mean you can’t get round the fact that we’re not in the majority really, we’re in a minority. Therefore the majority of people are engaged in this an’ therefore, I hate the word normal, therefore its cast as the conformist thing to do isn’t it? The conventional thing to do.

That they considered that their domestic situation was ‘conforming’ to the heterosexual world can be said to challenge that world for it expresses a deep understanding of it as constructed to exist only for heterosexual people. As Butler argues,

The “presence” of so-called heterosexual conventions within homosexual contexts as well as the proliferation of specifically gay
discourses of sexual difference, as in the case of “butch” and “femme” as historical identities of style, cannot be explained as chimerical representations of originally heterosexual identities […]. The repetition of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy (Butler, 1990, p.41)

Dawn and Elaine could be read as ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ and their relationship could be read as ‘conventional’. However that the participants acknowledge this in some way itself illustrates Butler’s assertion that there is no original way to ‘be’, no blueprint which one should or should not follow in terms of relationships and our understandings of them, one can be queer or one can be in a monogamously partnered relationship and in both cases the constructed nature of the social world can be acknowledged, understood and challenged. Sexual identity then is choice, is shifting, is contradictory and participants’ understandings of their identities reflected this notion.

The following sub-section offers an analysis of the ways in which participants understand the way in which they embody their sexualities as well as the way in which this plays out within the context of their professional worlds.

**Embodying gender and sexuality**

The embodiment of gender and sexuality is understood here as complex. Firstly, though gender and sexual identities intersect, it is possible to embody one’s gender and not one’s sexual identity or vice versa. Embodiments of gender and sexuality are deployed here as a take-up and adoption of the social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers that mark one out as masculine, feminine, heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual. The notion of taking up aesthetic signifiers of gender and sexuality brings the question of LGB visibility to the fore once again.

It has been argued that a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity is an invisible one, silent until spoken into existence (Sedgwick, 1990). However there also exists a discourse
of visibility, stylistic ways of being that enable LGB recognition, aesthetic signifiers that are read by LGB people by also recognizable within the wider social world. For example Sally Munt (1998) has written about butch/femme lesbian embodiments and the way in which they, within lesbian communities, have been superimposed onto the female body but that stylistic characteristics are also ontological characteristics concerned with ‘being, having an identity, a kind of true self’ (ibid. p.2). Butch/femme however is also a stereotypical reading of lesbian sexual embodiment and it has been argued that butch embodiments of lesbian sexuality in particular are ‘readable’ within both gay and straight socio-cultural contexts (Halberstam, 1998, O’Driscoll, 1996).

It is also argued that the body is socially, culturally and contextually situated (Curry & Raoul, 1992, Dunne, 1997, Martin, 1998, Munt, 1998, Young, 2002), that bodies only have meanings within the social contexts that they exist (Curry & Raoul, 1992). In other words sexual embodiments such as the masculine or butch lesbian and the ‘straight acting’ gay man are only possible because of their relation to socio-historical discursive practices that are (re)produced through performance and recognition.

This sub-section offers an analysis of the ways in which participants understood the gender and sexual embodiments of themselves and of others, and particularly engages with the extent to which they felt able to read the aesthetic signifiers of gender and sexuality onto the bodies of pupils they teach.

As with their understandings of sexuality, participants’ understandings of the embodiment of gender and sexual identity were multiple, shifting and, at times, contradictory. As with the notion that sexuality is a fixed and essential component of the self, gender and sexual embodiments were read by some participants as being fixed and essential. When I met Leslie she had a short, masculine haircut and stated ‘I’m happy for people to look at me and think ‘she’s gay’’. When she talked about her embodiment she framed it in the following way,

I’ve always been exactly the same as I am […] I can remember when I was married, an’ I had friends, married couples, an’ one of the husbands of a friend of mine would say, “Oh here she is in her flip
flops again”, you know […] I didn’t change when I decided, or when I realised, not decided, but when I felt more comfortable in my skin, I didn’t change the way that I was […] I’ve always bin the same person.

Leslie’s statement suggests two things. Firstly, that her gendered embodiment is fixed. She has always ‘been exactly the same’, by this, she infers that her physical appearance did not change when her sexuality evolved from heterosexual to lesbian. Secondly, the participant alludes to the notion that ‘discovering’ her lesbian sexuality made her feel ‘more comfortable in her skin’; therefore she understands that her gendered embodiment and sexual identity are linked in some fundamental way.

In the period during which she was married, Leslie resisted the trappings of normative heterosexual femininity. It is argued by queer theorists that gender and sexual identities are performative but that these embodied performances are not necessarily wilful, playful or imitative (Butler, 1990, Eves, 2004). The way in which Leslie understands her embodiment lends weight to this argument. Her gender identity was in place, not as lesbian but as a non-normative version of female embodiment. Leslie understood her physical image to be innate, for her physical or stylistic transition was not part of her coming out process.

The participant felt that she carries her gender non-conformity through to her professional life and to her relationships with men and women with whom she works, that it is not merely a physical but also a psychological reflection of who she is as a person in the social world,

I know I’m very different from other women, straight women erm […] I like to think different things, and […] the way that women behave sometimes makes me very angry because their behaviour is often geared to pleasing men or erm…an’ I find that frustrating ‘cause I think that’s limiting erm but obviously I’ve realised over the years that I have got on better with men because I don’t have an agenda, you know, I’m not slinking round their legs like a pussycat because there’s nothing for me to get out of it.
Leslie’s comments suggest a rejection of hegemonic heterosexual feminine gender identity and embodiment. She positions ‘straight women’ as a homogenous group to which she is an outsider. This raises again the notion that the social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers of gender and sexuality are able to be read across binary classifications. They also act to polarise masculinity and femininity and heterosexuality and homosexuality. Leslie reads what she perceives to be ‘limiting’ male-pleasing behaviour through the lens which links gender and sexual identities. She identifies the performative aspects of her colleagues’ gender and sexual embodiments because she exists outside of such a paradigm. She is the embodied lesbian ‘other’ to their normative heterosexual gender performance.

Other female participants identified themselves a ‘feminine’ and articulated the ‘trouble’ that this can cause within the context of lesbian spaces. For example Fiona who is twenty six and lives and works in a city in Lancashire stated that,

I’ve always been very open about (my sexuality) so because I don’t wear it as a uniform, you know, why do other people get aggressive? They wear (their sexuality) like kind of ‘I’m a lesbian and this is what you wear when you’re a lesbian’. As opposed to this is who I am an’ this is how I like to dress. It really makes me really cross because I obviously like love the fact that (in) the gay community you can play with how you look an’ it’s not like this female stereotype of you know, kind of like (sighs) bleached blonde hair and big boobs an’ all that stuff. But why in the lesbian community, why can’t I play it as well? Why can’t I? I’m very feminine an’ I’m very very comfortable being very feminine.

Leslie viewed her gendered and sexual embodiments as conjoined; they were reflective of each other. Fiona on the other hand posits an opposing notion. She states that she ‘is feminine’ but also alludes to the notion of playfulness in embodiment. She wants to play with her femininity but feels that lesbian spaces do not allow her to do so. This is because of the social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers that are dominant within the lesbian spaces Fiona is familiar with. She perceives that within these spaces
‘lesbian’ is worn as a uniform and that her feminine embodiment is deemed inappropriate to lesbian social spaces. Matt Mutchler (2002) makes the claim that,

What counts as appropriate femininity and masculinity varies across circumstances, place and among differently-situated actors. Therefore how individuals are accountable to doing gender is situational and context specific. (Mutchler, 2002, p.32).

I would also argue that individuals become aware of appropriate gender performance through context-specific informal learning strategies. This was illustrated within the data by several participants within both private and professional contexts. When John first came out and was exposed to drag queens on the gay scene in London he very much felt that his sense of masculinity was threatened by drag,

When I was first coming out, the idea of men being not masculine frightened me. Er and certainly when I first saw drag […] I tried not to engage or empathise or like it. But actually now I’ve grown through the experience of coming out and (with) coming to terms with who I am and my changing identity, but I now absolutely adore drag erm adore feminine men and masculine women and anywhere along that very large scale.

So as Mutchler argues, what John thought to be ‘appropriate masculinity and femininity’ shifted through time, through his own journey and learning processes, through his ‘coming to terms’ (Plummer, 1995) with his sexuality and the ways in which gender and sexuality are performed and embodied across contexts. John learned that gender identity and embodiment need not be salient or reified or constant. One can be a masculine gay man or a feminine lesbian and this in itself can pose a challenge to dominant heteronormative assumptions about what ‘being’ or ‘having’ a sexuality can mean at different times within a person’s life (Butler, 1990).

The notion, posited by Mutchler, that what counts as appropriate masculinity and femininity is context specific was both reified and challenged by several participants within the context of their professional worlds. Steve is the headteacher of a primary
school in Leicester. He described his gender identity as ‘naturally camp and effeminate’ and had previously worked as a professional drag queen. He is out at work to both staff and pupils and believes in ‘being honest with children’ about identity and different ways of being. He stated that,

We’re gonna do bingo next month at school as a fundraiser, and someone said, “You gonna do it in drag Steve? Parents might like that.” An’ I hadn’t even thought about doing it but these are straight people […] I don’t think there’s anyone taking the piss out of it; they just thought it’d be entertaining! For a family evening and they were sort of almost giving me permission to do it and I was like, “No, I don’t think I will”, you know.

Research into sexualities and education has frequently posited the notion that there is little space within schools for the performance of non-normative gender and sexual identities (Carrington & Skelton, 2003, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Ferfolja, 1998, Martino, 2008, Mills, 2004, Renold, 2003, Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008, Paechter, 2007, Skelton, 2001). However my data reveals that where teachers are open about their sexuality to pupils, or allow pupils space to openly discuss non-heterosexualities, they create a space through which non-normative gender and sexual identities are able to be explored, understood and played with. To further illustrate this point, Kate, who worked at an inner city school in London and was out to staff and pupils at the time of interview, stated that,

My kids at school do like to call me sir when they answer the register it’s like, ‘yes sir’. An’ I just kind of laugh it off now. Whatever, if you wanna call me sir, so be it. I don’t really care, I’d prefer that they used something that’s gender neutral if I’m honest, but I mean kids don’t. It’s either miss or sir and they like to call me sir, so I’m okay with that […] they know I’m gay an’ they kind of think it’s funny and it’s like ‘well okay’, you know?

Kate’s pupils then are acknowledging their teachers’ gender and sexual identity. The participant often wears a shirt and tie to work to accompany her bobbed-hair and
lipstick. She is then able to play with her gender identity and allows her pupils to recognise her performance and to play with her gender identity accordingly.

Our bodies, embodiments and images then tell stories about who we are in relation to the socio-cultural worlds within which we inhabit. Butler (2004) argues that our ‘bodies are not always our own’, that they are shaped by our environments and by expectations about who we are or should be within those environments. Participants who, to varying degrees, were not out at work, found it more difficult to allow their private gender and sexual embodiments to be visible within their professional worlds. Alison is twenty nine and works in a secondary school in a Yorkshire city. She is out to some staff at work but not to pupils, this is a deliberate decision. She made the following statement regarding her embodiment,

I feel a lot more comfortable wearing clothes that aren’t massively feminine […] I feel a lot more comfortable in just like a t-shirt or y’know a shirt, whereas my work stuff is like you know a shirt but I think I’d feel uncomfortable if I went any further than that in terms of looking masculine because I feel a bit like I’d be erm open to criticism an’ I hate saying it […] but that’s what I feel comfortable with.

Alison then perceives that her masculine dress is not appropriate within her professional life. Many participants’ subjectivities were conditioned by the socio-cultural facts (Young, 2002) of where they lived or worked and the point at which their personal and professional worlds intersected varied according to their socio-cultural contexts.

Another interesting issue to come out of the data was that participants felt that they were able to recognise, through informally learned social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers, lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils. What was interesting about this phenomenon was that even where participants had expressed an understanding of gender and sexual embodiment and performance that saw it as fluid, changeable and playful, they largely read sexuality on to the bodies of pupils in ways that suggested it was innate, essential and fixed. This was often articulated through the notion that one
can ‘look’ lesbian, gay or bisexual, as Margaret, who works in a rural secondary school in Shropshire illustrates,

There’s a girl in year nine now, who always plays football with the boys every morning, she always wears trousers and a lot of the other girls come in a skirt, they can choose skirt or trousers, she’s always trousers and she always plays football with the boys in a morning an’, I, I would say, that it is, likely, you know (that she’s a lesbian).

Margaret, and other participants, then use stereotypical aesthetic cues to identify pupils as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Aesthetic stereotypes are able to be read then across contexts, they render the LGB subject visible not only to other LGB people lesbians but also to society in the main (O’Driscoll, 1996). It is in this way that participants felt they were able to identify latent LGB identities within pupils. They use the markers of sexual difference that may or may not be written on their own bodies but have been learned in order to read sexuality on to the bodies of pupils. In this way the body is a visible signifier of difference for LGB people (Mason, 2002) but, as shown throughout this chapter and the thesis as a whole, this notion is fraught with contradictions. The reading of pupils as having lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer identities should also be analysed with caution because whom one is during childhood may not necessarily reflect who one will become in adulthood (Sumara & Davis, 1999).

Queer theorists have posited the notion that embodiment itself is context-specific, subject to change and, at every moment, socially constructed and performed (Butler, 1990, Eves, 2004, Fausto-Sterling, 1999). Dee, who works in a secondary school in the south of England, mentioned in both interviews a pupil in her class who identified as lesbian. During the first interview she was ‘sure’ of her pupils’ lesbian identity. However at second interview, she was not so sure and this was bound up with the girl in question’s physical embodiment,

There was a girl in my form, who came out to the class as a lesbian. An’ the thing is I think now she, I dunno where she is with all that. I think it was partly due to this…she’s plucked her eyebrows and she’s
wearing make-up, now maybe she’s still gay. ‘Cause you don’t know do you?

Dee’s statement reflects the shifting nature of gender and sexual embodiment. Though Dee herself stated that as a bisexual woman she ‘generally passes as straight’, and this was something she felt she had to do, the fact that this pupil had changed her embodiment and now used feminine cues suggested to the participant that she may no longer identify as lesbian. That she stated that ‘you don’t know’ suggests that aesthetic signifiers are not sufficient enough cues with which to establish sexuality.

It is important to continue to interrogate the role that gender and sexual embodiment plays within the social and personal constructions of identity because to do so illuminates the ways in which heteronormativity not only (re)produces itself but also the impact that this has upon those who live outside or in-between it’s boundaries. The way that LGB people ‘do’ gender and sexuality, as identity practices, is an important project and one which is furthered by this thesis.

**Summary**

This chapter is far-reaching in its aims. It has attempted to illustrate the significance of coming out narratives and the ways in which informal learning strategies structure participants’ understandings of themselves as gendered and sexual beings. The chapter also offered an analysis of the ways in which participants understand their gender and sexual identities and of how these understandings intersect between their personal and professional lives.

Section one engaged with the internal monologues and external dialogues that accompanies the coming out processes of participants. Coming out was positioned as an ongoing process rather than a solitary speech act. Analytically, it is positioned between the notion, put forward by queer theorists, that sexual categorisations perpetuate understandings of sexuality that are dichotomised and the lived experiences of people who come out as, and ‘own’, the identity categories of lesbian, gay and bisexual. It illustrated some of the informal learning strategies that
participants deployed in order to ‘(be) come out’. These learning strategies encompassed a narrative plot that showed participants moving from suffering to triumph and from shame to pride. It also demonstrated that this narrative trajectory can be interrupted if LGB people do not get to articulate their sexualities on their terms and, instead, are outing.

Section two deployed an analysis that acknowledged the juxtapositions between queer theoretical understandings of sexuality as constructed through discursive practices and the ways in which people understand their sexualities as fixed and essential components of the self. Participants were illustrated of having contradictory understandings of their sexualities, at once viewing them as fixed and changeable. This was also the case with embodiment; some participants understood their gendered and sexual embodiments as being unified, whilst others saw them as more deliberate and playful. LGB visibility was also a theme of this section and the social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers that render LGB people visible within LGBT spaces and the wider social world were explored. This section also demonstrated the way in which many participants ‘read’ sexuality on the bodies of pupils they teach and that this further demonstrated an understanding of gender and sexual identity and embodiment as being coherent and fixed facets of the self.

The next chapter takes the coming out narrative into the professional sphere and offers an analysis of the way in which LBGT issues are positioned within teacher training programmes. It also offers an analysis of participants’ decisions to be out at work, or not, and explores the ways in which participants are able to challenge homophobia and the heteronormative discursive practices that dominate educational institutions.
Chapter Six

“I Would Love to be in a Job Where I Could Just Be Me”: Coming out, staying in and the negotiation of LGB teachers’ private and professional worlds

Introduction

The previous chapter offered an analysis of participants’ experiences of the broader social pedagogies of gender and sexual identities as experienced through informal learning strategies. It engaged with participants’ coming out narratives and argued that rather than being a solitary speech act, coming out is a complex and ongoing process. Because this thesis is concerned with the way in which being an LGB teacher encompasses a negotiation between private and professional spheres as well as the extent to which participants felt that they are intruders/outsiders within the heterosexist space of school, questions about the disclosure of participants’ sexual identities within their professional lives were central to this research.

This chapter then engages explicitly with participants’ experiences as teachers and the points at which their lesbian, gay or bisexual identities intersect with their professional identities as teachers. The chapter is split into four sections. The first, ‘Teacher Training and Sexual identity Issues’, will deal with several issues. Firstly it will illustrate participants’ reasons for wanting to become teachers and will relate this to a discourse which sees teaching as a ‘moral’ profession charged with assisting in the raising of a new generation of citizens. Secondly, this section engages with participants’ experiences of teacher training. Most participants had entered teaching through the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) route and many felt that the attitudes of their fellow students towards LGBT issues had ‘set the scene’ in terms of what to expect from teaching as a profession in terms of recognition and understanding of LGBT identities. Thirdly, this section will look at participants’ perceptions of what is needed within their schools in terms of continuing professional development regarding sexual identity issues as well as analysis of strategies already in place within the schools that participants work.
The second section, “I don’t really wanna go into the ins and outs of my love life at work”: Participants’ choice not to come out at work, offers an analysis of the experiences of several participants who choose not to disclose their sexual identity at work. Their reasons for this choice will be expounded as well as the implications of this for participants in terms of their level of engagement with the school as a ‘community’. This section will deal with issues of perceptions of personal safety, negative experiences as well as revisiting the urban/rural divide present within the data that was expounded in chapter four.

The third section “I do come out but I do it by stealth”: Coming out to colleagues, engages with the experiences of participants who disclose their sexual orientation to colleagues. The reasons for this choice will be expounded as well as the strategies employed when participants articulate details of their sexuality to staff. The notion that participants should not ‘make too much’ of their sexuality will be tied here to a discourse touched upon in chapter four of what it means to be ‘acceptably different’ within particular contexts.

Finally the fourth section of this chapter, “I don’t think you can have a relationship with the kids unless you are honest with them”: Coming Out to Pupils’ will look at participants who are out to both staff and pupils within their schools. Such participants articulated this decision as one of ‘duty’, as a responsibility to be a good LGB role model for the pupils they interact with. The notion of teachers as role model will be put under the lens in this section. Chapter five offered an analysis of significant moments in participants’ coming out narratives. It will be argued in this section that questions around coming out at work often mirrored the decisions participants articulated around coming out to family or to other significant figures within their personal lives. Both the family and education are social institutions which regulate sexuality through heteronormative discursive practices. The extent to which participants who are out to pupils felt able to challenge the heteronormative discourse that dominates their schools will be explored as well as the feelings of guilt often expressed by participants who do not feel able to come out to pupils.
Section one: Teacher training and sexual identity issues

The figure of the teacher is infused with socio-historical understandings about the nature of childhood, of pedagogy, of professionalism and of morality (Aries, 1960, Beijaard et al, 2000, Day et al, 2005, Hatton & Smith, 1995, Zemblayas, 2003). Socio-political rhetoric posits that it is a teacher’s job to prepare the next generation of ‘good’ citizens and to prepare them for active participation within their nation (Banks, 2001, Day et al, 2005, Dillabough, 2005). It is a job that requires skills, training, observation and assessment at both micro and macro levels.

One of the key themes within this thesis is the notion that LGB identities often constitute an ‘invisible presence’ within educational spaces. They are rendered invisible through heteronormative discursive practices which act to marginalise, ‘other’ or ignore LGB identities. However LGB sexualities are often present within the informal spaces of school and are constituted as ‘other’ through discursive regimes such as the use of the word ‘gay’ by pupils.

This section of the chapter engages with two issues and is split into corresponding sub-sections. The first, ‘Why teaching?’ examines the influences behind participants’ decisions to become teachers and illustrates the way in which gender and sexuality impacted upon this decision.

The second sub-section, ‘Participants experiences of teacher training’ offers an analysis of participants’ recollections of their teacher training and the moments at which sexuality issues were raised either formally, within practice situations and class discussions, or informally. Here we see that LGB issues were low, or missing, from the diversity education participants received whilst training.

Why teaching?

Within research carried out upon why people enter teacher training programmes the reasons people choose to become teachers are complex and varied (Causey et al, 2000, Endo et al, 2010, Richardson & Watt, 2006). I wish to acknowledge here that it
is difficult to chart a linear or coherent trajectory into teaching, as reasons vary across context, time and space. Within the present educational and financial climate there are shortages of teachers coupled with looming increases in unemployment, therefore there is financial incentive to join the profession (Townsend & Bates, 2007). Participants were explicitly asked why they decided to enter teaching and their reasons reflected research in the field. The reasons were complex and varied and are expounded within this sub-section. Within the data, the gathering of which took place prior to the current global financial crisis, participants often raised the notion that teaching is somehow a noble profession, one not entered into for financial gain but rather a sense of moral duty (Causey et al, 2000).

Participants articulated many reasons for becoming educators and research has shown that LGB teachers enter the profession for similar reasons to those of their heterosexual counterparts (Endo et al, 2010). Firstly there were those who felt that teaching was a calling, something they had wanted to do from an early age. Kitty, who is thirty nine, a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) and primary supply teacher stated that,

\[
\text{I've always wanted to teach, ever since I was made prefect at school, um it's just been my calling I think. I think it's one of those jobs you don't do for the money for sure, you do it because you just have a love of children an' a desire to help them (laughs) develop as a person.}
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Kitty’s response evokes Causey et al’s (2000) argument about teaching being a moral profession, something to which you are drawn through moral imperative rather than financial gain.

Frances is twenty four and, at the time of first interview, was also an NQT working as a music and history teacher in Yorkshire. Frances also felt that teaching was a profession to which she was drawn and stated her motivation to enter teaching as follows,

\[
\text{I think it's something I've wanted to be since I was about 14 or 15. I think I like performing, so that's quite important in being able to stand}
\]
up in front of a class and things, it’s quite fun. Erm and also a lot of my sort of main role models were teachers and I think that prob’ly influenced it a lot as well.

Frances raises several interesting points regarding the reasons for wanting to enter the teaching profession. Firstly she talks about liking the ‘performance’ of teaching. Frances is also a musician, a classically trained singer, and so performance was something that intersected between both her personal and professional identities.

The notion that teaching constitutes a performance is present within literature on teacher identity (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Zemblay, 2003). Zemblay (2003) in particular has written about emotion and performance as interconnected and interdependent components of teacher subjectivity, and argues that the performance of teaching involves the ‘embodiment of language and emotion and the fashioning and display of the body and its affects’. In other words in order to be a teacher one must become a teacher, to learn how to perform as an educator. Teaching can be a deliberate and conscious performance and this acted for Frances, and several other participants who had theatre or musical backgrounds, as motivation for entering the teaching profession.

Frances also talks about entering teaching because, as an adolescent, her strongest role models were teachers. The notion that teachers are role models for young people was something that many participants alluded to. The notion of whether or not it is possible for teachers to be role models is present within the literature on teaching and teacher identity (Carrington & Skelton, 2003, Jackson, 2010, Martino, 2008b, Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010, Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008, Warin et al, 2006). It is argued that because the role of teacher is so bound up with the socio-political expectations of the role, what teachers are able to be and what they would like to be may differ (Warin et al, 2006) Therefore it is impossible to measure the extent to which teachers are or are not role models and indeed whether pupils see them as such (see Jackson, 2010). However the notion of being a good LGB role model was something which often affected participants’ decisions to come out at school. This notion will be discussed further throughout the remainder of this chapter.
Several participants talked about entering teaching because of a moral calling, a desire to perform and to act as a role model for young people. By way of continuing the ‘teaching as a moral calling’ thread, there were several participants who had given up white collar professional positions to become teachers. This decision was framed very much within the perception of teaching as a ‘worthier’ career, as Edward, who is a qualified teacher but works as a Healthy Schools Drugs Co-ordinator in London, illustrates,

Um being gay I realised it was fairly unlikely I was gonna have kids of my own, and I like being around kids and wanted to do something worthwhile as well ‘cause the, the insurance job I had, you know, paid well and had status, but it just felt soulless. So it was like I wanna do something that I can hold my head up and say, “This is what I do and I’m proud to do it and I make a change”. And if that involves working with kids in a positive way that will be good.

Edward’s desire to enter teaching was also bound up with his sexuality and his feeling that although it was ‘unlikely’ that he would have children himself, he was interested in ‘making a change’ and, in a way, helping to raise younger generations, as well as working in a morally defensible profession. Edward’s desire to be able to ‘hold his head up’ and say that he ‘makes a difference’ ties in to a socio-political discourse that sees teachers as ‘in loco parentis’ (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008), that it is part of teachers’ professional remit to raise the next generation of ‘good’ citizens (Banks, 2001, Day et al, 2005, Dillabough, 2005, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008, Warin et al, 2006) and this was one of the motivating factors in Edward’s decision to become a teacher.

Not all participants felt that teaching was a calling, a moral profession or a worthy career. Several participants entered teaching after finishing their degrees because they did not know what else to do. There are two cases I would like to discuss here. The first is Leslie, who occupies the position of having ‘drifted’ into teaching,

I really didn’t know what to do after I’d done my degree […] so I thought, ‘well I’ll do a PGCE and see how it goes. And I went to get
interviewed and they liked me very much so I was thrilled that they liked me I thought ‘alright then, I’ll stay’ and erm…I seemed to quite enjoy it so I stuck with it really. So I can’t say I ever had any powerful, you know, feelings towards it but er just kind of drifted into it really.

The notion of having ‘drifted’ into teaching was common to several participants of diverse ages and career stages. Teaching was seen by these participants as a stable occupation that they had come to enjoy rather than as something they had been drawn to.

The second participant whose narrative suggested a ‘drifting’ into teaching was Margaret. I wish to discuss her case because her decision to enter teaching is temporally situated and was informed by the opportunities available to her that were gendered. At fifty one, Margaret was the oldest female participant. Margaret had been at university when the feminist movement of the mid-seventies was in full swing. She had become involved in activism and had participated in ‘Reclaim the Night’ marches and other consciousness raising activities. Margaret’s reasons for entering teaching were informed by her awareness of the limits placed upon her gender during the late nineteen seventies,

I fancied another year as a student an’ it was a good way to get one. Because you were guaranteed a grant and you’d get a place on a PGCE course. Plus, I teach languages, and, this is more serious […] I wanted to use the languages and I did not want to be a secretary an’ it seemed at the time in 1979, ’78 when I finished university people were either going into filing or secretarial work or teaching. And the last thing I wanted to do was to have anything to do with secretarial work. So, I went for teaching.

That Margaret felt that she could either be a secretary or a teacher alludes to the notion that teaching is a feminised profession and this also ties in to the point raised by Edward about his decision to enter teaching being influenced by the notion that teaching is a moral profession. Teaching at the primary level and the teaching of certain subjects (such as languages) at the secondary level have come to be
understood, through socio-political discursive practices, as ‘natural’ career trajectories for women (Cavanagh, 2007, Dillabough, 2005, Mills et al 2004, Moran, 2001, Skelton, 2001). Margaret’s career options were affected by this discourse and so she chose teaching.

There were then many reasons why participants entered teaching; some did so because of a moral calling, others in order to perform or to be role models for young people. Some left white collar professional jobs in order to enter a ‘worthier’ profession. There were those who entered teaching because they did not know what else to do after finishing their degrees and those who made the decision to become an educator based upon their perceived limits of their gender, as in Margaret’s case, or of their sexuality, as in Edward’s case.

It is important to engage with the reasons for participants entering the teaching profession because of the way in which their ideas about teaching marry up with the reality of being a teacher and of being a teacher who identifies as LGB. The following sub-section offers an exposition of participants’ experiences of teacher training and the extent to which LGBT issues were raised within the programmes the enrolled upon.

Participants’ experiences of teacher training

Nineteen of the twenty participants entered teaching through the PGCE route and all were asked specifically about having received training on LGBT issues during their training, as well as whether wider diversity issues such as race and disability were addressed. Only two participants, Nicole and Spiderwoman, both of whom entered the teaching profession within the last five years, had received training on LGBT issues. Nicole had negative feelings about all of the diversity training she received on her PGCE course,

I thought the whole equal opportunities stuff was very poor to be honest. I thought it was very tokenistic and I had quite a lot of arguments really ‘cause I’d been working in the voluntary sector where
the equal opportunities stuff was quite developed and into this little institution where I thought it was really poor and tokenistic.

It is not possible within this research to compare the equal opportunities policies of the voluntary sector in the UK with that of the education system. However, a ‘tokenistic’ approach to equal opportunities in teacher education is something well illustrated by the literature in this area of study, particularly regarding the delivery of training around race and ethnicity issues (King, 1991, Nieto, 2000, Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). Indeed Nieto (2000) argues that,

Most approaches to multicultural education (avoid) asking any difficult questions related to access, equity and social justice. These questions strike at the heart of what education in our society should be, and they are, above all, about schools’ institutional practices (Nieto, 2000 p.180).

The reactive way in which participants’ schools tackle issues around homophobia and race have been documented throughout this thesis. Participants reported that identity issues, particularly LGB identity issues, were often raised only within the context of bullying and felt that staff who dealt with them were often ill-equipped to do so. Conrad and Crawford (1998) argue that if race is to be discussed, as Nieto suggests above, within a wider framework that engages with the power relations present within identity discourse, then sexuality should be discussed within a similar paradigm.

It was felt, by most participants that the teacher training programmes they were enrolled upon had a ‘tick box’ mentality towards equality issues and that little was done to challenge student teachers’ prejudices around race, disability and sexuality. This means that teachers are entering the profession with little understanding of the diversity, in terms of issues around social, cultural and sexual identities that they are likely to encounter within their classrooms. This is cause for concern given that teaching is becoming an increasingly feminised profession and that the majority of students entering teacher education and therefore the emerging workforce are white, middle class women (Banks, 2001, Carrington & Skelton, 2003, Dillabough, 2005, Mills, 2004, Mills et al, 2004, Skelton, 2001).
Participants’ experiences of teacher training reflected the extent to which diversity issues are addressed within their teacher training programmes. Several participants experienced overtly homophobic attitudes whilst training to become teachers. Edward, who is thirty eight and a Healthy Schools Drugs Coordinator in a London borough had the following experience whilst coming to the end of his teaching practice,

The teacher that I was with made some just really off key comments about why people’ve got HIV, almost like gay men deserved it. An’ I challenged him in front of his class, and said, “That’s not what I think. I might be wrong but that’s not what I think” and the teacher complained that I’d made him look a prat, in class, and the college didn’t really back me up even though (the teacher) was happy to stand by what he said […] and the college were very sort of, “Erm, oh well why don’t you sort it out with the school? And see what you can come up with”.

The issue of support is one which came out of the data many times when participants talked about the ability to come out, to challenge homophobia or to bring sexuality issues into the classroom. Support is important in this case so that the LGB teacher does not feel isolated, that sexuality is their issue alone (Ferfolja, 2009, Lehtonen, 2004). It is clear that in Edward’s case that this incident was seen as his issue to ‘sort out’ with the school rather than being seen as a wider diversity or equalities issue.

It should however be noted that Edward undertook his PGCE during the early 1990’s. A Conservative government was in power and many of its cabinet members had been engineers or supporters of Section 28. Section 28 was partly a reaction to the AIDS crisis and the tabloid, ergo public opinion that it was ‘the gay plague’ (Jeffrey-Poulter, 1991). Much of the equalities legislation that has been brought in since the election of New Labour in 1997 was not in place and this reflected a social climate towards non-heterosexual people that, at this time, was often hostile and intolerant.
Both Dee and Frances completed their teacher training programmes between 2006-2008. Neither participant felt able to come out as bisexual or lesbian respectively to their cohort and both had experiences of homophobic attitudes being articulated by their cohorts within the context of group discussions. Frances was in a lecture about differentiating lessons for male and female pupils when the discussion turned to sexuality,

I don’t think they’d ever thought about (sexuality) before […] and at the end of it I thought I’m definitely not coming out to this group of people […] it was only a couple of people in the group but they were the most vocal an’ you know (they were saying) if you’re gay you’re less of a man or less of a woman than you would be otherwise […] And I think they were sort of arguing that, you know, genetically you’re a freak if you’re gay basically.

Frances stated that although some of her fellow trainees challenged the beliefs expressed above, the teaching staff did not. Robinson & Ferfolja (2008) argue that sexuality is low on the list of equality issues in teacher training courses within an Australian context. They make the claim that far from facilitating discussions on diversity, a neo-liberal approach to education rather reinforces dominant power structures like heteronormativity. This has the effect of marginalising difference and it is in this way that LGB identities are rendered invisible within educational contexts (ibid.).

Dee’s experience of teacher training reflects the erasure of non-heterosexual identities within teacher training discourse. Her cohort was asked to do a piece of action research, something that is often a requirement of pre-service teachers during their training. One woman did a piece on homophobia. Dee stated that the presentation was good in terms of content but that the woman was not familiar with the software she used in order to present her work. When the woman finished her presentation Dee spoke with some of her fellow trainees; they talked about how badly the presentation had gone for the woman and ignored the content, thus erasing the element of the presentation that dealt with homophobia and non-heterosexual identities within school. This caused a strong reaction in Dee who stated that,
Something in me flipped an’ I just thought, ‘you are fucking ignorant’. And I didn’t come out [...] I’ve got real issues around safety and I didn’t feel safe enough in that cohort. I really didn’t [...] There were all these things at the end of term, “Oh would you like to come to a barbeque?” and you know, “We’re going to watch the rugby here” and I just thought, ‘oh fuck off!” You know, I’m not interested in your life; I’m not interested in your world [...] you’ll just go into a school, never really gonna understand all these issues that go on for kids. (What’s important for you is) the fact that they just need to get a job and live in some new-built house and go and watch rugby and that’s their fucking life. Well there’s much more to life than that.

In the above statement Dee raises several of the key mechanisms through which heteronormativity operates as well as illustrating the notion of what teachers are expected to engage with. Firstly, her fellow student’s erasure of the content of the presentation illustrates the way in which a heteronormative discourse erases LGB issues; it was the performance rather than the content of the presentation that her fellow trainees felt was important. Secondly Dee talks about her cohort as a homogenous group who enjoyed the same kind of social events. This placed her, and the woman making the presentation as outsiders, othered by a heterosexist bias. It can also be argued that Dee exposes the way in which a capitalist system of production and heteronormativity are interdependent through her assertion that ‘new built houses’ and ‘watching rugby’ were important to her cohort.

Two participants were involved in the delivery of teacher education, both at the PGCE and NQT level and both felt that the extent to which they were able to address equality issues was lacking in time, scope and depth. Edward, who delivers NQT diversity training, illustrates the low impact that the repeal of Section 28 has had upon how student teachers understand the parameters of what they are ‘allowed’ to talk to children about,

I still get people saying, ‘We can’t talk about this in our schools’. Erm so (I’ve been) doing stuff around where it fits naturally within the
teacher training curriculum, but it needs a wider approach. So when you’re talking about different forms of (for example) drama, then actually do something that acknowledges LGBT issues or […] where you’re talking about the curriculum in general […] rather than it just being a one off, ‘Oh this afternoon is LGBT. Get it done, get it ticked’, it needs to be more holistic.

The notion that LGBT issues need to be tied holistically to the curriculum in order to avoid a reactive, ‘tick box’ mentality ties in to the discourse expounded earlier about race and ethnicity issues within education and the call for social justice and diversity issues to be addressed within a wider framework that engages with the power relations present within the discursive (re)production of identity (Conrad & Crawford, 1998, DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, Nieto, 2000, Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008).

Participants’ experiences of teacher training illustrate the ways in which educational institutions shy away from addressing LGBT issues. The reasons for this are multiple and include religious intolerance, fears about parents, the notion that children are ‘too young’ to understand non-heterosexualised gender and sexual identities. There are strong feelings amongst academics, activists and practitioners that education needs to deal with LGBT issues, and should do so in an inclusive, holistic way. A failure to do so confines all individuals to narrow performances of their gender and sexuality within schools (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008).

If non-heterosexual gender and sexual identities continue to be ignored within teacher training and INSET then teachers will continue to perpetuate limited and distorted understandings of inequality and diversity (King, 1991). Chapter four illustrated the ways in which this notion was reflected by participants within their experiences of how other staff members dealt with LGB issues when they arose within their schools. The consequences of a failure to address LGB issues through engaging practices are that young people growing up gay will continue to underachieve, drop out of school early and ultimately grow up feeling ‘less than’, wrong and ashamed (Mutchler, 2002, Thurlow, 2001). LGB teachers will continue to feel isolated, that LGB issues are their issues to deal with and that they do not belong to the wider school community (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Ferfolja, 1998, 2009, Lehtonen, 2004, McKenzie-Bassant,
We need to question how society became this way before we can begin to tear down the structures that dominate it (King, 1991). In order to do this within education we need to train teachers to develop an understanding of all diversity issues so that they are better equipped to deal with them when they arise within both the formal and informal school spaces.

The next section of the chapter offers an analysis of participants who choose not to come out at school and illustrates the feelings of frustration, isolation and shame that this decision can precipitate.

Section two: “I don’t really wanna go into the ins and outs of my love life at work”: Participants’ choice not to come out at school

Schools as educational and social institutions are engaged in discursive practices that promote the notion that heterosexuality is the ‘preferred outcome’ (Endo et al, 2010, Dunne, 1997) for its pupils and staff. This places staff members who do not fit into this heteronormative paradigm under particular pressure. The consequences of working in an environment which marginalises LGB teachers’ identities and that can include harassment and homophobic abuse is stress, anxiety and depression (see Robinson et al 2004). It is argued that LGB teachers are in a unique position to understand and tackle homophobia within school if they so wish because of their own experiences of intolerance and homophobia (Sykes, 2004, Robinson et al, 2004). However this notion is double edged because if LGB teachers are positioned as in possession of ‘expert knowledge’ about LGB issues then addressing them can become a solitary pursuit for the LGB teacher.

Additionally a teacher’s non-heterosexuality can be a barrier rather than a facilitator to discussion because of real or perceived homophobia within individual schools and the school system (Ali, 1996, Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Robinson et al, 2004, Sykes, 2004). Epstein & Johnson (1998) argue that the relationship between teacher and pupil is one of power. The power dynamic that characterise the teacher/pupil relationship is evidenced by the physical space of the classroom; the teacher often standing to address pupils who are sitting, as well as by the way in which the teacher
controls the classroom environment through disciplinary practices (Jones, 2004). This relationship of power is however fragile, and can be reversed by signs of vulnerability in staff. If children believe that ‘gay’ is uncool, puny and distasteful, then surely any staff member who declares him/herself as such is vulnerable to abuse. Lesbian and gay teachers, argues Sykes (2004) are particularly vulnerable to injury,

The space for simply existing as a gay person who is a teacher is in fact bayoneted through and through, from both sides, by the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden (Sedgwick cited Sykes, 2004, p.83).

The idea that a gay teacher’s identity might be ‘bayoneted’ from two sides evokes the notion that the disclosure of a non-heterosexual identity within schools is a potentially dangerous speech act. It also alludes to the notion that LGB identities constitute an ‘invisible presence’ within educational institutions. We have seen throughout this thesis that LGB identities are ‘othered’ within educational spaces through heteronormative discursive practices. Therefore, the LGB teacher, whether out or not, is a marked presence within both the formal and informal spaces of school. Ferfolja (1998) argues that the inequalities (re)produced by heteronormativity makes teaching a difficult career for LGB people because of the ways in which heteronormativity is (re)produced through the guarding of ‘heterosexist norms, hegemonic male power and harassment and abuse’ (ibid. p.407).

Heteronormative discursive practices then act to uphold the binary categories of gender and sexuality within schools and therefore there is then a dualism operating within schools in terms of the sexuality of its teaching staff. On one hand LGB teachers may feel that they ‘should’ come out in order to challenge homophobia or because being in the closet it too emotionally costly (Ferfolja, 2009). On the other hand there is often little space within school to discuss non-heterosexual identities rendering them silenced and/or invisible.

This was reflected by several participants who chose not to disclose their sexuality within their professional lives or did on a limited person to person basis. The reasons for choosing not to come out at work were complex, contextual and multiple and were
related to the location of participants’ schools and to the complex nature of sexual identity. This evokes Butler’s (2004) discussion of what it means to be recognised as ‘fully human’ within a particular context and her assertion that recognition can simultaneously render one visible and mark one out as ‘other’, thus making life unbearable (ibid.).

For Dee, who identifies as bisexual and works as a music teacher in a secondary school in the south of England, the notion of coming out was bound up with her perception that there was no place within her workplace for her to open a discussion on her identity, that colleagues would not understand her relationships and she would not know how to explain them,

My experience is generally that that’s hard for me. I don’t present as bi. Some people might go, “Oh I wonder…” But I don’t present as that and also there’s that I sometimes have sexual relationships, generally short ones, with men […] I don’t really wanna go into the ins and outs of my love life because it’s complicated enough for me. And I dunno I don’t know how I would, oh actually, you know, “I have relationships with women”, or, “Oh actually the person who broke my heart was a woman”. You know I don’t quite know where to go with that.

When she talks about her sexual relationships as being ‘complicated’, Dee positions herself as an outsider, a marked and simultaneously invisible presence within the space of the staffroom. It is interesting that she states that she ‘doesn’t present as bisexual’, suggesting that she might physically blend in to the staffroom and be read by colleagues as heterosexual whilst simultaneously feeling psychologically othered. It is the emotional aspects of her relationships that Dee feels are too complicated to speak into existence in the staffroom; her physical attraction to men and her emotional and physical attraction to women.

In chapter five, we saw how Dee understands herself as ‘queer’ and that for her, to be queer means to live outside of or in between categories. It is the complexity of her bisexual identity that is stifled by Dee’s workplace, she understands herself as neither lesbian nor heterosexual, her attachments to men and women are complex and
variable and it is here, within this shiftiness that the limits of discursive practices that act to dichotomise sexuality comes into play. Bisexuality is a potential threat to the way in which monosexual identities are understood and therefore acts as a challenge to the notion of stable binary categories of identity (Rust, 1996, Ault, 1996). Because of the way in which heteronormative discursive practices are deployed within schools with the effect of dichotomising sexual identity categories, there are literally no discursive spaces in school within which she feels able to talk about her identity and relationships.

It can be argued that the staffroom is often a difficult site for lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers because much of the conversation that occurs there is based around heterosexual relationships and related activities (Epstein & Johnson, 1994). Dee is therefore unable to disrupt the heterosexist presumptions of her staffroom because of the lack of discursive space within which she could achieve this without potentially causing herself harm. Dee stated that she has always found it difficult to negotiate her private and professional lives and feels that disclosing details of her relationships might result in injury,

This is the first time I’ve actually made it work. And it’s requiring me to be in therapy for support. And I also said to my therapist, you know, “It this goes tits up, if I feel really unsafe I’m just gonna drop the job”. You know really it’s that bad for me.

Dee’s experience illustrates the notion that the ability to exist as an LGB teacher is riddled with complexity and to the notion that LGB staff may be placed under particular pressure and that this pressure can result in stress, anxiety and depression (see Robinson et al 2004).

The aggressiveness with which heterosexuality is often performed within the workplace was illustrated by Margaret, who, when asked whether or not she attended school social events talked again about the ‘loud crowd’ who dominate the staffroom and who made the overtly homophobic remarks expounded in chapter four. Margaret works as a languages teacher at a secondary school in rural Shropshire. She stated that,
(I go) *occasionally*. And that’s because we all go out as a department (and the other department members) don’t particularly like this loud crowd, that dominate, and they get loud at social events. It’s a great embarrassment and they always get really, really drunk an’ really shout an’ they try to sort of like get people to snog people an’ put car keys down their front’s…An’ try an’ get waiters to snog ‘em an’…oh an’ then shout out asking people questions about their sex life loud across a restaurant. So I don’t really wanna go there. (Laughs) an’ last time I went, I went at Christmas I swore I’d never ever go again.

The heterosexualised performances of the ‘loud crowd’ mean that they dominate school social events, making it difficult for those who do not ‘fit in’ to attend or enjoy the events. Margaret illustrates the aggressive performance of heterosexuality that characterise school social events. Sex and the performance of heterosexual sexual behaviour are evident in Margaret’s statement, there is no room to challenge these performances and so Margaret positions herself as outside of them by not participating in school social events.

Participants who were not out at work tended to share very little of their lives at all with colleagues. Lehtonnen’s (2004) work on LGB teachers within a Finnish context has similar findings. This illustrates the private/professional binary that characterises much work on sexuality and schooling (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Lehtonnen, 2004, Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008) and reflects the silence surrounding non-heterosexualities within educational institutions.

Kitty has worked as a supply teacher in rural Wiltshire for several years and chooses not to discuss her sexuality, or many details of her private life, at work. She talked about several experiences which informed this decision. Firstly, she did supply at a Catholic school where she was,

> Asked to introduce myself as Mrs. Bee because I had a daughter. And I said well, you know, ‘I’m divorced and there isn’t a male in my life’ and she was like, ‘well we don’t want the children to know that’ so I
had to identify myself as Mrs. Bee. Yeah, I was really, really cross about that, y’know. I couldn’t be Miss Bee because I have a child.

The school then demanded that Kitty perform a partnered heterosexual existence in order to fit in with the religious and social ethos of the school. Kitty’s experience echoes Robinson’s (2005) argument that,

Negotiating everyday gender relations in schools is a complicated and often contradictory experience that warrants individuals to take up certain performances of masculinities and femininities that are regulated and policed through the normalizing practices of compulsory heterosexuality (Robinson, 2005, p.22)

For Kitty then, the taking up the identity of a married, heterosexual mother forced her to disguise her private existence as a divorced, bisexual, single mother. Her ‘real’ identity did not fit in with that which was desired by the school and so a gendered and sexualised performance was thrust upon her.

Kitty stated that she has a regular supply job at a school near a military base. She described a dominant discourse at school that assumes heterosexuality, is male dominated and within which non-heterosexual identities are invisible. She does not discuss her private life at all; most staff do not know that she has a daughter or where she lives. She feels unable to talk about her sexual orientation and stated that,

I think the only reason that I don’t talk about it (is) because you know it’s not something that’s a normal thing where I work because there is no gay community there, there’s just absolutely nothing in the whole of the town, you know. And I kind of look in the papers and things, you know and keep my eyes open, and there’s absolutely no mention of it so, you know, all of the parents, as far as we’re aware, are heterosexual, it just never comes up.

Kitty is then muted by the assumed heterosexuality of her workplace and the heteronormative discursive practices which dominate it. The gendered and sexual
performances of the pupils are particularly rigidly policed as illustrated by the following statement,

There have been homophobic comments in the staffroom […] I mean particularly the boys in Key Stage 1, you have the dressing up box and there’s one boy that particularly likes dressing up as a female, you know, an’ the teachers are saying, “Oh, you know, if he was my son I wouldn’t let him” an’ y’know, “I’d put a bag over his head” kind of thing […] and just making really negative comments […] I just said (that) I disagreed with them an’ thought well I’m not gonna rock the boat too much because I was starting to get looks, you know, it was literally me against the staffroom, they were all of the opinion that it was wrong.

Like Dee and Margaret, Kitty’s sexuality does not ‘fit in’ with the normative and presumed heterosexuality of the staffroom. When she did speak out and challenge the talk of the majority, she positioned herself as existing outside of the majority. This can be a dangerous position for a teacher because as Day (1997) argues,

Heterosexual relationships are frequently assets in the politics of the work environment. It is normal for co-workers to have some degree of knowledge about their colleagues’ personal lives and this knowledge can be a critical element in establishing the trust upon which networking and mentoring relationships are built (Day, 1997, p.148)

For participants who chose not to discuss their private lives at work, the public/professional binary was apparent within their experiences. Working in a heteronormative environment that allowed little space within which to articulate the existence of non-heterosexual identities precipitated feelings of isolation, otherness and a need to keep quiet within social situations at school.

The following section offers an analysis of participants who choose to come out to staff within their schools and exposes the reasons for this choice.
Section three: “I do come out but I do it by stealth”: Coming out to colleagues

Making a decision about coming out at work is a consideration for many LGB people whatever their profession (Day, 1997, Heaphy, 2008, Lehtonen, 2004, Ward & Winstanley, 2005). The workplace can act as a closet (Ward & Winstanley, 2005), a place where non-heterosexual identities remain hidden, silenced by a heteronormative discourse. Some of the discursive processes through which this is achieved were expounded in the previous section where it was demonstrated that interactions with staff members is often dependent upon performances of heterosexual identity. Deciding to come out at work can be a process fraught with difficulties and questions about support, legal protection, cultural tolerance and ultimately necessity (Day, 1997, Rivers & Carragher, 2003).

Chapter four of this thesis demonstrated the ways in which the pressure of living double lies within the context of participants’ private lives had negative effects upon their well being and senses of self. Coming out at work also carries many similar considerations. Day et al (1997) argue that LGB people often come out at work because the stress of hiding their sexual orientation and leading private/professional lives that are split can be too emotionally costly. The decision to come out Day et al posit, is often a deliberate choice and one that is made after careful assessment of the context within which the LGB person in question is employed. Coming out at work can be an important consideration for several reasons. Firstly, workplace relationships are often built around the knowledge of colleagues’ private lives and discussions during down time are frequently based around social activities and relationships conducted within the private sphere (Day & Schoenrade, 1997, Epstein & Johnson, 1994, Heaphy, 2008, Ward & Winstanley, 2005). If LGB people feel that they cannot disclose details of their private lives through fear of intolerance or homophobia, then engaging with colleagues during these social situations can be difficult.

Coming out to colleagues was managed differently and in awareness of the factors expounded above by participants who chose to do so. For some participants, being out to staff was an important part of their professional identities, especially when they had worked previously in environments that were not open to their sexual identities. For
example for Natasha, living a more open life in terms of her lesbian relationship was one of the major motivational factors in her and her partners’ move from South Africa to the United Kingdom,

When we came over from South Africa, I just decided (to) be open from the beginning. I don’t want to lead that double life thing that was going on in South Africa. But also, um I’m here on a work permit and (my partner) is on my permit as a dependent, or a spouse, yeah spouse, so my head obviously knew before she issued me the work permit, um so I couldn’t really then (laughs) pretend that I’m not (laughs).

The fact that her partner was registered on her work permit meant, on one hand, that the participant was denied the choice of whether or not to come out to her headteacher. On the other hand, this made it easier for her to be open about her sexuality and this was something that Natasha felt was positive and allowed her to move away from a private/professional split.

Edward’s identity as a gay man actually informed his choice to work in education,

I think to some extent I may work in education because it fits more comfortably with being gay than the previous stuff erm kind of in financial services that I used to do which I found really homophobic. So maybe it’s a case of the gay thing is more important than the work thing.

In order to successfully negotiate his public and professional lives, it is necessary for Edward to work in an environment that is tolerant to some degree of his sexual identity. Although he no longer works as a teacher, instead working for the Local Authority, Edward previously had a positive experience of working as a gay man in a primary school,

My last experience in a primary school er was very positive in terms of my sexuality. It’s a hundred year old school; allegedly I am the first homosexual ever to have graced their staffroom (laughs). Erm…and I
felt like, you know, people would come an’ ask me, ‘what do gays think of..?’ Erm but when stuff hit the fan, you know, kids started saying “Mr. ______’s gay”, the school actually said; “We don’t know what to do, what should we do?” An’ asked me and involved me um and, you know, when I had a relationship breakdown um they were very supportive. They took it very seriously; you know and were there for me, really.

Edward’s experience raises several issues. Firstly, that he was asked ‘what do gays think of…’ alludes to the notion expounded earlier that the out LGB teacher can be posited as being in possession of ‘expert knowledge’ of LGB issues and therefore the sole source of information regarding these issues within an educational space (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Ferfolja, 1998, Lehtonen, 2004, Nixon & Givens, 2002, Russ et al, 2002). That Edward was positioned as ‘the first homosexual to grace the staffroom’ places him within this paradigm and therefore LGB issues were made his issues.

‘Secondly, Edward’s positive experience contradicts much research in the field which posits the out gay male primary teacher as a problematic figure. Within this paradigm any males entering teaching at the primary level are viewed with caution and often suspected of being gay and/or paedophile (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, 1998, Carrington & Skelton, 2003, Ferfolja, 2009, Jones, 2004, Mills et al 2004, Nixon & Givens, 2002, Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). For example Epstein & Johnson (1994) state that,

The widespread mythology of lesbian and gay sexuality as dangerous to children has resulted in classically homophobic responses in which panic has been allied to the demand for protection (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, p.224).

Section 28 has been seen as a direct response to the panic around children’s exposure to homosexuality (Jeffrey-Poulter, 1991) and, although the Clause has been repealed, within the context of the primary school gay men are often viewed as agency-free, bound to a heteronormative discourse and forced to perform their sexual identities as part of it. We saw in the previous section how this can also impact upon women
working within the primary sector because of the way in which Kitty’s status as a divorced single mother was problematic to the Catholic primary school she worked in.

The two gay male participants who worked within the primary sector, Edward and Steve, were both able to be active agents in the way that their sexual identities were perceived and understood within their schools. Edward was asked directly about LGB issues and felt supported by his colleagues throughout his time at the school. Steve is the headteacher of a primary school in an East Midlands city. Steve felt that it was important that he be open about his sexuality from the time of his appointment,

I made no bones about it on my application that I was a member of the lesbian an’ gay, bisexual and transgender working party for the (union) erm and I guess people knew. I must have told (them) at my interview that I had a partner, it was no big revelation or anything.

A further discussion of Steve’s position as an out gay male within a primary school will be discussed within the next section of this chapter. Here, I would like to make the point that both Edward and Steve work within an inner city context which bring us back to the notion mentioned in chapter four that, to a certain extent, LGB identities are part of the fabric of the city. Participants who worked in rural environments, like those under discussion in the previous sub-section, felt less able to be open about their sexual identities because LGB identities were perceived of as alien to the communities in which their schools were located.

Most participants who were out to their colleagues felt that it was important to their psychological well being that they were open about their sexuality at work. Many participants compared their current experiences of being out with previous situations where they had felt unable to come out, as illustrated by Spiderwoman,

When I was still working in engineering, I did work somewhere where I wasn’t out. I was out to maybe one or two people, an’ it was just so tedious […] I couldn’t be myself; um I dunno it just made me feel unhappy. So erm it’s for my personal happiness (laughs). Yeah. I mean
there’s nothing to hide to be honest, it’s just like if you don’t like it, whatever (laughs).

The notion of being inside the closet, unable to come out is often accompanied by an exposition of the psychological damage that this can cause to the closeted subject (Sedgwick, 1990, Plummer, 1995). Plummer (1995) talks about the transformative nature of the coming out narrative where a move from suffering to triumph is often articulated (ibid.).

As illustrated within the previous chapter, coming out to family and friends is often seen as the most significant coming out story, with other comings out within daily social intercourse seen as events of lesser significance. That participants felt that being open with colleagues at school about their sexual orientation was important and that it held significance to their psychological well being supports the argument that school, like the family is a social institution that demands non-heterosexualities speak themselves into existence (Sedgwick, 1990).

Earlier in the chapter Dee talked about not being able to find a space within which she could mention her sexual identity. Dee made these comments during our first interview, she was not then in a relationship with a woman and stated that if she were, she may find it easier to bring up issues around her sexual identity with colleagues. Many participants who were out to colleagues were in a relationship found and it easier to bring their sexual orientation into the staffroom by mentioning their partner rather than making an ‘I am…’ statement as Spiderwoman illustrates,

(It’s easier to come out by talking about your partner). That’s why I think it’s easier if you’re in a couple. I haven’t kind of come out out, for ages, I don’t ever do it like that now, it’s just like people’ll be asking me something and I’ll go, “Yeah my partner blah, blah, blah, she…” and I think it helps because if you talk about it just like it’s something (that’s) hardly even worth mentioning, that’s it’s like no big deal, then people have to, they kind of re-adjust themselves and they think, ‘oh okay’. And they have to act cool even if they’re not (laughs).
The idea of not making ‘too much’ of their sexuality was something common to several participants. This ties in with a discourse around what it is to be ‘acceptably gay’ in a particular context. Having a partner gave participants who wished to be open to colleagues about their sexuality segue into bringing sexuality into the conversation without making a big coming out statement. Participants without partners felt less able to introduce their sexuality into a conversation because the interlocutor may not understand the relevance of it. For example Kitty stated that,

I’m not in a female relationship so there’s no reason that anybody should know about my sexuality, it would never come up in conversation. And for me to make a point of saying that I was gay or bisexual means that, y’know, ‘well why have you told me that?’ You know? ‘We weren’t even having a conversation about that’ d’you know what I mean? It’s not relevant.

Participants in long-term relationships were more able to be active agents in the telling of their non-heterosexuality than those without partners or involved in more casual relationships. The ‘conversational’ coming out strategy was one employed by most participants and was a deliberate and conscious speech act as illustrated by Nicole,

I mean I probably wouldn’t mention my partner straight away so I do come out but I do it by stealth so that people’re really clear, you know? And you don’t wanna not. You don’t wanna start censoring yourself do ya? (Laughs) also you never get to find out who the other queers are do you?

Nicole then feels that it is appropriate to wait until the ‘right time’ before coming out at work. For her, coming out is important not only in terms of her psychological well being but also in terms of coming out as a way to ‘find’ other LGB teachers within the school.

Coming out to colleagues was then often achieved through participants’ deliberate conversational strategies. John illustrated the way that he came out to colleagues
through a conversational strategy that acted to correct heteronormative assumptions about his sexual orientation,

I think on a couple of occasions somebody’s said, “Oh your partner, is she..?” and I’ve said, “Oh no my partner’s male” or…so there’s been a couple of occasions where I’ve had to kind of out myself, but generally I guess it’s just word of mouth that…or just through how I present who I am and my identity…or I might, you know, I might have made reference to the fact or…yeah.

It is interesting that John states that his sexuality is passed on through ‘word of mouth’, suggesting that once spoken into existence, the divide between a lesbian, gay or bisexual teachers’ public and professional life is forever fractured (Nixon & Givens, 2002, Sparkes, 1994). Foucault argues that schools are ‘observation machines’ (Foucault cited Jones, 2004) and so once spoken, the sexuality of an LGB teacher becomes public property. The LGB teacher occupies a particular and marked space within the staffroom and, as illustrated earlier, this can lead to the LGB teacher being seen as the provider of ‘expert knowledge’ on LGB issues.

It is therefore important that the LGB teacher be an active agent in their coming out narrative when disclosing their sexuality to colleagues. Because of the coming out process and the complex and deliberate decisions that have to be made around coming out, participants who came out to staff were, in some way, prepared for what followed coming out. Chapter five illustrated the precariousness that can accompany the coming out process within the private realm, particularly if that process is interrupted and an LGB person is ‘outed’. This was also the case within the workplace as Alison illustrates,

I was a bit bored on duty the other day an’ I though right, there’s a teacher that I get on quite well with, an’ I was like ‘right, I’m gonna tell her I’m gay an’ I said something about my partner and she went, ‘Right, what school does she work in?’ I thought ‘that’s a bit risky isn’t it?’ I was in a bit of a mood after that ‘cause I was like well what happens if (I wasn’t gay)?
That the teacher Alison had chosen to come out pre-empted her disclosure disrupted the relationship of power that exists between the teller and the interlocutor and her sense of agency was removed from the interaction. Therefore the triumphant conclusion to this incident of Alison’s coming out was denied.

Coming out to colleagues is a complex, strategic and deliberate decision making process. Being open about their sexual orientation was an important part of several participants’ professional identities, for others it was important to their psychological well being. The next section explores the decision making process involved when participants consider coming out to pupils.

Section four: “I don’t think you can have a relationship with the kids unless you are honest with them”: Coming out to pupils

Coming out to pupils was an issue raised with all participants and was a consideration for all participants whether they chose to come out to pupils or not. Several participants who were not out to pupils evoked the notion of shame and that coming out was, in some way, a duty as an LGB educator. Leslie for example stated that it was ‘to (her) eternal shame’ that she was not able to come out to pupils within the school in which she was employed at first interview. Research in the filed has demonstrated that where LGB teachers are not out at work, to whatever degree, guilt often accompanies the way that they articulate this decision (Ferfolja, 2009).

Support from colleagues was also a major factor within participants’ decisions to come out to pupils and therefore the issue of the urban/rural divide in positive experiences came into play. None of the teachers working within rural environments were out to staff or to pupils. As with coming out to colleagues, coming out to pupils involved complex, strategic and deliberate decision making processes.

One of the reasons why participants wanted to come out to pupils was because they had experienced homophobia from pupils as a result of their perceived sexual orientation. This is an issue within research on coming out at work as Day (1997)
argues that coming out as a teacher can often be a decision made under the pressure of homophobia or intolerance.

Two participants came out to pupils because they had experienced homophobia from pupils and had met resistance from school management when challenging this. Both Kate and Valerie work in inner-city London secondary schools, Kate teaches English and Valerie French.

When Kate had started teaching at her school as a NQT, she had been the victim of a homophobic campaign by pupils,

> The kids’d yell, “Lezza” at me. I had ‘Miss_____ is a lesbian’ printed all over the toilets…Er you know they wrote all over the desks and all this kind of business like, you know.

Kate wanted to challenge this direct and the low level homophobia that existed through the pupils using ‘gay’ as a general pejorative term. However she experienced resistance from the senior management team at her school to her desire to achieve this through coming out to pupils. Kate’s experience is therefore framed in terms of her embodying the lone political voice. At one point she stated that, “I am the only one. I am the only out member of staff to the kids”. The participants’ feeling that coming out to pupils was a personal struggle is illustrated by the following section where she talks about having to campaign for an assembly on LGB issues,

> I campaigned and I campaigned an’ every year I made a big fuss an’ about 2 years ago…they said that I could do (an anti-homophobia assembly) but I couldn’t do it on my own, I had to have an outside agency do it so that was fine so I went and found one, erm and they came in and did an assembly but I was very very clever in that I was around there. So the kids kind of got a sense that I wasn’t ashamed of it, ‘cause I didn’t want it to have the reverse effect…Because that would be even worse I felt than not doing it at all.
It is interesting to note that Kate’s school would only allow her to give an anti-homophobia assembly if an outside agency was brought in, again illustrating the notion that within the institution of school, a dominant heteronormative discourse posits non-heterosexual identities as existing outside of the school community.

Similarly to Kate, Valerie experienced homophobia from pupils when she started working at her current school,

When I arrived at that school […] one of my classes was quite horrible. And I had to go to my head of department erm…because they put a sign on my door that said, ‘fat dyke’. And I went to see her and she said, “But you’re not fat my love!” (Laughs) She […] was the only one in the school who was able to actually say the word. ‘Cause my line manager, just didn’t want to say the word. At all. And…I think, because I made such a fuss last year about the fact that kids used the word gay all the time and can be quite horrible to each other […] they’ve made sure they’ve put it in the policy.

That only Valerie’s head of department was able ‘say the word’ lesbian when referring to the problems Valerie was having acts as illustration to the way in which heteronormative discursive constructs act to silence non-heterosexual relationships. It was only through Valerie and Kate’s resistance to this, and her persistence that the participants were able to ensure that LGB issues were dealt with in away that they found acceptable.

Kerry Robinson (2005) argues that,

Heteronormativity operates through regimes of ‘truth’ constituted in everyday activities and interactions with micro and macro contexts in society to reinforce the unquestionable status of heterosexuality as the natural and normal way to be […]. This power relationship is not a given or fixed one, but rather needs to be constantly worked at in order to maintain the veneer of stability that surrounds it. Thus heterosexism
and homophobia operate to sustain the status quo (Robinson, 2005, p.178).

Both Kate and Valerie were able to interrupt the regimes through which heterosexuality was posited as the ‘natural and normal’ way to be within their schools. Valerie made sure that homophobic bullying is referred to as such within her schools’ anti-bullying policy and Kate, through persistence, got her anti-homophobia assembly.

Both participants, since the incidents described above, have come out to pupils. Kate feels that coming out has been a positive experience and one which, she believes, has strengthened her relationship with the pupils,

I don’t think you can have a relationship with the kids unless you are honest with them. And…after we had the gay assembly, (in) one of the classes…one of the brave kids said, “Miss, would you mind if we asked, are you proud to be gay?” And I thought what a sensible, mature very sensitively put question. (And) we went through all the questions like when did you know? When did you come out? And all this and I thought ‘that’s okay that’s really, really sensible’…So, I think, yeah there’s that relationship that’s built with the kids and if you pretend to be something that you’re not, and the kids say, “Are you?” and you have to pretend that you’re not, then that’s…I think that’s wrong, basically.

The notion of ‘being honest’ with pupils was something also raised by Steve who is the out gay male head of a primary school in Leicestershire. I wish here to return to the discussion opened earlier about the problematic of men working within primary education. Parallel to the academic discourse about men being viewed with suspicion within primary education, there is a socio-political discourse that bemoans the lack of men within primary education and posits this as a reason for boys’ under achievement (Carrington & Skelton, 2004, Dillabough, 2005, Mills et al, 2004, Mills, 2002, Weber & Mitchell, 1996). Within this paradigm, men are often seen as essential to the
primary child and school in order to assert discipline and provide ‘strong’ male role models to disaffected boys.

Steve, as the headteacher at his school, posited the notion that the role of men within primary education is multiple and that there are other types of males that children need to see besides the ‘disciplinarian’,

I think as a male teacher, having worked in some very very hard areas […] children sometimes say, “Are you a man or are you a lady?” you know, things like that. I actually say, “I’m a man”. Erm, but I actually think it’s really good that they’re thinking about things like that ‘cause I think that some of those children need to see that men can be emotional, that they can be soft, that they can be gentle, and that’s not from a sort of crusading issue, I think that’s from a real living person issue. Because a lot of these kids are battered or they have fathers that just screw around and move on to the next woman, so I think actually that if they see a man that is able to have a cry with them, and do things like that […] I believe in being truthful with kids.

Steve described his gendered embodiment as being ‘naturally camp and effeminate’. Therefore, he was read by children as having an ambiguous gender identity and this, coupled with his openness about his gay relationship, prompted children to ask him which sex he belongs to. Steve has then created a professional space within which he is able to challenge heteronormative discursive practices which position men within primary school as either necessary to provide discipline or suspected of being gay and/or paedophile. Steve is able to be an out gay man and to use his gendered embodiment to demonstrate alternative masculinities within the space of the primary school.

Several participants who were out to both staff and pupils within their workplaces often narrated their comings out in school as did Kate and Steve, with feelings of responsibility, duty or political sensibility.
I interviewed Elaine and Dawn together. They are a couple and have been together since they were at university eighteen years ago. Two years ago they parented a child together and becoming parents was one of the major reasons for them wanting to come out to pupils at the schools in which they worked. Both work as secondary school teachers in the same East Midlands town in which they live. Elaine teaches French and stated that,

(Because of our son) it’s important for us to be secure and out because, you know, he’s gonna get some stick at some point and he’s gotta know that, you know, his mom’s aren’t embarrassed about it or scared about it or not open about it. An’ I think that’s a big issue with us as well. Certainly (it) was with being out at school.

Both Elaine and Dawn feel that coming out to pupils has been a positive experience and Dawn, who teaches science, expressed surprise at the ease at which her pupils accepted her sexual identity,

I wasn’t out at (my school) and when I came out to my tutor group ‘cause we’d had (our son) they weren’t upset with me for being a lesbian, they were pissed off I’d not told ‘em. The fact I was gay had nothing to do with it. The fact that I’d not told them that I had a family and I was having a baby, that really bugged them.

It can be argued then, given the positive experiences of participants who come out to pupils, that children and young people do understand the complexities sexual identity and are willing to engage with LGB issues where given the opportunity to do so (Robinson, 2005, Russell & Bohan, 2005). It is the institution of school and the heteronormative discursive practices that continue to dominate it that continue to (re)produce the notion that heterosexuality is the preferred, natural and reified form of sexuality.

By way of illustrating the above point it is noteworthy that all participants who were out to pupils experienced some form of resistance to their coming out from their
schools. This took many forms and illustrates the way in which heteronormativity, as a power structure, operates.

At Elaine’s school the intolerance for LGB identities was revealed when the headteacher demanded that a piece of pupils’ artwork depicting a kiss between two men was removed. She recounted this event during our second interview,

> My head is (a) fundamental Christian yeah, so […] I think if he had his way he’d be standing at the pulpit and sending hellfire and damnation to all. In fact I can’t remember the last time you were here whether they’d removed the display board at school? It was a student’s GCSE art portfolio an’ they’d used gay subject matter, so it was two men kissing. Or it could’ve been two women kissing because actually, really, you couldn’t really tell. Erm an’ there was this great big hoo har an’ the head an’ the governors demanded (that) this series of pictures was taken down; it was just entitled ‘The Kiss’ […] they didn’t think it was suitable subject matter for schools.

On one hand Elaine’s headteacher tolerates her decision to be out to pupils, but on the other hand he feels that pupils representing non-heterosexual relationships through art is not acceptable for his school. This is a troublesome dualism as it places the participant in a position where she is not fully supported by her school, making her sexual identity her issue.

The veracity with which Elaine’s headteacher objected to the artwork belies a homophobia that is woven into the fabric of our schools, LGB issues are deemed ‘unsuitable’ or irrelevant to pupils. Other participants experienced a less overt, but no less insidious, form of homophobia from colleagues. Kate feels that coming out has held her back in terms of career advancement in her current school,

> I’m not sure whether the fact that I’m not where I want to be in that school is because I’m gay or because I’m out, I can’t prove it. I don’t know whether it’s because I’ve got, you know a bit of piercing and pink hair and shit, I don’t know. It’s difficult to prove. […] Okay, this
woman’s bin on the panel for 3 of the last interviews I’ve had and I’ve not got it […] and the comments when we were doing the gay assembly such as, “Oh what’s all this then?” Disdainfully done.

The presence of a homophobic undercurrent you can sense but not prove because it is not overt was also experienced by Steve. As the openly gay headteacher of an East Midlands primary school, Steve is open with pupils about his sexuality and feels that this is an important part of their diversities education. However Steve feels that there are elements within his school who do not share his view. Steve had purchased books at an LGBT bookshop in London for the school library and the following statement highlights his concerns about his staff,

At the school I’m working at now none of them will speak out about sexual identity issues, in terms of ‘well you shouldn’t be gay and…’ or ‘the Bible says it’s wrong’, I think some of them have those thoughts, and my reasoning for that (is that) I bought all those lovely books from (an LGBT bookshop) to go into the library. They all disappeared within a week or two. They were all stolen, or have gone missing, or been put in someone’s cupboard. An’ despite, y’know pleas to get then back, ‘cause they’re books I bought to present to the school library for the children to read, they went missing wholesale an’ I was just very curious about that […] I actually think that subversiveness is actually more dangerous that open opposition. ‘Cause open opposition you can argue against an’ work with, or work against, whereas that subversiveness, that silent acceptance but going against it...

The subversiveness that Steve speaks of acts as illustration to the continuation of heteronormative discursive practices with schools and is reflected in the literature on LGB teachers (Ferfolja, 2009). Many participants talked about not being able to change ‘what is in people’s hearts’ through legislation and policy making. That those participants who openly challenged heteronormativity and its sibling homophobia were challenged back by colleagues wishing to uphold them is testament to this notion.
Most participants were not out to pupils however this issue was something that all participants had considered and reflected upon. For several participants, coming out to pupils was bound up with being ‘acceptably gay’ or ‘not making too much’ of their sexualities within the workplace.

For John, on one hand, being out and open about his life with staff is something that is part of John’s strategy of self-affirmation; on the other he feels that his sexuality, if he makes too much of it, could be used against him,

I’m not ashamed of being gay, and it’s a completely natural thing for me to be, erm…I guess there’s kind of two sides to the argument. One is whether I’m just kind of a good role model, I do what I do and people find out and, “Oh, he’s gay”. […] I think sometimes by going out of your way to force an issue, there’s then more opportunities for people to pick up on and criticise, “Because he’s gay, it’s because he’s gay”…Part of me would love to be in a job where I could just be me. I do feel that on occasion, I’m in school, and I’m not allowed to… ‘Not allowed’ perhaps is the wrong er phrase but I feel that I shouldn’t share the fact that I live with a man, share my life with a man, that I like having sex with men.

That John feels that he should not talk about his sexuality in terms of the pleasure it brings him is interesting on several levels. Firstly it is argued that school, as a social institution, when addressing non-heterosexual identities, focuses upon the sexual element of LGB relations, rather than upon lesbian, gay and bisexual as identity categories (Rasmussen, 2004, Robinson, 2005). Therefore John focuses upon this sexual element of his identity and understands it as part of himself that his workplace prefers to be silenced.

Secondly the discourse surrounding sexuality in general within schools tends to focus on the practical rather than the pleasurable. Sex education lessons often focus upon prevention and biology lesson upon reproduction. Rasmussen (2004) argues that,
The power relations that exist within schools and educational research often work to exclude, prohibit and silence discussions of sex and pleasure in the school’s formal curricular (Rasmussen, 2004, p.451).

John is therefore doubly silenced by wanting to be acceptably different within his workplace and not making ‘too much’ of his sexuality as well as being silenced by a discourse that prohibits the discussion of sex as pleasure within school.

The extent to which participants were out within their profession affected the way in which they felt able to tackle LGB issues within the classroom. The subject that participants taught was also a factor. Alison and Kate both teach English but had different ideas about the extent to which they were able to raise LGB issues within their subject. Alison is not out to pupils and, like John, feels that she shouldn’t ‘make too much’ of her sexuality at work,

If anything comes up that could be homophobic or related to being gay I’m just a little bit uncomfortable with talking about it ‘cause […] I just feel a bit like erm (the pupils are) gonna think I’m, y’know, banging on about my cause. I’d rather just do it quietly an’ y’know, if it comes up not make a massive thing of it.

Conversely Kate is out to pupils and stated that,

English is just brilliant ‘cause you’ve got so many characters that you can draw on an’ I obviously teach texts that will have something there to latch onto an’ […] Twelfth Night is a brilliant one, because you’ve got a woman dressing as a bloke, and then it gets in to some nasty love triangle where um she’s working for a man, he gets her to go and woo his, like y’know, intended. Then the intended ends up falling in love with her, thinking it’s a bloke. So of course there’s all these issues around, ‘Oh she’s a lesion!’ Well no she’s not because she thinks it’s a bloke.
The ability to bring LGB issues into the classroom for participants was fraught with complex and ultimately subjective decisions about identity and the extent to which the private and professional realms should overlap. Nixon & Givens (2002) argue that,

Questions of identity formation and management are central to the way in which the LGB educator seeks to reconcile the difference between the public and the private self, responding to questions both in the staff room and the classroom (Nixon & Givens, 2002, p.6)

The importance of this issue was further highlighted by participants who struggled to come to terms with their decisions not to be out to pupils and the accompanying feelings of guilt that accompanied this choice.

The notion that LGB teachers form their professional identities through the questions that they respond to is one illustrated by the data. Leslie talked about being asked a question about her sexuality after a discussion in one of her lessons had turned to sexuality. At first interview, Leslie worked in a Special School, in the interim between interviews she changed jobs and so when I interviewed her for the second time, she was working as a biology teacher in a mainstream secondary school in Worcestershire. She stated that during the discussion,

One of the kids was like, ‘I don’t mind men, but two women? That’s not right’. An’ I said, ‘Oh really, d’you think that?’ An’ I said something about people loving each other an’ this sort of thing […]. Anyway in the end, there was a sort of, ‘So are you married then, miss?’ You know how they do? They find the route round and so you answer all their questions […] an’ they tried but they weren’t brave enough. An’ then right at the end of the lesson, they got one of the kids and said, ‘Go an’ ask her, go an’ ask her, go an’ ask her’. So this poor girl came and stood in front of me, they’d all left, they were all looking through the doorway waiting, and she built herself up and she said, ‘Miss, are you bisexual?’ An’ I said, ‘No, Beth, I’m not’. An’ that was it an’ she ran away (laughs). ‘Cause I was thinkin’ ‘oh ‘ere we go, okay’. But if she’d’ve said, ‘Are you a lesbian?’ I would’ve said, ‘yes’.
Er but because she didn’t ask the right question, it let me and her off the hook so to speak.

That Leslie felt as if the pupils’ question had let them both ‘off the hook’ because it was not the right question is interesting in terms of the relationships of power present within the interaction. Leslie was able to answer the pupils’ question truthfully and avoid having to out herself to the pupil, thus keeping the split between her private/professional identities intact.

Parents were a major contributing factor to participants feeling unable to come out to pupils. For Spiderwoman, not being out to pupils was the cause of some tension for her, particularly as she had been out at her previous school,

I’m actually not overly happy (at my job) just ‘cause I don’t feel that I can be fully myself um in a variety of ways […] sometimes it’s the parents you’re fighting against. Children are quite, they’re quite open to things […] but parents’re the ones. […] I just think like why d’you have to be invisible? Like nobody else is expected to. If kids asked somebody else about their, you know are they married, they’d be like, “Yeah, my wife is a…” whatever she is an’ it’s really not that big of a deal, so it’s like why can’t you do that?

For this participant then not feeling able to be honest about her private life is detrimental to her professional life (Nixon & Givens, 2002). This means that the participant feels stifled by the dominance of heteronormative discursive practices within her workplace, something that is exacerbated, as demonstrated in chapter four, by the management team at her school who refuse to acknowledge her presence as a black lesbian.

For Natasha, the parents of her pupils were also the main obstacle to her coming out to pupils. Natasha is South African and works in an inner city school in London with high numbers of ethnic minority pupils. Whilst living in South Africa Natasha experienced the dangers that living an open lifestyle as a lesbian woman can pose, therefore Natasha feels that it is potentially dangerous to come out to pupils at school,
With the parents in my school, ‘cause a lot of them are from (Africa and the Caribbean)…and in Jamaica um, it’s against the law to be um, gay…So that’s why, at work, I definitely don’t want the parents to know about it. Even though I’m in England, but they also come from the place I come from…where violence is the way to treat things in life (that you don’t like).

Natasha’s experience illustrates again the importance of context within participants’ decisions to come out at work. It is inappropriate, she feels, to bring her sexuality to the fore with pupils because of the risk of parents finding out and the potential danger this might place her in. She feels that parents ‘come from the same place’ as she does and so her choices around coming out at work are limited by this perception.

Participants’ coming out narratives were continued through their professional lives. The way that participants talked about the way that their sexual identities are positioned within school mirrored the coming out narrative in terms of the structure expounded in chapter five of suffering, the need to break a silence, a ‘coming out’ and a ‘coming to terms’. For some participants working within education meant going back into the closet. Participants who were not out at school or who were out to staff used the language of the closet when articulating their experiences, stating that they felt that they ‘couldn’t be themselves’ at work, that they had to hide their relationships or that they felt guilty about not being open with pupils. For those who had come out at work, the language they used was more triumphant in tone; they felt relieved that they could be open to varying degrees.

**Summary**

This chapter engaged with several key issues regarding participants’ professional experiences as LGB educators. Firstly it offered an analysis of participants’ experiences of teacher training and illustrated the complex and varying reasons for participants’ choosing to enter the teaching profession. We saw here the ways in which the notion of teaching being a calling intersected with gendered and sexual
private and professional expectations. This section also demonstrated the ways in which participants experienced their teacher training courses and posited the notion that LGB issues, and indeed many diversity issues, are low on the list of priorities for teacher training programmes.

The second section of this chapter engaged with participants who choose not to come out within the workplace. The reasons for this were multiple and complex and were influenced by the location of participants’ school, the communities they served and the notion that there is no space within which to raise personal sexuality issues within the workplace.

Section three offered an analysis of participants who chose to come out to staff within their professional lives and illustrated the way in which this is oft achieved through conversational strategy. A desire to close the gap between private and professional lives was also a factor within this decision making process.

The final section of this chapter examined participants’ experiences of coming out to pupils and their reasons for/not doing this. It was demonstrated that this was a consideration for all participants, whether they chose to come out to pupils or not. Participants’ decisions to come out to pupils were influenced by their experiences of homophobia from pupils, a feeling of duty and a perceived need to be honest with pupils about ‘who they really are’

Coming out always involves risk. Risk of loss, of rejection, of humiliation, misunderstanding or violence. Though most participants felt that things had gotten better for LGB people working and studying within our schools, a heteronormative discourse continued to (re)produce itself through homophobia, both overt and surreptitious as illustrated by Steve, Kate and Elaine in this chapter, and sexism as illustrated by Kitty. Katherine Rockhill (1993) argues that,

> Every time we interrupt, speak defiantly, and/or name our differences, we risk the loss of our community, home and friends. So too in the classroom, difference is spoken at great risk (Rockhill, 1993, p.356).
Coming out then is a complex and constant process. The ways in which participants were able to articulate their sexualities were context driven and re-made according to the audience that would receive them and the way in which these narratives were constructed act as illustration to this as well as to the many binaries that dominate a social order dominated by a heteronormative discourse.

The following chapter concludes the thesis, highlighting its findings and making recommendations for further research and policy.
Conclusion

This thesis has illustrated the way in which heteronormative discursive practices are (re)produced within school and the impact that this has upon lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers. It was posited that working within such an environment often precipitates a negotiation between private and professional worlds. It was acknowledged that although most people might embody ‘homeselves’ and ‘workselves’, this can be an acute concern for LGB teachers because of the way in which heteronormative discursive practices dominate schools as educational institutions and posit normative versions of heterosexuality as normal, reified and preferred. As such, LGB people, practices and relationships are posited as ‘other’ within schools.

This thesis has addressed a gap in the literature on sexuality and schooling because previously, there have been few studies that explicitly address the experiences and identities of LGB teachers. Therefore it provides useful insights for academics and practitioners by situating the current state of play for this social group. This conclusion will further this project by making suggestions for future research and policy considerations in this area.

Theoretically this thesis was underpinned by a framework that was inspired by poststructuralist feminist and queer theories. Approaching the research in this way allowed me to present the nuanced and complex ways within which the multiple facets of participants’ identities intersect. Additionally I was able to demonstrate the subtleties with which the deployment of heteronormative discursive practices impacted upon participants’ experiences both as LGB people and as teachers.

My engagement with poststructuralist feminism/queer theory was also a cautious one. This is because the purpose of these theoretical tenets is to critique the way in which identity categories are constructed as well as to analyse how they are operationalised and position identities within hierarchical binaries. As such the projects of poststructuralist and/or queer analyses are often to interrogate and, ultimately, to dismantle identity categories therefore to redressing the relationships of power that go into their making. Though I acknowledge that this is an essential project, I have also found myself frustrated by such an analysis because, too often, they reduce the lived
to the textual and fail to acknowledge the importance, pride and self-affirmation that the identity categories of lesbian, gay or bisexual hold for people’s lives as they are lived during various moments. I therefore understand that care needs to be exercised in research concerning marginalised identities. Care needs to be taken in order to represent people’s lived experiences accurately, to allow their voices to be heard articulately and to avoid reducing their complex, multi-faceted and often painful experiences to an exercise in theoretical meandering or textual analyses. Therefore this research sits somewhere between a poststructuralist/queer and a sociological/humanist analysis of the experiences of LGB teachers. These epistemologies need not be mutually exclusive, rather they can be used in conjunction to inform, enrich and challenge our understandings of the social world.

I stated in the introduction to this thesis that throughout the course of the research I have found that my own assumptions about being LGB and working as a teacher have been furthered, refined and challenged. I did not deliberately set out to unlearn, as it were, what I knew about the social world, however throughout the course of interviews and analysis, I found myself thinking about the social worlds that I inhabit in new ways. I now understand identity to be a process one participates within in order to recognise and be recognised rather than something that one ‘is’ or is not. In addition, the introduction to the thesis revealed that I, as a lesbian-identified woman, once worked in a school where I was told that, ‘schools are conservative places and that will never change’. This was said within the context of my own coming out at work and led me to believe that there was, or is, no space for LGB identities to be spoken into existence by adults working in schools. Part of the inspiration for this research was to test this assumption and I have revealed, throughout the thesis, that there are opportunities within one’s professional remit as a teacher, to make a space to bring one’s LGB identity to the fore.

The thesis took as its starting point seven questions and it seems appropriate that I should refer back to those questions here, therefore below is a summary of the research questions and answers:

a) How do LGB teachers understand and experience the use of the word ‘gay’?
The use of the word ‘gay’ was experienced and understood by participants in multiple and complex ways. It was largely understood that ‘gay’ is a word used by children and young people without thought and without knowing reference to LGB people or issues. However it was even more firmly believed by participants that even though ‘gay’ might be deployed within formal and informal spaces of school without conscious thought, it nevertheless reinforces the notion that ‘gay’ is abnormal, deficient and ultimately wrong.

b) To what extent do LGB teachers feel that they are ‘outsiders’ or intruders upon the heteronormative space in which they work?

Participants understood their sexual identities to be ‘other’ to the heteronormative spaces, both formal and informal, of school and therefore were not able to integrate their sexual identities into their professional spaces smoothly. Spaces of resistance were however opened up where participants were out at work to staff and, more successfully, to pupils. Where participants felt that they were able to create a space for their sexual identities within their professional worlds they were more able to raise LGBT issues in the classroom and to integrate such issues pedagogically. The issue of being able to be open at work about sexuality was split along urban/rural lines and suggests that there exists a divide between the rural/urban LGB teacher experience.

c) To what extent does being a LGB teacher demand a negotiation between private and professional spheres?

The thesis acknowledges that most people have ‘workselves’ and ‘homeselves’ that do not necessarily intersect smoothly. However for LGB teachers this divide is often felt more acutely because of real or perceived homophobia or intolerance of LGB issues and identities or the because LGB identities are invisible within the communities that schools’ serve. Therefore being an LGB teacher often involves complex processes of negotiation in order to exist professionally and privately along demarcated lines.

d) In what ways do participants perceive the way in which macro policy changes have impacted upon their lives at the micro level?
Major politico-legal changes to the lives of LGB people were received positively by most participants. However it was largely felt that changes such as the Civil Partnership Act and the Sexual Orientation Legislation had had personal ergo micro and not macro effects. Several participants stated that ‘you cannot change what’s in people’s hearts’ and therefore that heteronormative discursive practices and the ‘othering’ of LGB identities remains largely intact. This was the case especially in relation to the repeal of Section 28 which was felt by participants to have had very little impact upon the ways in which sexuality, gender and related issues are framed and discussed within schools.

e) Is there space within the compulsory educational institutions to challenge or queer the dominant discourse of heteronormativity?

Such spaces have to be made by the individual, and this is one of the key messages of this thesis. Because there remains no mandatory, curriculum-based guidelines for the content of Sex and Relationship Education or Personal, Social and Health Education it remains up to the senior management team of each individual school as to how such education is delivered to pupils. Where participants felt able to be open about their sexual identities to pupils, and this thesis demonstrates how this was possible only within schools in urban locations, space was created by the individual within their own classrooms for the discussion of LGB issues. This was made manifest in perhaps the most ‘controversial’ educational space: that of two gay male primary teachers who were able to bring alternative versions of masculinity into their classrooms. However social justice issues in general were approached by participants’ schools in a ‘tick box’ and often reactive way – homophobia would be dealt with only when it arose in the context of bullying – and therefore this thesis recommends and hopes that in the future social justice needs to be approached in a curriculum-integrated manner and not be left in the margins of the enacted curriculum.

f) How do LGB teachers understand their subject positions in relation to their jobs?

This thesis has demonstrated that there is tension between lesbian, gay and bisexual identities and a professional identity of ‘teacher’. This is because of the ways in which
schools continue to (re)produce heteronormative discursive practices and therefore (re)produce the LGB subject as ‘other’ within educational spaces. Therefore much of the ‘informal knowledge’ that LGB people carry with them is unable to be deployed within professional spaces because of the uncritical way in which identity is posited and understood within schools.

g) What do coming out stories tell us about the way in which gender and sexual identity is played out in varying social contexts?

Coming out stories continue to be a useful resource upon which to draw in the analysis of LGB people’s worlds, in this case both private and professional. This is because of the ways in which coming out narrative demonstrate the continuing dominance of heteronormative discursive practices and the ways in which these practices impact upon the lives of those existing outside of their margins. This thesis demonstrated the way initial coming out stories are mirrored in one’s thinking about and/or acting upon the necessity of coming out professionally. It was in the re-telling of coming out stories that the notion of shame, and its potential for transformation, came to the fore. Therefore participants who were somehow stifled in their expressions of sexual selves at work felt a sense of shame that was not felt by those able to be more open about their sexualities within schools.

The research has many implications and following is a discussion of them that is organised with chronological reference to the analysis chapters.

The use of memory in chapter four illustrates the complexities of the way we understand ourselves through our lived experiences. Participants’ reflections upon their early childhood and adolescences often informed how they understood their adult sexualities. Within the context of their memories of early childhood and primary schooling, participants’ preferences for play figured heavily in the telling of identity narratives. The way in which play acts to reinforce normative gender identities is well documented (Davies, 1989, Davies, 2003, Hammersley, 2001, Kehily, 2001, Paechter, 2007, Renold, 2005, Skelton, 2001). In the case of this research, the recognition of a younger self that traversed the boundaries of appropriately gendered play was understood, by some participants, to be a marker of their adult sexual identities.
Within this paradigm, the notion of shame was also brought to bear as illustrated by one participant found herself ostracised by her peers because of her desire to play traditionally masculine games. Shame was a theme that haunted the thesis and was presented here mechanism, something, following the work of Munt (1998), which one ‘is made to be’. However Munt also posits the notion that shame can be transformative and this notion was taken up by this research through its illustration of the way in which participants (re)figured their identities at different moments within both their private and professional worlds.

Chapter four also engaged with participants’ current experiences as educators within English schools. Several vital findings were apparent here. Because this research is located temporally after the repeal of Section 28, I felt it was vital to make enquiries into participants’ perceptions of the effect of the repeal. I wish to state again here that this data is not meant to be representative, rather to offer a snapshot. It was then posited that the repeal of Section 28 was, like the Clause it dismantled, symbolic. Because the content of sex and relationship education is not prescribed, the repeal of Section 28 has not necessarily opened up a discussion on sexual diversity within schools. Participants experiences demonstrated that ‘hierarchies of prejudice’ exist within schools, hierarchies within which LGB issues occupy a lowly position. Within schools under discussion here, a reactive approach to homophobia was present meaning that LGB issues were often only dealt with within the context of bullying meaning that LGB issues were placed within a paradigm of injury and otherness.

However the notion of LGB identities being positioned as ‘other’ through anti-bullying strategies was challenged by participants’ observations that there were pupils at their schools who identified as LGB and with their perceptions that such pupils had few problems because of their sexualities. Because I did not interview such young people, this notion can only be presented in terms of participants’ perceptions. It is, however, worth flagging this apparent juxtaposition as an area for further study.

Additionally, chapter four revealed that there was an urban/rural split in participants’ experiences of being LGB and working as teachers. This was perhaps surprising given that much of the British education system is centralised, therefore carrying the expectation that there will be some form of coherence and consistency regardless of
location. Therefore participant’s differing experiences within rural and urban contexts was striking. There were several implications here. Firstly, although we have a national curriculum in place for most subjects, the lack of a formalised curriculum for teaching Sex and Relationship Education impacts upon teachers’ abilities to raise gender and sexuality issues within the classroom. Participants living and working in an urban context generally felt better supported and more visible within their workplaces. It is arguable that this is because of the visibility of LGBT communities within most major urban centres within the UK coupled with schools’ attempts to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. This diversity was not present within the communities of the schools within which participants in rural areas worked and therefore was not reflected within these schools’ diversity training or within staff interactions with pupils. The issue of an urban/rural divide in the provision of diversity education demands further investigation.

Finally chapter four contributed to an ongoing discussion about young people’s use of the word ‘gay’ and its deployment as a playground pejorative. Here it was argued that although ‘gay’ may not always intend to be or have the effect of being injurious, it nevertheless (re)produces the notion that ‘gay’ is lacking, abnormal and therefore ‘other’. It was argued here that a normative subject, whose ‘normality’ can be read through bodily inscriptions, is (re)produced through playground pejoratives and that the labels attached to abnormality are changeable. The limited longitudinal scope of this research showed that between first and second interview, participants observed a decline in the use of ‘gay’ and the rise of another identity marker deployed pejoratively; Jew. Further research might explore this trend further.

Chapter five offered a departure from educational spaces as the site for analysis. This was important because one of the mains aims of the thesis was to illustrate the complexities that characterise our existences as private and professional beings. This chapter demonstrated that informal learning processes are at play within the construction, understanding and performance of a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity and that this, following Phelan’s work, entailed a process of becoming. The idea here is that embodying a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity is a process that is developed over time and achieved through the recognition and adoption of social, cultural and aesthetic signifiers. As a result the chapter offered an analysis of participants’ coming
out stories and argued that, rather than being individual speech acts, coming out is a complex and ongoing process. The sexual self was understood here to be something that can be transitionary and, at different moments during their lives, participants understood their sexuality in different ways. It is here that queer theory’s project of deconstructing identity was furthered through my engagement with the intersections between nationality, race, class, age and so on that characterised participants as subjects as well as the challenges that LGB people’s understandings of their gender and sexual identities pose to the notion that sexuality is a stable and coherent facet of identity. The transformative nature of shame was again raised within this chapter and was illuminated as participants moved from feeling forced to live ‘double lives’ to being able to embrace their sexualities. This furthered work in the field as well as offering new insights into the coming out process as well as by demonstrating the way in which informal learning processes impacted upon participants’ professional lives. This was illustrated by the perceived lack of space in schools within which participants were able to discuss their sexual identities and by the perceived fundamental differences felt by some participants between themselves and their heterosexual colleagues.

Chapter six saw the thesis return to school as the site of analysis and engaged explicitly with participants’ experiences as teachers and argued that their experiences indicated that there was an apparent lack of space within educational institutions within which to bring LGB identities to the fore. This was reflected in participants’ experiences of teacher training where diversity issues in general were exposed as being either missing or delivered in a tokenistic way. What was noteworthy about this point is that this was felt by participants who had recently completed teacher training, by those who had completed teacher training some time ago as well as by two participants who delivered teacher training.

This chapter also offered new insights into LGB teachers’ abilities to come out (or not) at work. Three groups were identified here; those who were not out at work and therefore had lives that were demarcated along private and professional lines; those who were out to staff and those who were out to both staff and pupils. Coming out within the social arena of school was likened to participants’ most significant comings out, usually to a family member or close friend, and that were explored in chapter
five. Participants who did not feel able to come out at all at work felt less part of the school community because of the way in which heteronormative discursive practices dominated their workplaces ergo preventing them from feeling able to disclose their sexuality to colleagues or pupils. Participants who were able to be open about their sexuality at work articulated greater job satisfaction and smoother interconnections between their private and professional selves.

Chapter six also offered new insights into the debate around the recruitment of male teachers and the notion that it is a particular kind of male that is encouraged to enter teaching at the early years or primary level. It is widely understood that men are encouraged to enter teaching at this level in order to provide discipline to ‘unruly boys’ who are usually positioned as lacking strong male role models. Therefore, it is hegemonic heterosexual masculinity that is desired by schools. However, two male participants in this research demonstrated their ability, through being open about their sexual identities, to present the children they teach with alternative forms of maleness. The largely positive ways in which this alternative maleness was received by colleagues and pupils alike acts as a challenge to much research in this area which positions gay masculinities as being suspect within the primary arena. This is an issue for further research.

This thesis aimed to address a gap in the literature concerning schooling and sexuality by explicitly focusing upon the experiences and identities of lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers. Much research in the field focuses upon children and young people and the way in which they experience normative discursive practices around gender and sexuality. By focusing upon children and young people, research into sexuality and schooling inadvertently posits the notion that adults within the institution of education operate within a unified, coherent and stratified subjectivity that doesn’t exhibit cracks. Through its engagement with the trajectories of participants’ lives from memories of schooling through to current understandings of the sexed and gendered self, it has demonstrated that categories of sexual identity remain important to those that inhabit them. Additionally, this research exposes that, although we may all inhabit ‘homeselves’ and ‘workselves’ that do not necessarily intersect comfortably, for LGB teachers the difficulty of negotiating these two selves can become impossible and seemingly unsurpassable. By researching the experiences of adults within
education I have been able to access a group of people whose reflections, articulations and understandings of themselves and of the institution of school, have offered new insights and furthered existing debates into the way in which sexual diversity is framed within schools as well as into the continuing (re)production of heteronormative discursive practices.

In order to redress this balance, thus ensuring that pupils and staff whose identities are different to those which dominate a school community do not continue to feel isolated, schools must ensure that LGB issues are addressed with understanding, knowledge and care. Many participants felt that when LGB issues are addressed within their schools it is often within a reactive paradigm, i.e. because of direct and explicit homophobia. Additionally participants illustrated the extent to which LGB identities are often framed as being ‘out there’, as not belonging to school communities and this was illustrated by schools either bringing people in to talk about LGB issues or by sending pupils out of schools to see plays etcetera that deal with LGB issues. Therefore, for many participants, their LGB identity did not belong within their workplace and therefore the private/professional split was apparent within their experiences. Identity therefore needs to be understood in all its complexity within social institutions such as education in order for us to fulfil our potential as questioning, learning and knowledgeable beings.

Though there have been extensive legal changes over the past thirteen years within the UK, the impact of these macro changes has yet to filter down to the micro level within the experiences of my participants. LGB identities therefore continue to be marginalised and misunderstood within schools and are often only brought to the fore by individuals rather than by whole school imperatives. This means that in many cases although legal change has occurred, social change has yet to catch up and that LGB issues and identities remain an invisible presence within our schools.

There have been attempts to address this, such as the ‘No Outsider’s’ project, which aimed to see beyond the discourse of tolerance that is present within schools in the UK by developing strategies with primary teachers that challenge the heteronormative processes that dominate our schools through action research (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). However, as DePalma and Atkinson state, the extent to which such imperatives
are taken up nationally and even locally is debatable. This research showed too the covert (and overt) resistance that can overshadow attempts to change the ethos of a school or community.

When concluding their research, DePalma and Atkinson (ibid.) state the following,

The status quo, where the ever-present threat of bullying and exclusion on the basis of perceived sexuality and non-gender normative behaviours results in silences and invisibility, is unacceptable.

I wish to applaud this statement. The status quo is unacceptable and, by focusing on teacher’s experiences, this research demonstrates that this status quo affects adults working within education as much as it does children and young people studying within it. It is time that LGB issues stopped being the preserve of LGB staff or their supporters, time that this social justice became visible within the curriculums of our schools.

In terms of making recommendations as a result of my findings I would like to state the following: because participants’ experiences are shaped by and dependent upon a multitude of social, political and cultural forces that do not necessarily but may intersect, my ability to make policy recommendations are limited and so perhaps it is better to state that rather than making recommendations, there are several points that policy makers in this area should consider. They should consider that there is a fissure between the experiences of LGB teachers working within urban and rural areas. This contains LGB identities to the city and ignores those in other geographical locations. They should also consider making lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues part of a real social justice agenda, one which abandons the ‘tick box’ mentality characterises much of the current guidelines in this area. This work should begin when teachers are training and continue, through INSET, into their professional lives. This would contribute to the creation of schools as a safe space for everyone, staff and pupil alike, regardless of their identities.

Schools clearly have a great deal of work to do in order to provide environments that cater for and affirm the diversity that is often present within them either visibly or
invisibly. However this work is also integral to a consideration of many other social institutions and schools cannot be seen as existing in isolation from the institutions of, for example, the family, religion and the state. Although the UK has seen much reform in terms of legal imperatives concerning same sex relationships, the way in which these imperatives have been taken up, can be transposed upon and are played out within people’s day to day lives do not necessarily indicate macro and micro cohesion, and, as one participant stated, laws cannot ‘change what’s in people’s hearts’. Although education is a key social institution and impacts upon peoples lives in many ways, there remain many challenges to face before LGB identities are acknowledged, understood and are able to be performed within education in any meaningful way.
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Appendix A

Participant request letter

My name is Emily Gray and I am a PhD student at Lancaster University. I’m undertaking research exploring the experiences of LGBT teachers working within the British education system. Research in this sphere is crucial if we are to understand the ways in which LGBT lives are lived and negotiated in schools. I am looking for participants for the project who are currently working as teachers or have recently left teaching in the UK and who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgendered. Participants will be interviewed twice; each interview should take no longer than an hour. This project is likely to yield important policy and practice implications, so please share your experiences with me and contribute to this important project. All interview data will be anonymised.

If you are willing to take part in my research or would like more information, please-mail me: gray.em@gmail.com. Alternatively you can write to me c/o my department at Lancaster:
Emily Gray
Department of Educational Research
County South College
Lancaster University
Lancaster
LA1 4YD
Appendix B

First Interview Schedule

Introduce self and research – state that all data will be anonymised and that any information given may be used for the purposes of this research and ‘spin off’ projects (e.g. journal articles). State that participant is free to decline answering any questions they are not comfortable with.

Ask for permission to be recorded.

Section 1: Introduction

Name

How long have you been teaching?

How old were you when you started teacher training?

Why did you want to become a teacher?

What sector of education do you currently work in (public, primary, secondary etc)?

How long have you worked at your current school?

What are the demographic characteristics of the pupils at your school?

What is your level of responsibility?

Age

Section 2: Experiences of Schooling

Where did you grow up? – Probe what the area was like socially and politically - attitudes

What are your most vivid memories of your own schooling? – Probe friends, what/who they liked about it.

Can you remember thinking about your own gender/sexual identity?

Do you define your sexuality? – Probe point at which began to think about sexuality in this way – what prompted this?
Do you define your gender? – Probe point at which began to think about gender in this way – what prompted this?

When and to whom did you first come out (if out)? – Probe reaction; did this act to affirm sense of self? In what ways?

Did you experience any negativity at school because of your gender/sexual identity? – probe form this took, direct or indirect.

Section 3: Homophobia & sexism

Does the school in which you work include homophobia and sexism in its anti-bullying strategy?

Are words like ‘girl’ and ‘gay’ are used within your school? – Probe context

When are words like this used and by whom?

How do you feel when you hear words like this being used?

How do you react when you hear words like this being used in the classroom/playground/staffroom?

Have homophobic or sexist pejoratives ever been levelled at you either at work or in your life outside of school? – Probe context

How did this make you feel?

Do you think that policy developments like the repeal of Section 28, the Civil Partnership Act, the Gender Recognition Act has had an effect upon the way in which gender and sexualities are understood in school? - Probe

Does the school in which you work have anti-bullying strategies to combat racism/sexism/homophobia that includes both pupils and staff? – Probe level to which this is enacted.

Are you a member of a teaching union?

(If yes) does your union have an LGBT support group? – Probe if they use this if so and why.

Do you socialise with other LGBT teachers? – Probe how they know them

Do you feel that your sexuality/gender has affected any of the choices you have made during your career? – Probe how and to what extent

Do you feel that you have encountered any negativity because of your gender/sexual identity?

Section 4: Coming Out
Are you out to other staff members at work?

(If so) how and when did you come out and to whom? – Probe why this was important

Are you out to pupils?

(If so) how and when did you first come out?

(If not) is not coming out a conscious decision?

Do you attend school social events?

Would you take a partner to a school social event?

Do you socialise at all with people from school?

Who do you socialise with most regularly? – Probe reasons

**Section 5: Reflections**

Do you think there has been a change in the way LGBT people are perceived within the education system since you were at school?

(If so) what are the changes?

Was anti – homophobia/sexism covered in your teacher training?

How was this subject approached?

Do you think there has been a change in the way LGBT people are perceived within the education system since you completed your teacher training? – Probe trans

(If changes perceived) what do you feel has made these changes come about?

Is there a name you would like me to refer to you as when writing up?

**Second Interview Schedule**

**Key themes in research:** Gender and sexuality as social relationships, performance, violence (safety & fear), queer gender identities, queer, bisexuality, gender/sexual binary, LGB subjectivity, fixed/fluid sexual orientation, memory, sexual experiences, bullying, heteronormativity, teaching as a performance, evolution of words, homophobia, media, gender/sex binary, social trends, Foucault, discourse of normality, racism, anti-bullying strategies, sexism, group membership, policy, official equality discourse, visibility, increased social recognition (pos & neg aspects), impact
of science upon LGB subjectivity, role models, media representation, queer iconography.

**Section 1: Opening questions**

What made you want to take part in this research?

If you were asked to describe who you are what would you say?
- Probe importance, how parts of identity intersect.
- Pay attention to gender – is being a man/woman important – similarly race/nationality and class.

Is being an LGBT-identified person working within the education system an important issue for you?
- Probe why/not.
- Probe important issues.

Are identity politics important issues for our schools?
- Probe extent to which they are addressed.

Do the subject(s) you teach allow you to tackle identity issues in the classroom?

Do you think that homophobia is an important issue for our schools?
- Probe extent to which it is dealt with generally and specifically.

Do you think that LGBT pride is an important issue for our schools?

Should teacher education engage with LGBT issues? How could this be approached?

Do you feel that having a lesbian, gay or bisexual image is important?
- Probe why/not?

Do you think that it is important to define your sexuality? Why/not?

**Section 2: Heteronormativity**

Heteronormativity is a term used by social theorists in order to discuss the way in which gender and sexuality are separated into hierarchically organised categories. This means that man has been set up as the opposite and superior of woman, and heterosexual as the opposite and superior of homosexual. Heteronormativity dominates social institutions such as law, science and education and is kept in place by a regime of sexism and homophobia. It is in this way that lesbian and gay lives are marginalised. Theorists have become interested more recently with bisexual and transgender lives. They can be seen as providing a counter argument to the idea that gender and sexuality are fixed and/or natural human characteristics and provide a way to challenge or ‘queer’ our understandings of these categories. Bisexual and transgender identities are able to be read in this way because law, science and education often talk about gender and sexuality as fixed, immovable and pre-ordained human characteristics that fit into either oppositional group (male/female and gay/straight). Political rhetoric also often follows this script. The idea that people can live in a different gender to the one they were born into, or refuse to identify as either
male or female, or that people can have intimate sexual relationships with men and women and reject the gay or straight classification, demands that we re-think the way we understand gender and sexuality, what they mean and what they are.

What do you think about using the idea of heteronormativity as a way to understand human gender and sexual identities?

Is this a useful way to make sense of LGBT lives?

Could talking about gender and sexuality in terms of heteronormativity be a useful way to challenge sexism and homophobia in schools?
- Probe how this might be approached.

Do you think that the idea of ‘being normal’ is one that is present within the school in which you work?
- Probe how kids understand
- Probe how they perceive this.

Does the word ‘gay’ as used by pupils act to reinforce the idea that homosexuality is not normal?

Do you think there is a link between gender and sexuality?

Is homophobia, the fear of and actual violence part of the LGB experience? Why/not?
- Probe idea of ‘luck’.

Do masculinity and femininity have to belong to men and women respectively?
- Probe what it means to challenge this.

What do you think makes people lesbian, gay or bisexual?
- Probe what makes them think that.

Section 3: Personal questions

(Fiona)
You talked before about assuming that you were straight when you were younger, how would you describe the process of developing a gay identity from that point?
- Probe difficulties.

Your sexuality was something that you talked about very much in terms of emotional issues and you stated that though you feel able to have physical relationships with men, the emotional aspect of your relationships with women was the thing that characterised them. I wondered if you might talk a little more about that?

You stated that you felt ‘lucky’ not to have experienced more overt form of homophobia in your life, is homophobia something that you feel characterises the LGB experience?

In the first interview you stated that you often felt unwelcome in gay venues because of the way you dress, why do you feel that this is the case?
- Probe femininity, sexual experiences with men and the way in which this is perceived on the scene

Section 4: Concluding questions
Are role models important for young people? Why/not?

Is coming out a necessary part of the LGB experience? Why/not?

Where, in your opinion, are the biggest areas of inequality for LGB people?
- Probe in education and generally.
- Probe how this could be addressed.

Has being a teacher impacted upon the way in which you understand how gender and sexual identities are perceived of, understood and performed?
- Probe how they are understood.

Is it important to you to belong to an LGBT community?
- Probe why/not.
- Probe who this group excludes.

Do you think that aligning oneself with an identity category such as lesbian, gay or bisexual lends weight to the idea that gender and sexuality are fixed categories of identity?

Do the media accurately represent lesbian, gay and bisexual lifestyles?
- Probe pos/neg stereotypes.
- Probe role models.

Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?
### Appendix C: Summary table of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Sector of Education</th>
<th>Length of service</th>
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