SEXUALITY, SILENCE AND TEACHERS: 
NEGOTIATING HETERONORMATIVITY IN SCHOOL 
CULTURES.

Madelaine Imber

B.A. (Monash), Grad.Dip.Ed. (Melb)

March 2009

Submitted in (partial) fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne.
**Contents:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents Page</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration of Originality</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body of Thesis</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1 – Plain Language Statement</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2 – Consent form</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3 – Interview questions</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices 4-9 – Transcripts</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Declaration of Originality

This thesis does not contain material which has been accepted for any other degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text.

Signature: ..............................................  Date:......................

Madelaine Imber
Acknowledgements

This thesis has been made so much easier with the support of my family and friends, who have put up with my absences and (occasional) complaints. Thank you to Associate Professor Ray Misson for his guidance and thoughtful feedback. For advice with structure and for reminding me that this project was worthwhile, thank you to Joan Nestle. A big thanks to proofreaders: Kate Dullard, Sophie Harle, Peter Horsfield and David Imber. And a huge thank you to Sam Horsfield for your advice, wisdom and endless patience.
Abstract

This paper explores lesbian and gay teachers’ understandings of how their sexuality interacts with the Victorian secondary state school culture in which they work. With the aim of investigating the relationship between heteronormative schooling cultures and queer teachers, six same-sex attracted teachers were interviewed. The interviews were analysed, using discourse analysis, in order to examine teachers’ understanding of their school culture and its intersection with their sexual identity. The analysis and discussion showed a divide between teachers who chose to be out to students and those who did not. Most of the participants felt that their level of openness about their sexuality linked closely to their personality and that this dictated how much of their identity they wished to be on display at school. This often had a flow-on effect to how they managed other issues, such as addressing homophobia in their school. Participants were concerned about being labeled a pedophile or being seen as trying to recruit students to homosexuality and were therefore conscious of not looking or acting too stereotypically gay. This suggests that lesbian and gay teachers expend more energy and are more conscious of their demeanor than straight teachers in the heteronormative school cultures in which they operate. Despite there being legal protection for lesbian and gay teachers in government schools, on the ground there is still tension within schools about opening a dialogue with students about sexuality.
Introduction

Background

In 1978, the Melbourne Gay Teachers and Students Group published a pamphlet entitled Young, Gay, and Proud! The group consisted mainly of lesbian and gay teachers in Victoria who saw the clear need for more information “…written as if the reader is gay” (Melbourne Gay Teachers and Students Group., 1978, p.ii). Members of the group distributed the pamphlet covertly yet within months of it being released the Victorian government banned it (Willett, 2000, p.133). Despite this, over 10,000 copies were sold throughout Australia and the pamphlet was used as the basis for a North American edition of the same name (Alyson, 1980). The pamphlet was groundbreaking for not only its content, but for its authors – lesbian and gay teachers. They understood the gaps in education for young lesbian and gay students and sought to fill them, even though they could not put their names to the pamphlet for fear of losing their jobs.

Thirty years on, there are still gaps and silences in education for young queer students, who grow up isolated, “lonely and stressed” (Hillier and Harrison, 2004, p.80).

Only recently was it acknowledged by Bronwyn Pike, the Victorian Education Minister, that “[e]very child has the right to a high quality education regardless of their sexual orientation” (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008, p.2). However, their counterparts on the other side of the desk – lesbian and gay teachers -
have had less research undertaken into their needs. As adults, teachers have more autonomy and often have a deeper understanding of their own sexuality. However, there is still a disjunct between their internal world and the world in which they work. As queer young people face homophobia, higher suicide rates and more social problems, often within the confines of their school, their teachers are also fighting their own battles; battles that are not just individual ones, but that are often fought in the public domain.

There are constant debates in the media about lesbians and gay men. Same-sex marriage in different forms is regularly debated and used as a wedge issue by politicians. Adoption, surrogacy and IVF are also part of the proliferation of issues in the mainstream media that impact on lesbians and gay men. Political parties and the queer community debate amongst themselves and in the public domain on these issues.

Before a lesbian or gay teacher even arrives at school, they are reminded that they are in a world not of their design. In the media, their lives are on display and in contest. They see gay marriage being banned in the USA. They see an assisted reproductive technology bill on a knife-edge in Victorian parliament. They read articles by different interest groups about how they should not be allowed to marry. They hear from a gay man, one of the highest judges in the country, that the compromise on same-sex

\[1\] Throughout this study I will at times use the terms queer, lesbian and gay and same-sex attracted somewhat interchangeably. This is for the sake of brevity. I understand that there are differences in these identities. There is a more detailed discussion of personal identification in the methodology.
marriage equates marriage between people of the same sex to applying for a dog licence. They hear from the Pope that homosexuals undermine the very fabric of society. And there is still, despite its spuriousness, an undertone conflating the ‘homosexual’ and the ‘paedophile’ as one and the same, inspiring moral panic and homophobia when it comes to lesbians and gays caring for children (The New York Times, 2008, Rood, 2008, Gregory, 2008, AFP, 2008)

What is crucial about these debates is that they frequently centre on notions of family (often with a focus on children) and the access to reproductive rights and custody of young people by lesbians and gay men. And this maelstrom of debate all occurs before a teacher even enters a classroom.

In the midst of this debate over the rights of the gay citizen is the lesbian and gay teacher, who on a daily basis engages with the challenges of working within their particular school’s culture. Within these institutions that centre on children, the queer teacher has to find ways to function as a fully integrated professional entity. Different teachers take different approaches to this challenge. Some teachers come out to students, feel compelled to be honest and are willing to accept possible consequences. Others believe there is nothing to be said – private lives are private and not to be shared. Others teeter, unsure where the boundaries lie, hesitant whether they should, or can, come out.

*Rationale for the study*
Current teaching ideology is that teachers need to connect with their students on a personal level (Dixon, 2004) and their identity is thus a critical part of how they teach. This ideology is an intense part of teacher training and the formulation of teacher identity (Dixon, 2004). Given the boundaries (both announced and covert) around sexuality in schools, the issues grappled with by teachers who identify outside heterosexuality will have an impact on their practice, be it positive or negative. Lesbian and gay teachers have to reinterpret their practice, omitting or modifying their interactions with students. This is likely to have an impact on teaching style, content, results and even the ability of lesbian and gay teachers to provide support to students in a welfare context. Ultimately, it could impact their ability to do their job to the best of their ability.

The focus of this study is to identify issues faced by lesbian and gay teachers in government secondary schools, primarily looking at their interactions with colleagues and students and what impact sexual identity has on these dynamics. Schools are heteronormative institutions with protocols around the visibility of non-normative sexuality that are in conflict with lesbian and gay identity, and thus lesbian and gay teachers. (Russell, 2005, Yep, 2005). My key aim in this study is to investigate how teachers construct their professional persona within their schools. The focus is not on discrimination in an active form, but rather on the subtleties of silencing. My interest lies in the contradiction between what is expected of teachers in general and then the protean way lesbian and gay teacher negotiate these contradictions. This raises the questions:
1: How do teachers negotiate the teaching cultures of their schools?

2: To what extent and in what ways are lesbian and gay teachers silenced by the teaching cultures in which they operate?

As a lesbian teacher, I will naturally be invested in this study and come to it with preconceived notions. I am operating with the understanding that “reality is subjective and constructed on the basis of issues of power” (Lather, 2006, p.38). Therefore my own place in the study is acknowledged and anticipated. I cannot be objective and do not wish to produce an artificial objective analysis. I do, however, engage with my subjects and work towards gathering reflective and participatory data (Snape and Spence, 2003).

My own experience in state schools has been somewhat alienating and part of the motivation for this study is to find out if this was an isolated experience, or if others felt the same way. Before I became a teacher, I co-founded and facilitated a peer resource group that was invited into schools and universities to discuss homophobia and heterosexism with young people. ‘Outspoken’ went in classrooms as queer youth reflecting on our experiences and highlighting the consequences of homophobia. The nature of the work was to be out, proud and fighting homophobia. To step into my own classroom, to work in a system not of my design and to be beholden to unspoken rules was a shock – possibly greater than I was expecting. This shift informs my current teaching and my own research. There is no clear path through these contradictions, but this research is a product of venturing out to other teachers to at least ask the question. I
doubt it is possible for the answer to be conclusive or straightforward, but the question still needs to be posed.

Key understandings

Bearing these notions in mind, the key question for this study interrogates how teachers negotiate the teaching cultures of their schools. In order to narrow the notion of ‘teaching culture,’ only state school teachers have been interviewed. While all schools are different, this ensures that their governing body is consistent – unlike Independent or Catholic schools, which answer to their own ethics and educational priorities.

There are nationwide benchmarks that all schools adhere to, but the ways and means with which each school addresses them differs. Each state school will have its own unique priorities, student and staff demographic and leadership team and style but will be working within a similar central policy framework. Despite these differences, queer teachers are always operating in a heteronormative environment. As described above, by necessity teachers have to make choices about how they are going to negotiate their identity in this world.

The key assumption here is that heteronormativity is a silencing mechanism. Since heteronormativity is a covert, implicit reinforcement of the status quo, it is silencing by its very nature. The acknowledgement of heterosexual landmarks (marriage, anniversaries etc) excludes those who cannot marry. Heteronormative coding underpins the teaching profession – teachers known as Miss or Mrs., assumptions that all students are
straight (boys and girls separated on camps, for fear of active heterosexuality). These imply a dominant sexuality, with no room for variance; the ‘other’ is silenced by omission.

One also needs to remember that silence is not a passive dynamic. It is not an absence of speech, thought or ideology, but an actively constructed force (Misson, 1999) created to uphold dominant ideologies. Heteronormativity also gives society (and the microcosm of this, schools) the imprimatur to present a reality that is not real to many people (Grace, 2006).

The forces of heteronormativity and silence are so powerful, that they must have an impact upon the subject. The six participants in this study expose their perceptions of their schools and what they see are the limitations or restrictions placed upon them. These are voices that are not often heard and they have learnt to negotiate their workplace on a daily basis, despite the maelstrom of debate around their identity. These stories are the ones that I want to explore and unpack – there are so many unspoken discourses that impact on teachers’ lives and abilities. The key aim of this study is to see how much this silence affects teachers and what they themselves have to say about teaching cultures.

Limitations

The limitations of this study lie predominantly in its size. Interviewing such a small number of teachers means this study will not connect to all lesbian and gay teachers’ experiences. However, I do hope the data yielded will provide an outline of some of the issues facing lesbian and gay teachers
and the implications that has on practice. Given the participants provide their own reflections it is an ultimately subjective view of their environment and teaching practice.

The other significant limitation is the lack of racial and geographical diversity amongst the participants. All are of Anglo-Saxon or European ethnicity, and four of the six teach in the Northern suburbs, a traditionally less affluent region of Melbourne. Two of the participants were not born in Australia (one English, one American), but have been here for at least eight years and the bulk (if not all) of their teaching experience is based in Australian schools. Only one participant is male. This could reflect my data collection methods, but it also reflects that women dominate the teaching profession (Australian Education Union, 2008).

**Significance**

This study is designed to explore the current place and practice of lesbian and gay teachers in schools, the implications of which are far reaching. Whilst many people are aware that homophobia is now classified as discrimination, heterosexism is a daily, accepted occurrence. Therefore, the gaps into which lesbian and gay teachers fall need to be opened up and explored. Teachers of all sexualities need to understand the meta-narratives that occur within schools both superficially and fundamentally, especially when it impacts on teacher practice and wellbeing whilst at school. Policy makers and parents also ought to be aware of these narratives and how other teachers, students and the wider educational community need to understand them.
Most recent writing in the field of sexuality is based on poststructuralist conceptions of sexuality and identity construction. These concepts begin with Foucault, and most other theorists build on his work. Following our review of these theoretical understandings of sexuality comes the more pragmatic field of education research. There are cross over sections of research in the field of education and research, and this nexus provides a starting point for this study.

Major theoretical perspectives

Foucault provides an important grounding to the field of sexuality studies with his text *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (1978). This text offers a framework for understanding the construction and ‘pathologising’ of sexuality. Foucault focused on notions of binary opposites; a perspective that places emphasis on the dominance of one by ensuring the other is seen as deviant. He saw binary sexuality (homo/hetero) as primarily constructed in the Victorian era - one that is now noted for its sexually repressive values. This repression, coupled with capitalism’s “intensive work imperative” (Foucault, 1978, p.6) pushed sexuality into the realm of the controlled and restricted.

In Foucault’s framework, the medico-scientific dominated culture of the Victorian era was actually a breeding ground for opening previously covert conversations on and around sexuality. Repression, contrary to common thought, created a necessity for confession and self-analysis regarding
one’s sexuality; it created almost an obsession with discussing an individual’s sexuality. This confessionalism grew from the Church’s established methods into the psychoanalytical framework, which established a conduit for discussing and engaging with sexual practice at a systemic level. Thus, sexuality became based around “…the slow surfacing of confidential statements” (Foucault, 1978, p.63) in a supposedly sexually repressive time. This repressive climate created an intense focus on sexuality, especially those desires that were seen as deviant - homosexuality being one.

A Foucaultian framework does have its restrictions; whilst he mentions schools as institutions, his focus is the field of sexuality, rather than education. Therefore, for the sake of this thesis Foucault’s understandings need to be adapted to unpack modern teaching discourse. The key issue for teachers appears to be coming out to students, the ‘confession’ discussed above.

Applying Foucaultian theory, the notion of ‘coming out’ is a confession of sexuality to the powers that be – society. By confessing sexuality to students (as a teacher, in this case) the teacher is giving a vast amount of power to the students and altering the dynamic of the classroom and institution. In this literal interpretation the revelation of non-normative sexuality is shown to expose a teacher – they are no longer on equal footing with their heterosexual colleagues and they have less authority in relation to their students.
Khayatt (1992)(who will be discussed in greater depth further on) addresses the construction of power in the classroom, and its capriciousness. This authority can be undermined by any perceived weakness or difference, for example, being part of a minority, be it due to race, ability, gender or sexuality. Any “forfeiting of ‘authority’” (Khayatt, 1992, p.206) jeopardises teachers’ ability to teach. Consequently, this undermining of authority reinforces Foucault’s idea of confessionalism as a method of control and its intense focus on sexuality as a repressed and controlled entity. For teachers who wish to ‘confess’ their sexuality, it is important to consider whether their intention is one of alleviating guilt and confessing, or rather, whether it is a step in a process of equality - purely a hurdle to overcome.

It would seem clear that in any given circumstance one is either in the closet, or out and open about their sexuality. Yet Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refutes this notion of binary opposites in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). According to her analysis, the only reason there is a closet is because people have come out. Instead of seeing heterosexuality and homosexuality as opposite forces, she sees them as parallels – one could not exist without the other, therefore they are not opposites they are co-dependent labels. As such, the key idea is that one is privileged above the other. Heterosexuality is the preferred, dominant and socially acceptable option. This echoes Foucault’s assertions on binary sexuality.

The clearest example of how this impacts upon teachers is one Sedgwick raises - the privileged status of marriage. A woman going by the title Mrs. and appropriating her husband’s surname emphasises her “subordination
as a woman and her privilege as a presumptive heterosexual" (Sedgwick, 1990, p.32). This privilege is apparent in schools, literally from day one. The first thing a teacher is expected to do is introduce her or himself to students. In a profession dominated by women (Australian Education Union, 2008, p.3) the title of ‘Mrs.’ is tantamount to a declaration of a woman’s sexuality. A normalised and possibly unintentional declaration, it is one that is, by implication, supported by the school culture and society at large. Such self-naming is not discussed or questioned, at lease not to the same degree, as the questioning of teachers who do not identify as heterosexual. Sedgwick acknowledges the normative power associated with heterosexuality, but she still sees being ‘in’ or ‘out’ as a component of an outmoded discourse centring around artificial oppositions. However, the binary would not exist in mainstream society if it were not supported.

We can go back to Foucault to see how borders around sexuality are policed, which gives some insight into notions of coming out or staying in the closet. As mentioned in The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1 (1978) society is covertly obsessed with sex, but controls it and frames it as a taboo. Despite, or perhaps because of this control, those with a non-normative sexuality must find a way around this control. Before one can understand their methods of subversion or subterfuge, there needs to be an understanding of the society itself.

Foucault’s other key work, Discipline and Punish (1995), analyses the birth of the prison and deconstructs concepts of surveillance and control. This dovetails well with sexuality, an entity that society continually endeavours to control. Whilst Discipline and Punish focuses on many aspects of the
title, the aspect that is relevant to this study is panopticism. The panopticon is a tower at the centre of a prison, initially constructed by Jeremy Bentham. It allows all prisoners to be observed whilst being unable to see who is observing them. Thus being visible is, in itself “a trap” (Foucault, 1995). This is a very clever, practical way for a prison to operate, but its societal application is far more pervasive and equally effective. Foucault applies the essence of the panopticon (that one may be constantly observed) to many institutions – schools, hospitals and so on. In this post-modern age of technology, this theory takes on an even more pervasive dimension. The panopticon is “a perfect eye that nothing would escape” (Foucault, 1995, p.173) and subjects intuitively modify their behaviour, aware of the eye upon them.

Foucault specifically cited schools as a focal point for surveillance, which is obviously relevant for this study (Foucault, 1995, p.173). According to Foucault, students are technically the ones being observed by teachers to ensure no misbehaviour or deviance from the rules of the institution. The reality is that both teacher and student are being watched and judged – by each other. The beauty of the panopticon is that the observer is always being observed – either from above (those higher up) or below (students, with links to external power – parents, principals and so on).

Foucault’s salient writings on sexuality and surveillance provide a genealogy for subsequent understandings of constructions of sexuality. The gaps in his research are significant – he lacks any non-Western analysis and his understanding of female sexuality is extremely limited, if indeed it exists at all. The first gap, that of location, is not of critical
importance to this study, as we are operating in a similar social milieu, which is informed by the one in which Foucault wrote. The issue of his lack of gender analysis is telling, as he does not delve into the nuances of gender power and surveillance. However, other theorists took up his key ideas and expanded their reach.

Following Foucault is Judith Butler, who explores the consequence for the individual who feels they are being watched. She posits that being observed puts people in a constant state of presenting what they believe is required, or as she calls it, “performativity” (Salih, 2002, p.62). Butler argues that there is a continual performativity by the subject of the position that has been allocated. For example, from the point of gender being conferred at birth and thus ‘hailed’ as such; “it’s a girl”. Girls, in this case, fall into their position and perform it. This performance is not conscious, but rather one that is so deeply ingrained many would consider it an innate expression of self and thus the correct position (Salih, 2002).

This hailing can be ‘troubled’, especially when a subject position is used to weaken the individual. For example ‘it’s a lesbian’ has a far more contentious and risky consequence than ‘it’s a girl’. However, both position the subject in specific ways, presumably to the benefit of the hailer (Salih, 2002, p.77). Some subject positions are socially supported (all the trappings of ‘girl-ness’) while others are stigmatised and the hailing can be used as a form of aggression, discrimination or domination.

The concept of performativity is apt for this thesis. The interview questions aim to understand how lesbian and gay teachers feel about their
school and its environment. Do they perform consciously or unconsciously? Are they hailed at school as lesbian or gay, and is this empowering or disempowering? Butler asserts that all people perform, but those outside gender and sexuality norms need to do this more (Salih, 2002, p.96). How does this impact on teachers?

When performing a gender, the hegemonic form of masculinity or femininity closely relates to the performance of heterosexuality or homosexuality. So in order to present sexuality correctly, a teacher needs to perform gender in the socially expected manner as well. Thus, any gender-deviant teacher is threatening their expected gender and sexuality, as too is the teacher that is not heterosexual.

*Heteronormativity & silence*

Heteronormativity and its ‘love-child’, heterosexism, underpin a significant amount of postmodern research around sexuality. Heteronormativity is the term used to expose how “institutionalized heterosexuality is consciously and unconsciously accepted and reproduced” in modern society (Yep, 2005, p.395). Therefore, homosexuality and queer identities challenge this dominant mindset. Conventional gender roles and institutions, such as marriage, support heteronormativity by creating a standard by which those on the outside are judged. The normalisation of heterosexuality ensures that homosexuality is othered, or marginalised.

Heterosexism is the enacting of discrimination against those who do not fall within the defined parameters of heterosexually accepted behaviour. Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered individuals and other
‘deviants’ are the casualties of heterosexism. This takes the form of active discrimination, or passive exclusion (for example, lack of legal rights) (Petrovic, 2005). In either form, those who fall outside the standard are punished. This acts as a silencing mechanism because it creates a standard that excludes those who are not heterosexual. Anyone who does not identify as heterosexual must then make concessions in order to function successfully in society.

This is particularly pertinent for teachers, who operate in institutions that endorse and even teach these norms. This understanding of heteronormativity and silence is the premise that this thesis rests on. The following sections explore how heteronormativity is a pervasive agent within schools and the impact of this on both students and teachers.

**Sexuality and education**

Ferfolja (2007a) provides us with a bridge between broad conceptions of sexuality and education by exploring society’s obsession with emphasising the ‘sex’ in sexuality. This is a consequence of heteronormativity – by breaking from the given path, any teacher who attempts to interrupt heterosexism or homophobia is seen as suspect (Ferfolja, 2007a). This compounds the silence, as heterosexual teachers may not wish to take on something so contentious, and lesbian and gay teachers may not wish to threaten their livelihoods. This silencing is intensely problematic for teachers, but lesbian and gay students also suffer the consequences.
Students

As teachers engage in the ‘performativity’ required for their profession, students are sorting out the same issues on the other side of the desk. Significant research has been undertaken to understand the needs of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) youth with a large amount undertaken in schools. This research provides a context for this study.

Herr and Hillier both look at the consequences of this stigma and disadvantage. It is now commonly accepted that approximately 10% of the population are same-sex attracted (Herr, 1997) and the extent to which these young people face greater hardship than their heterosexual counterparts is becoming clearer (Herr, 1997, Hillier and Harrison, 2004). Lynne Hillier has completed studies on same-sex attracted young people in Australia (1998, 2004) that explore their disaffection and isolation.

Students who are ‘out’ or those who challenge gender norms struggle significantly with abuse and rejection, whereas students who are closeted feel silenced and as if they are living dishonestly (Hillier and Harrison, 2004). Under neither circumstance do the young people feel safe or understood. As schools act as a primary place of interaction and social connection for young people, this marginalisation can drive them out of school and away from formal support. These studies show that the school system has failed these students (Herr, 1997, Hillier, 1998, Hillier and Harrison, 2004) and that students dropped out of school due to homophobia and heterosexism. Hillier also found that despite any difference of class, ethnicity and social standing, lesbian and gay young
people are only seen through the stigma of their difference and are at a significant disadvantage to their peers, through lack of formal education. For however long these lesbian and gay young people stay at school, it is a place of restriction and peer fear. Given that queer youth face these hurdles at school, it is more than likely that queer teachers have parallel experiences in the same institutions.

Even before we look at lesbian and gay teachers’ experiences, there needs to be an understanding of what all teachers are doing to support – or not support - queer youth. All teachers clearly have a role to play, not just LGBT teachers. Teachers that uphold or fail to question heteronormative values and do not stop homophobic discourses in schools, is an issue that is still prevalent and has a negative impact, especially on LGBT students. While the language of racism is now generally restricted, the language of heterosexism and homophobia is not (Herr, 1997). What can be gained from looking at queer students is that, even though they have less power in the school environment, those that have the power are not actually helping them. This systemic failure must also impact upon the lesbian and gay teachers who teach these disenfranchised young people.

**Teachers**

Compared to the research undertaken into lesbian and gay youth, the research into lesbian and gay teachers has been sporadic. The logical place to start is to see the research in an historical context. Jackie Blount undertook the most detailed analysis of the history of same-sex attracted
teachers in *Fit to teach: same sex desire, gender and work in the twenty first century* (2004). Despite there being no evidence to support it, the conflation between queer teachers and paedophilia has “long haunted school workers desiring persons of the same sex and has proven at times to be a politically powerful weapon” (Blount, 2004, p.2-3). In the 1970’s in the USA, there was a strong movement to stop any laws being passed that might protect lesbian and gay teachers. Anita Bryant famously campaigned against protection for lesbian and gay teachers in Miami and then for Proposition 6 in California, mandating the dismissal of queer teachers. She said that gay teachers “could sexually molest children” (Bryant in Blount, 2004, p.132), confirming that the “paedophilia bugaboo” (Blount, 2004, p.2) still troubles teachers and still has no basis.

*Fit to teach* shows the restrictions placed on sexuality by schools, and how methods may have changed, but the outcome has stayed comparable. While some teachers have now come out of the closet, many have lost their jobs or have had to leave difficult teaching environments (Epstein and Johnson, 1998).

Blount’s text focuses on North American experiences over the twentieth century. It gives a history of teachers’ struggles over that time and explores the changes that have occurred. While Australia shares much of its cultural capital with the USA, the experiences here are different. Due to different social, historical and religious contexts, Blount’s text cannot encapsulate Australian teachers’ experiences as it can North Americans’. 
To gain a full insight into Australian teachers, we need to turn to Australian texts.

*Australian perspective*

Rasmussen, an Australian theorist of sexuality in education, provides a bridge between the established sexuality theorists mentioned in the first half of this review and the education field. She posits that emphasis on the ‘in the closet / out of the closet’ binary encourages a sense of victimisation around LGBT teachers and students and could indeed work against the ‘cause’ by moving outside the possibility of assimilation (2005). She takes the position that “from a pedagogical perspective, coming out is not inherently good or bad” (Rasmussen, 2005, p.154), but making firm, declarative statements can be counterproductive in a world of shifting identities. Her concern is that coming out is “unproblematically valorized” (Rasmussen, 2004, p.149), which creates a highly didactic position.

While agreeing that “coming out” is often romanticised, Rasmussen almost negates the consistent of discrimination and silence that many lesbians and gay men encounter. Of course identities shift, but that shift does not operate in a vacuum – there is always a dominant sexuality, a socially sanctioned one. While Sedgwick, Foucault and Rasmussen all point to the fluidity of sexuality, there still needs to be an understanding of how teachers on the ground feel in a heteronormative world. There are more specialised perspectives on the matter that are specifically located in the education field, rather than the broader arena of sexuality.
Jennings and MacGillivray (Jennings and MacGillivary, 2007) take up this argument and emphasise that coming out in a heteronormative society has consequences greater than just buying into an outdated binary. They also raise the point that the more marginalisation one might face (not male, not white, etc) escalates the adverse outcomes of coming out. These details change the theoretical notions of coming out into concrete problems that lesbian and gay teachers negotiate daily. There have been vehicles for many of them to publish these stories, which form an aspect of the literature on non-normative sexuality and teachers.

This large body of writing on lesbian and gay teachers is not academic. This oeuvre of stories, told by classroom teachers generally teaching in North America is highly personal and obviously subjective. The dominant publications dedicated to these stories are the two editions of One teacher in ten (1994, 2005), complied by Kevin Jennings. Jennings is the founder of the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and these anthologies represent some of the key principles of the organisation. While the 1994 anthology is darker and the stories are generally about teachers negative experiences, the 2005 anthology is primarily concerned with the ‘coming out narrative’. All of the narratives within the anthology address the issues and experiences involved in coming out as a teacher. They also, with few exceptions, highlight the positives of coming out and the freedom these teachers associate with this.

GLSEN’s clear support for coming out leads to a bias in the stories chosen for the anthology and indeed those who even knew of its existence. As this is the most powerful lobby group for same-sex attracted teachers it is
legitimate to assume that this is actually one of the most important issues for their members. However, it needs to be noted that coming out is not their sole intention; it is a by-product of their personal philosophies. For many, it is the conduit to making their lives easier and less fraught with hiding and secrecy. Most of these teachers feel that it is their final hurdle to being a well-rounded and competent teacher. A teacher in One teacher in ten described it as “the most empowering moment of my teaching career” (Wheaton, 2005, p.48). Whilst by no means an academic study, it provides a sample of lesbian and gay teachers’ stories. Given that these do not follow an academic structure, there is a need to contextualise the writing on gay and lesbian issues before we can look at lesbian and gay teachers in this study.

Key studies

Five key studies that look at lesbian and gay teachers are Lesbian teachers: An invisible presence (Khayatt, 1992) “Forbidden to Care” (Kissen, 1996), Negotiating the self (Evans, 2002), “Teacher negotiations of sexual subjectivities” (Ferfolja, 2007b) and Unmasking identities, (Jackson, 2007).

Khayatt’s work with lesbian teachers in Canada is relevant to this study, but is the oldest of these important texts. Although published in 1992, all her data was collected before 1986 (Khayatt, 1992, p.205). Despite the age of the study, there are some key ideas in here that hold true. Her 18 participants all fear being outing – most were not out to staff or students. While being out to staff is less of an issue for the participants in this study,
being out to students is still pertinent. The strand of Khayatt’s text that is most relevant is that of legal protection for teachers. Whilst there was none when she was interviewing, the lesbian teachers she spoke to felt it was important, but was not going to change significantly their ability to be out. Even if there were laws to protect them, the laws could not protect them from being isolated and uncomfortable at work. The potential for their “job to become a daily struggle rather than a fulfilling profession” (Khayatt, 1992, p.210) was greater than anything a law could protect them from.

Kissen’s focus in “Forbidden to Care” is less about teachers’ daily lives. Rather, she narrows in on their ability to provide pastoral care to students. Her contention is that lesbian and gay teachers find this aspect of their profession difficult because they are trapped by being forced to hide their sexuality. This, in turn, prevents them from being able to be role models to students and places limits on the care and connection a teacher can have with a student. Teachers in this study assert that this limits their openness and comfort with both staff and students. There is an element of this that could be self-perpetuating. Due to living in a heteronormative society teachers may already hide parts of themselves outside school and their inhibitions at school may be an unnecessary extension of this. However, given the hesitations, prohibitions, suspicions and restrictions around sexuality and young people, it is unlikely their fear is unfounded.

Kissen’s premise rotates on the idea that to care for students, one needs to feel connected and hiding a significant aspect of your identity prevents this. Despite this being an older piece of research (1996), its concerns are
still valid. Teachers are still operating in a heteronormative landscape and there are strong sanctions in place around children and sexuality. As mentioned above, those sanctions tend to categorise lesbian and gay teachers with paedophiles. Kissen’s research illustrates the impact of this unfair generalisation on the ground and the hesitation and anxiety lesbian and gay teachers feel daily.

A more recent study on lesbian and gay teaching is Negotiating the Self, by Kate Evans. It is the closest text to this research in terms of subject matter and methodology. Evans interviews four pre-service teachers (three lesbians, one gay man) and uses critical discourse analysis to analyse the data. Her research methodology is exemplary as an in depth analysis with a small sample size. She provides a detailed analysis of teachers negotiating the clashing of the personal and private with the public and institutional that occurs in teaching. A key term she uses is ‘bifurcation’ of identities, referring to the way in which teachers split themselves emotionally in order to deal with the conflict of non-normative sexuality and teaching. She discusses the emotional work that this requires for teachers, which links to Kissen’s research showing the emotional toll teaching can take on queer teachers. The critical difference between this study and Evans’ is her focus on pre-service teachers, rather than current teachers. The focus is squarely on the teachers’ concerns and understandings about teaching, rather than looking at the culture within which they will operate.

Two more recent studies go further into the issues lesbian and gay teachers face. The first is Janna Jackson’s work, which operates in a
similar vein to Evans’. Whilst it is more recent than Evans’, it is less complex. *Unmasking identities* (2007) interviews lesbian and gay identified teachers in North America. The participants varied in age, gender and level of openness about their sexuality. Her findings reflect much of Evans’ in terms of separation between the teacher’s true self and their work self. Her participants touch on the impact that being in the closet has on their teaching and they are clearly more comfortable and confident after they have come out to students. They describe their teaching as more “student centred” and themselves as more “integrated” (Jackson, 2007, p.173) once they come out. This study gives a snapshot of North American teachers, but a more nuanced approach comes with an Australian perspective from Ferfolja.

Ferfolja, in her study of lesbian identified high school teachers in New South Wales uncovers the most culturally specific data. Her main focus is the myriad ways lesbian teachers ‘pass’ as heterosexual. ‘Passing’ (as straight) and ‘covering’ (hiding, but not overtly lying about one’s sexuality) are the key strategies for lesbian teachers in working in the heterosexist environment of a school. Having children, being divorced or being young enough not to be married all help lesbian teachers cover or pass (Ferfolja, 2007b).

Ferfolja conceptualises coming out as influenced by how a lesbian or gay teacher is ‘read’ by others – it’s not simply an individual choice, it is influenced by the setting. For example, some divorced women may like the idea that their sexuality is not in question, while others rail against the assumption of heterosexuality implicit in having been married. Therefore if
(in this example), a lesbian teacher wishes to come out, her previous positioning plays a part in her coming out. Breaking out of the mould of being a ‘mother’ or ‘a single (divorced) heterosexual’ takes an articulated effort and energy. If a teacher physically fits a stereotype of non-normative sexuality, coming out may take on a different weight. Neither one is better or easier, but there is a distinct difference. The focus on teachers’ perspectives and how they perceive themselves is central to Ferfolja’s work.

Evans, Jackson and Ferfolja act as models for this study, which will hopefully allow a synthesis of different aspect of these three studies. My methods of analysis will be closer to Evans’, using discourse analysis, but the focus is more allied with Jackson’s and Ferfolja’s. However, school culture and the role that it plays in shaping a teacher’s experience is not at the forefront in these studies.

These studies do not address the impact of school cultures on professional practice, and Gregory and Greenbaum provide an insight into teachers’ negotiations of this. Gregory (2004) analyses levels of silence in a school he taught at early in his career, where different teachers with different agendas were trying to keep any queer issues out of the staffroom and classroom. There was an implicit concern that he and other gay male teachers were getting “too physically close to male students” (Gregory, 2004, p.55). Instead of this issue being addressed, he was directed to avoid anything relating to homosexuality on the curriculum. These discourses are what place lesbian and gay teachers in the proverbial “glass closet” (Lipkin in Gregory, 2004, p.55) – everyone knows,
but no one is allowed to discuss it. Gregory suggests that this silence is in conflict with his integrity and ability to be enthused about teaching. This experience was a shaming one for him, especially reflecting on it after coming out at school and feeling like a better, more constructive teacher. His issues connect the consequences of silence in teaching and the consequences of being an openly gay teacher.

Greenbaum’s article “Bringing literature out of the classroom closet” (1995) relates to teaching practice being impacted upon by school culture, but is not specific about silence. In the context of teaching texts with a lesbian or gay sub-plot or context, she felt the scrutiny of her sexuality most keenly and found it necessary to protect herself, to a degree, in how she taught. Conversely, a heterosexual teacher would not have these restrictions because they have ‘nothing to hide’.

These smaller case studies show the daily impact of teachers having to protect themselves. According to almost all of the teachers in Jennings, (Jennings, 2005) these feelings are unfounded and when one comes out, things work out. Perhaps this is happening more often, but it is still a vexed question as to whether the teaching culture inhibits teachers, or their own inhibitions play a central role.
Methodology

Given the limited range of perspectives from lesbian and gay teachers, it seemed apt to hear directly from teachers themselves. Interviews are a key form of qualitative data collection in the social sciences, especially for groups who may have been discriminated against. As lesbians and gay men fit this target group, it is pertinent to interview them to gain an in-depth understanding of the world in which they operate (Snape and Spence, 2003).

A qualitative approach was the appropriate one for a study of this size and for the detailed data being sought. A relatively small sample size of six participants allowed for a range of perspectives, but also a manageable and useful array of data. Given the subjective nature of the responses and the sample size, interviews were the most appropriate method of data collection. Six subjects were interviewed for an hour each and these narrative case studies form the backbone of this thesis.

Part of collecting and analysing this data rests on the understanding that ‘truth’ is a subjective quantity (Lather, 2006). Oppression and silencing are subjective realities and the subjects in this study will have differing views on where the boundaries lie. Some will feel silenced in one context, where another does not. The methodology needs to reflect these individual truths so one can analyse, understand and extrapolate from the data.
Participant selection

The focus in this study is on secondary teachers currently teaching in government schools. The policy in government schools around sexuality is hazy and teachers and schools appear to tackle it in their own ways. Theoretically, teachers should not discuss their private life with students and they need to maintain “objectivity in their relationships with students” (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2008). Given many teachers are known as ‘Mrs.’ (which indicates their heterosexual relationship status) private boundaries are difficult to determine and heterosexuality is not seen as private; it is the standard. Also, whilst an out teacher may not lose her/his job, the school and community could make a situation untenable for the teacher.

In order to restrict the possible variables in the study I have only interviewed secondary school teachers in the government system. Catholic and Independent schools vary in their governing policies and they also have religious affiliations that would complicate matters. Again, for the sake of consistency, I have excluded primary teachers, as they face different limitations and restrictions due to the age of their students. I did not wish to do a disservice to Catholic, Independent or primary school teachers by having a thinly spread analysis. I also chose to interview only teachers who identified as lesbian or gay, rather than do a disservice to bisexual, transgender or intersex teachers through poor coverage of their experiences. Some teachers did identify as queer, but were in same-sex relationships at the time of the study.
Given the small size of the study, a representative sample is not possible. This made the method of participant selection a little problematic. The options were to advertise for participants (an apparently random method) or to use my own contacts. Rather than attempt to create some kind of illusion of impartiality, I decided to gather participants through my own networks and allow it to snowball.

This method was selected for several reasons. Firstly, I needed very few participants and advertising would possibly garner too many responses, thus requiring some method of selection within volunteers. Secondly, had I attempted to recruit through other means, such as advertising in the gay press, the participants would still have had to self select in some manner. They would have to identify as lesbian or gay, be willing to discuss this within the sphere of their profession and have some connection to the community, such as reading a gay and lesbian publication where the advertisement was housed. Since many people in the community do not read or have access to these publications, this would have inevitably skewed the sample to a degree.

In fact I had more than enough participants, simply by telling my networks what I was looking for. I had many responses from teachers who did not fit the criteria (private school teachers, primary school teachers etc.) as well as more than six respondents who fitted the requirement of the study. I chose the first six who responded and fitted the criteria. As it turned out, I knew only one participant and friends or colleagues of mine knew three others, but I had never met them before. The final two emailed me upon
hearing of the study, but we did not trace back any common connection and I do not know whom we know in common.

**Ethics**

Prior to data collection, the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Melbourne approved this study. This process ensured that every aspect of this study complies with the University’s policies and broader ethics requirements. As part of this, each participant received a plain language statement (Appendix 1) about the research and signed a consent form (Appendix 2). Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter and to protect the participants’ anonymity they have been allocated pseudonyms and specific reference to their schools or identifying markers have been removed. This is in line with the ethics guidelines. The interviews were conducted in locations that suited the participants and ensured their comfort and anonymity. The interviews took about an hour and the basic interview questions are included as Appendix 3. Most contact with participants (excluding the interviews, which were conducted face-to-face) was by email and all data was stored in accordance with University guidelines.

**Case studies and interviews**

Narrative case studies are used commonly within social sciences as case studies “advocate pluralism, relativism and subjectivity” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p.2). In seeking participants’ experiences, the interviews took on an element of the traditional narrative – they told their own stories about their experiences in schools as teachers with non-normative sexualities.
However, the data is not purely narrative driven. The participants also spoke of their attitudes towards teaching and sexuality. These interviews were deconstructed and explored through discourse analysis.

The interviews create these case studies – a focused, in-depth analysis of one person’s experience and opinions. In a post-modern age, it is near impossible (if not methodologically unfashionable) to define a single, objective truth. Therefore case studies, interviews and other forms of non-quantitative ‘statistically sound’ data are as valid as the traditional, objective scientific data. However, rather than presenting a series of case studies, the data has been analysed through their key themes in order to draw out commonalities between different queer teachers’ experiences.

A feminist approach is appropriate for this study, as they focus on the voices of marginalized members of the community. A feminist perspective generally sees interviews as the best way to draw out subjective notions of truth and experience. This study aims to draw out teachers’ own ideas and values as they see the world (Kitzinger, 2006). This is imperative because the research question focuses on individual measures of what inhibits or facilitates good practice. The emphasis is not what other teachers, principals, schools, or even students feel about their teaching culture. It is about the teacher’s own notions of reality, ability and practice. Therefore, most of the interview questions were open ended, aimed at creating a conversation rather than closed, more specific responses.
Data

The participants varied in the years of experience in teaching. Five of the six participants are women – given the profession is dominated by women and my networks are mainly women, this was not surprising. Four out of the six worked in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. Again, this skew could be due to my contacts.

Below is a table of the participants, in order to show the breadth of teaching experience within the sample, and to create a reference for the later data analysis. I have listed them in order of years teaching experience, which incidentally reflected status in schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Position in school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bette</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Leading teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jodie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a broad term covering a range of methods aimed at deconstructing text not through what is said so much as through how it is said. It focuses on the meta-narrative of what is being said – the nuances within the words spoken, within the repeated phrases - not just the
meanings of the words themselves. At its core, discourse analysis recognises the variability of ‘truth’ and acknowledges that truth is location and context dependent (Stubbs, 1983). This is important for my study because participants are recounting deeply personal experiences and evaluating them against their own terms of reference. Some forms of discourse analysis rely heavily on grammatical deconstruction – taking apart speech word-by-word, syllable by syllable. I take a broader and less linguistically based approach.

Discourse analysis is a logical method of analysis within a deconstructivist paradigm. Key postmodern and poststructuralist theorists have their own methods of discourse analysis, all varying to greater or lesser degrees. Foucaultian discourse analysis, as it is informally known (informally because Foucault did not lay down a specific framework as such) is the one that I will employ. It is a method influenced by Foucault's ideas (Fairclough, 1992) and is the most apt and fitting method of discourse analysis for this study.

In order to understand discourse analysis, first we need to contextualise and define discourse. In Foucaultian terms, nothing meaningful exists outside discourse. Discourse is a “system of representation” (Hall, 2001, p.72) that helps us define and understand knowledge and structures. Traditionally discourse was a linguistic concept. Foucault brought the concept into the post-modern realm by translating it into a method of understanding the construction of knowledge in language.
One of Foucault’s discursive focal points was sexuality. He posited that the subject ‘homosexual’ was produced within “moral, legal, medical and psychiatric discourses” (Hall, 2001, p.74). This is extremely apt for an analysis interrogating sexuality (specifically non-normative sexuality) construction within schools and the impact this has on teachers.

Given its semantic nature, the best way to understand discourse analysis is to put it into practice. I have constructed two possible teacher statements that one teacher could use in the course of an interview.

**Statement 1:** I am a member of the lesbian community.

**Statement 2:** I am considered part of the teaching community.

Ostensibly, these statements taken together tell that we are speaking to a lesbian teacher. However, discourse analysis would draw out two key concepts.

The discourses of ‘lesbianism’ and of ‘teacher’ are separated. Obviously these statements are context dependant, but the subject does not enmesh the two, preferring to phrase them separately. Clearly, discourses conflict all the time, but it is any jarring that is the focus of discourse analysis. The interest lies in what happens when this conflict occurs and possible implications that this might have.

The other key discourse element in these statements is their phrasing. This teacher says, “I am a member of the lesbian community,” placing herself clearly and presently in a community and a lifestyle. However, she also says “I am considered part of the teaching community”, that is to say
she is externally considered that way, but she does not necessarily have ownership of that identity. She is placed there through perceptions of others, but she herself hedges around the idea with qualifications, and is not as strong in her statement as she is in the first statement. These statements show where she places herself and how she conceptualises negotiating the different frameworks within which she operates. These are the nuances and subtleties that discourse analysis draws out and explores.

Clearly these statements are of my own creation and prove a specific point. However, this gives an idea about how and why discourse analysis is used. The analysis draws out recurring discourses from the body of data and uses this to understand some of the meta-narrative that take place in interviews.
Analysis & Discussion

The six participants come to the study with a diversity of experience and different levels of responsibility within their schools. I have replicated the table of participants here (given in the methodology) for ease of reference. I have added the subject area the teacher works within, as it is relevant to some responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Position in school</th>
<th>Subject area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bette</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Media/ESL/English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Leading teacher</td>
<td>Media/English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Geography/History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Art/Visual design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>English/SOSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jodie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>English/Philosophy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The bulk of the analysis will be structured around themes that emerged, but it is helpful to establish each participant initially through a short introductory sketch.

*Bette*

As a young lesbian, Bette was intensely politically active in her early years of teaching, mainly within the lesbian and gay community. This activism spilled over into her classroom; she came out to her students in the mid 1980’s and felt there were no negative repercussions. As a principal (in
the Northern suburbs of Melbourne) her relationship to school culture is
unique and she interrogates who, what and how a school’s culture is
shaped. Her concerns have shifted over the course of her career and as a
principal her focus is broader than the sexuality activism of her early years
in the education system. Her experiences and perspective on teaching
now differ (as a principal) from the other participants, as she has less
student contact. This will become apparent in sections of the analysis.

Lucy

Lucy, a North American, also came from an activist background with an
artistic bent, which she explored for ten years between completing
university in the USA and undertaking her teaching qualification in
Australia. She now teaches in the Eastern suburbs and holds positions of
responsibility within her school. A brave teacher who likes pushing the
boundaries of curriculum, Lucy cannot articulate why she is not out to her
students and her inability to understand why she is not acutely concerns
her. She is dedicated to her students and subject matter she teaches (film
studies) and imbues her course with a sense of social justice and fair
treatment for everyone.

Brian

In search of more academic teaching opportunities, Brian chose a school
in Melbourne’s inner city when he began teaching after emigrating from
England. He firmly believes his private life is private and thus does not
discuss any aspect of his outside life with his students. To Brian, the
school’s focus on academic achievement is a highlight for him. He
volunteered to be interviewed because he wanted to ensure that a positive perspective from a gay man in teaching was presented.

_Dawn_

A confident and open teacher in Melbourne’s North, Dawn got to know the students at the school for a couple of years before she came out to them. Her relaxed demeanour and subject area (art) allow her to build strong relationships with students in the medium-sized school in which she teaches. Having other lesbians on staff has made her feel more relaxed, even though they are not out to students. Dawn could not imagine teaching and not being honest about her sexuality and she feels her openness enhances her teaching.

_Susie_

Susie has been teaching in the North West for her whole teaching career and has concerns about the level of support the administration would provide if she did come out to students. However, she does not feel a burning desire to do this as she is still honing her craft as a teacher and feels that coming out would act as some kind of distraction for the students. She does however feel an inequality of expectation whereby heterosexual teachers are able to talk about their private lives whilst she cannot.

_Jodie_

Jodie consciously chose to start her teaching profession in a State school, as she knew that legally she was protected from repercussions when she
came out to students. She did this early in her first year of teaching and was not concerned about it being an issue, as she cannot imagine working somewhere she had to hide parts of herself from students. She spent her first two years of teaching in Melbourne’s North West, coincidentally at the same school as Susie. They were unaware of each other’s participation in the study. Jodie now teaches in the inner city part time and studies psychology part time. Most of her comments in this study refer to her first school.

**Outline**

While this is a broad-brush view of the participants and their main concerns, it is more pragmatic to view the data as a whole and interrogate the recurring images, ideas and thoughts. The themes fall roughly into the following framework:

Internal:

a) Personal

b) Role as teacher

External:

a) Students

b) Leadership/ Colleagues

Whilst this is not the only possible breakdown for this data, it is one that allows a focus on the teacher and then draws out, looking at their
perceptions of the people and systems around them. There are many sections that overlap and themes that cross over.

**Internal**

By starting from the internal world of the teacher, we can gain an insight into how they construct their identity within their school culture. The main focus is the nexus between the teaching identity and their sexuality.

**Personal**

- “I think that’s me”

One thing that all participants, aside from Susie, made explicit reference to was their sexuality being inextricably linked to their personality. They felt they could not separate their motivations, teaching styles and personal demeanour from their sexuality. Consistent with being open about her sexuality to students, Dawn finds it “so hard to separate sexuality and who you are”. Jodie, who is also out at school does not see her sexuality “as something that defines me as an individual, [rather] I see it as part of who I am.” Bette echoes this, when asked if being gay had changed her career path, she replied, “It’s a very hard thing ‘cause it’s who I am.”

These three teachers are all out to staff and students – Bette to a lesser degree with students due to her current role as principal with less regular student contact. Their comments suggest a strong integration between their public and private personas and one that has overcome the problematic nature of coming out to students.
Lucy prioritises her ‘difference’ above her sexuality by saying “[e]ven before I was a lesbian I was different.” In this way, she rationalises not coming out to students by insisting that her ‘difference’ is multifaceted and reducing it down to her sexuality would be an oversimplification. She expands: “my lesbian identity, I mean that’s the least of my worries in some senses in terms of, of really what’s problematic in a school for me.” For her, personality and sexuality are a package – which is part of her generalised ‘difference’. The interesting phrase “least of my worries” places sexuality into the realm of the problematic, alongside other seemingly worrisome characteristics, which she does not expand upon. She phrased it as a deficit, as something to overcome.

Brian, also not out, has a different perspective from that of Lucy. He felt that a boundary around personal matters is part of his persona. That boundary exists not because of his sexuality but because “I think that’s me.” Further on in the interview, he expands on this “I kind of compartmentalise it really, I guess. That’s my workspace and then I’ve got my home time as well.” The implication here is that his personality can be understood through this compartmentalisation.

These five participants all feel their sexuality is integral to their identity, yet they present it quite differently. According to Kate Evans’ Negotiating the Self (2002), her student teacher participants struggle having to split their sexuality from their teaching identity. This “bifurcation” exhausts teachers and is counterintuitive to them being able to teach properly (Evans, 2002). Jackson’s participant, Carolyn, concurs and discusses the energy taken to stay in the closet and the constant protean action that accompanies every
moment: “‘This is what I’m doing but how are they perceiving what I’m doing?’” (Jackson, 2007, p.22). These participants do not discuss this bifurcation, rather they basically feel their personality and sexuality integrate. If they are out, this is part of their personality, if they are not, this too in integral to who they are.

- “I knew a State school couldn’t fire me for being queer”

Given that participants felt integrated within themselves, their environment could easily be an extension of their own understanding of the world. That is to say, they would work somewhere that reflected them. One of the few to comment on school choice is Brian – who feels his sexuality has a limited bearing on his profession. He says: “[s]exuality doesn’t come into it at all, um, consciously”. His qualification in the phrase “consciously” is telling, in that he can see that there is a possible other level of consideration – one that he does not overtly address.

The reason this study focuses on government secondary school teaching cultures is because there is a degree of consistency in the framework and directives for government schools. They are covered by the same anti-discrimination law (2000), which Catholic and Independent schools are not obliged to comply with. For Brian, this did not overtly come into play. Conversely, Jodie chose a state school because she knew that they “couldn’t fire me for being queer”. Even when specifically asked about school choice, none of the other participants said that they overtly made a choice based on the system’s legal standing on sexuality. Bette made choices based on the fact that “being comfortable in your school is about
being comfortable with its discipline policy, with its parent body”. Susie and Lucy did not mention why they chose the schools they were in.

Initially, Dawn did not articulate her restrictions as based on sexuality, but as geographical; she was educated and undertook her teaching rounds in the Western suburbs and did not wish to teach there. Her concerns stem from what she sees as the “redneck, homophobic undercurrent there”. Clearly this is a choice based on how her sexuality would be received in the Western suburbs, however she can also generalise it to encompass her perspective on homophobia and sexuality. While there is an overlap between ‘redneck’ and ‘homophobic’ that was not her only concern. Her choice was based on the perception of the culture of the schools in a certain area. In this case, the policy of the state system matters less than the perceived impact of the cultural stratification of the area.

For lesbian and gay teachers, this lack of concern about school choice could be related to their expectation that they will work in a heteronormative environment. Lesbian and gay teachers internal worlds have been constructed by a society, as seen in the introduction, which does not embrace their difference. Their school is part of this society, and these participants appear to understand that their schools will reflect that. Only Jodie and Dawn selected schools on the basis of the possible protection they could give from a heterosexist world; Jodie by choosing a state school and Dawn by choosing a school in a particular geographically area.
Role

The concerns mentioned above are about the choices that these teachers make as they negotiate their profession. Beyond those interior questions, the participants had to contemplate how they constructed the teacher identity that they enacted at school. Their role of teacher and its efficacy depends on how they present that persona.

- **Looking & acting ‘gay’**

Susie encapsulates the essence of what many participants felt when she comments “I guess it’s easy for me as well because I look like the typical straight person most of the time.” Jodie and Lucy also both emphasised their ability to ‘pass’ (Ferfolja, 2007b, p.575) as straight, be it intentionally or not. As Susie highlights, it is “easy” for her because she can be seen as straight and so being closeted is not a great challenge.

Lucy expands, “They see me as, ‘cause I’m girly, as very heterosexual” and thus unknowingly elaborates on Susie’s idea; it must be her lack of ‘stereotypical’ lesbian traits that allow her to blend in, unintentionally though it may be. She reinforces this “I mean, I used to look a lot more dykey”. Now she feels she does not, therefore her students do not make assumptions about her sexuality. She does not comment on how students responded to her when she looked ‘dykey’. These women agree with Ferfolja (2007b) as they fall into the category of ‘passing’ as straight. They don’t actively ‘cover’ and fictionalise their personal life, but they do “not actively challenge[e]” (Ferfolja, 2007b, p.571) assumptions of heterosexuality.
Their ability to pass is a relatively unique dilemma for members of a marginal group. Unlike other minorities, lesbians and gay men have the ability to hide their difference. What is not focused upon in this study are teachers who are not ethnically European. Ananke (1994, in Rasmussen, 2004) specifically does not come out for fear of losing the black community she needed as a black single mother in a racist society. Her racial identity was clearly visible yet her lesbian identity was not, thus her racial marginalisation was also more apparent. As all participants in this study were ethnically European and able bodied, their main concern was coming out. The five of the six participants who are women may have to take into account their lack of privilege in a patriarchal society. They do not, however, raise this in their interviews.

Jodie provides a contrary perspective to Lucy; being out means she does not have to worry about any cues she may give off about her sexuality as she has chosen not to hide. However, she feels “I kind of represent something that’s possibly a bit different to what they might think a lesbian is because I’m femme.” This doubles the impact of her coming out – the emphasis is not just on being out and honest; she is also able to counter what she perceives as incorrect stereotypes of lesbians in society.

Without going into an in depth analysis of butch/femme, Jodie’s self-identification as femme offers a solid insight into her political and social understanding of sexuality. As Jodie also refers to herself as “queer” in the interview (an identity not without political weight), it is apparent that her sexuality is politicised and being open about it is important to her. This is relevant to her perceptions of her own gender and sexuality presentation
as it informs her reasons for coming out. She could have, like Susie or Lucy, ‘passed’, allowing her the scope to avoid questions about her sexuality. She did not choose this route. She has chosen specifically to undo her unwitting cover and use it as a lesson—that anyone, no matter how they look, can be a queer.

A more ‘obvious lesbian’, Dawn, with “really spiky hair…[and] a piercing” felt “what more can go wrong?” Her students already could see she was different, thus she felt coming out would have a limited impact. She is clearly voicing other’s opinions on spiky hair, piercings and sexuality but the derogatory reaction she consistently faces makes her conceptualise it as a negative. Her physical appearance acted as the vanguard of her coming out of the closet—the visual aspect of difference was already there, needing only to be followed by her actually disclosing her sexuality.

The different standpoint on this comes from Brian. Definitively not out to students, he states, “I do catch myself being very camp sometimes. And I think ‘Oh God, what are you doing?’” The thought of sending signals about his sexuality makes him extremely uncomfortable, as “I don’t actually want them to immediately label me as being gay”. Camp, by definition “challenge[s] the notion of gender performance” (Whitney, 2005, p.117) and the breaking of gender roles threatens the heteronormative world of gender binaries, thus exposing non-normative sexuality. Brian’s immediate aversion to being seen as gay links into the notion of “teacher as feminized” (Evans, 2002, p.42), wherein a man in teaching is automatically suspect. On a more individual level, his concern about being seen as camp is contrary to his earlier insistence that his personality and
sexuality are one and the same. This highlights the work involved in him behaving differently in his two, very separate worlds. It also emphasises the disjunct between the two worlds, which cannot coexist together harmoniously.

Lucy and Susie are not dykey/butch (the lesbian version of camp) therefore not readable as lesbian and Brian avoids any ‘camp’ qualities in order to pass. The difference between them is Brian is avoiding certain behaviours, while Lucy and Susie are avoiding certain physical cues. In this way, Brian must be a lot more vigilant in his cover. Susie and Lucy can, for example, wear skirts and have longer hair, while Brian needs to regulate his behaviour and mannerisms on a daily basis. Both require a level of Butler’s performativity (Salih, 2002), an acting out of gender roles.

The participants are conscious of their performativity, and are accepting of it to greater or lesser degrees. Jodie is ‘innately’ femme, yet overtly challenges this, while Brian tries to curtail any ‘campness’. He is protean in his gender performance to fit his audience and what he perceives as his role.

- “…you know, that old myth, if you’re gay then you’re into kids”

This gendered self-regulation has its roots in the disproved yet dominant discourse which constructs non normative sexuality as “hypersexual, paedophilic, deviant, abnormal, sick and sexual predatory” (Ferfolja, 2007a, p.148). This myth has carried and continues to attract societal support. Statistics from the USA in 1970 show that “77% of the public felt homosexuals should not be allowed to teach” (Blount in Jackson, 2007,
The panic around this may have cooled somewhat but the intervening years have shown that change is slow. The moral panic that surrounds gay teachers still arises with frequency, a recent case being a lesbian student teacher being unable to complete her teaching rounds due to her sexual orientation (Green, 2005). In this case, only a few years ago here in Melbourne, Anne Mitchell from La Trobe University noted “…that taint of paedophilia…kind of hangs around people's misconceptions about homosexuality” (Green, 2005, p.4).

Given this history, it is not surprising that participants would be concerned about such allegations. Brian is the most sensitive of the four interviewees who raises this as an issue. He states that because “they were so paranoid in England” (where he began his career) about abuse allegations he felt the need to become particularly vigilant. He does not make a specific connection to his non-normative sexuality; he thinks all teachers need to be vigilant, not just those who are queer. As the only male in this study, his concerns could be connected to gender – male teachers are seen as more suspect than women. He does not focus on this, nor does he establish his level of caution as connected to his sexuality. However Brian has a double level of danger to face – any teacher needs to be careful, but a gay man needs to be on alert. The combination of children and sexuality, then non-normative sexuality is a potent mix, a breeding ground for moral panic and a minefield for the gay teacher.

Three others raised the notion “…you know, that old myth, if you’re gay then you’re into kids” (Dawn). In fact, Dawn and Susie both raised it in a
fashion that differed from Brian. There was not the same concern for allegations of abuse; they had a generalised concern about queer sexuality and its conflation with recruiting or paedophilia. The distinction between the two was not made. They were just keen not to “sexualise the kids” (Dawn). Susie felt teachers coming out would be “showing their sexuality in some way” which would lead to a sexualisation that is inappropriate in a school environment. There is an inequality of expectation that is touched on here, and expanded upon below – heterosexual teachers can show their sexuality in multifarious ways that are not deemed inappropriate, ways that homosexual teachers cannot.

Jodie had to “keep very clear boundaries” with one student who was questioning her sexuality which “could have become an issue had I not been careful. Not that I was in any way interested in her, but I think her attachment to me could have become a little bit, um, beyond safe, you know.” While all teachers set boundaries, Jodie is talking specifically about a student who was “questioning her sexuality,” and the danger involved in letting the student’s attachment to Jodie become “beyond safe”. What becomes pointed is in considering this she does not specify whose safety she is most concerned about – hers or the student. She goes on to say “So I think that may have, could have become an issue had I not been careful” – again the agent of concern is not clearly stated. What is clear is that the situation is unsafe for both of them and this is connected to Jodie’s non-normative sexuality.

Susie, without having an experience like Jodie’s, has similar concerns “I’d be worried about, you know if girls found out they’d think I was trying to
crack onto them and all that sort of stuff. I do fear that.” Her fear shows the predatory stereotype as inhibiting. To this end, Brian concludes “just never put yourself in a situation where you’re one on one with them”. This seems counterintuitive to ensuring students’ get the best education making them unable to confer with a teacher when and if necessary. The hampering of education for the necessity of protecting oneself from allegations is something Brian accepts as normal, indeed axiomatic.

This silencing culture echoes Foucault’s panopticon; the fear and sense of being observed ensures these teachers keep students at arms length. This concern around sexuality does not just reach parent and teacher; students are also alert to the rigorous policing around teachers and sexuality. Dawn quotes a student of hers: “‘Miss, if we ever heard that you were having an affair with a student…we would know that you would never do that’”. The student awareness shows that if they did not like you, they would have a considerable weapon with which to damage the queer teacher. The student’s statement shows a full awareness of the potential for damage and the precarious position that a teacher’s non-normative sexuality places them in.

- Teacher/welfare worker line

This boundary setting with students brings the participants into the murky waters between the role of teacher and that of pastoral care giver and nurturer. It is an undefined area left by those who set the guidelines for teachers (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2008) and questioned by the national union: “How far should teachers take this responsibility?”
(Cashen, 2008, p.24). Inside this ambiguity, the lesbian or gay teacher has also to manage the additional predatory discourse surrounding non-normative sexuality and education. The specific needs of marginalised lesbian and gay students complicate the matter even further (Hillier and Harrison, 2004). Some teachers feel connected to these students, and want to help them specifically. Others do not see it as their job – they are there to teach, not to emotionally support students. ² There is enough evidence to show that queer youth do suffer from a lack of role models and that lesbian and gay teachers are hesitant to provide that modelling, for fear of the ‘recruitment’ label (Johnson, 2005). This places not only queer students at risk, but all students. What is implicit here is that teachers cannot fulfil their role to the best of their ability because they are scared of outdated and fictional stereotypes.

Although not asked initially, the nexus between these undefined roles emerged in each interview. Teachers either took on the burden of pastoral care for lesbian and gay students, or they definitively avoided it. Bette stands out as an anomaly, as she has in other areas. As a principal, her contact with students is limited. She did not raise this issue in her current role and did not dwell on it as she recalls it from her time in the classroom.

“I think that unless that’s your job, you probably shouldn’t be doing it” is Susie’s way of expressing it. Many teachers, lesbian or not, may feel this

² The Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct covers matters such as teachers providing all students with an “opportunity to learn”, treating students with “courtesy and dignity” and maintaining “professional relationships” (Victorian Institute of Teaching 2008). It does not specify how much teachers should know about students outside the realm of their subject and vice versa.
way. Susie’s discussion helps to clarify the issue from a queer teacher’s perspective: “There’s a danger of becoming…some sort of figurehead and it’d be like having a little cult of students”. Susie here has to face the stereotype of gay recruiter, which makes many teachers avoid strong connections with students – it puts them in an awkward professional position and questions can arise from other staff and parents (Kissen, 1996). Jodie’s experience of parents was that “I think a couple of them backed off when they found out that I was queer”. This reinforces the minefield that out teachers face, especially when they have mentoring relationships with students. It is also consistent with the issues Kissen raises – in that lesbian and gay teachers have to consistently balance their relationships with students (Kissen, 1996). The drawback of this is the possibility that these students are left in the cold, with even less support than queer teachers in a heteronormative school environment.

Lucy and Brian express similar sentiments to Susie and believe that is where a welfare team is important; “I’m there to teach them, there are other people there to nurture them”. Lucy continues her sentiment with a caveat “I know that’s not a great thing… I do try to nurture them intellectually. ” She has turned the dilemma on its head by taking any pastoral care role on as an academic one, and therefore feels she is fulfilling both roles in one. It would seem this is not a conscious choice, but perhaps this is a place where lesbian and gay teachers have the potential to improve their practice. Yet many teachers in Jennings’ anthology (2005), in Jackson (2007) and Kissen (1996) refute this – the energy is lost in self-protection. Lesbian and gay teachers cannot afford to
invest that much energy into students when they need it all for themselves.

Yet again, Jodie and Dawn are in accord with one another on this matter. As the two out teachers in the study, their comments mirror each other. And they have the opposite perspective to the other three teachers. Dawn has the most to say on the matter. She actively seeks out “future queer students…You know, even if I don’t teach them, just to find out who they are and you know, just generally make them feel that I care about them.” Dawn conceptualises being a queer teacher as more than a classroom role – she takes on more of a mentoring role. She mentions a student with welfare needs “who wanted to speak to me, and me alone and wouldn’t speak to anybody else”. The assistant principal, in concert with Dawn, referred this student onto the welfare team, as she obviously needed more specialised assistance. Dawn also uses the class time while students make art to connect with them and pay attention to their emotional needs. Jodie’s mentality is similar to Dawn’s, but she is more interested in “…their [students’] well being…it’s broader than just the queer stuff”. It’s worth noting that Jodie is studying to be a psychologist, and wants to work more closely with students on that level, rather than as a classroom teacher. The core of this issue, according to these participants is about teachers being out. Jodie and Dawn feel comfortable engaging on a personal level with students as they are out. Of course, perhaps their desire to connect with students is what compels them to come out in the first place. Lucy, for example, connects on an intellectual level and “nurture” students rather than engage personally.
Jodie and Dawn actively seek the emotional engagement with students that Brian and Susie shun. It is impossible to know which came first – openness that means coming out and engaging with students or coming out opening the floodgates of connection.

Naturally this is not an issue that is exclusive to lesbian and gay teachers. Heterosexual teachers also have to be concerned about these issues, but the blurry lines around student welfare are heightened by the ambiguity of queer teachers status in schools. Although none of the participants noted any backlash, they were all aware of the potential for it. The extra effort that these teachers have to go to in order to contemplate these matters gives an insight into the extra work involved in being a lesbian or gay teacher.

**External**

The remainder of this analysis involves participants' looking outward, at the external factors that impact upon their experiences. In the professional sphere, this includes leadership, colleagues and students.

a) Students

- *This is so gay*

One of the few ideas that all participants raised without being directly asked was the use of homophobic language amongst both students and staff. This is supported by a survey of over 900 junior high and high school students in the US that found 75% have heard the phrase “that’s so gay” frequently at school (Russell, 2005, p.741). The Victorian Education
Minister in Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools, encourages teachers to stop homophobic language: “The word ‘gay’ and equivalents, when used as a term of derision and harassment, should be understood by the total school community as offensive, hurtful and unacceptable” (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008, p.4).

The phrases “that’s gay” and “you’re so gay” and the multifarious other versions of homophobic teenage jargon that exist seem to echo with abandon through the schools that participants work within. It is fair to say the vast majority of young people who use this language, at any given point, are not trying to be overtly homophobic. But these generic insults and put downs are the common cultural capital that most young people do not resist. Only Brian’s school avoids this to a large degree as it “has got a reputation for [being] accepting”. He acknowledges this is because of their rigorous anti-bullying stance, a consequence of being a select entry school – young people there “have come from backgrounds in other schools of… going through absolute hell”. They understand what it is like to be marginalised and thus tend not to subject their peers to the same conditions.

All participants admonished students for their use of homophobic epithets, except Bette. She has noted the language in the schoolyard, but feels it is a case of “misappropriation” and while kids are “conservative about homosexuality … however I don’t find homophobia going on here”. This is consistent with her general attitude of sexuality being a small part of the whole. Bette discusses her reduced lesbian activism over time, and the
more settled nature of her politics. While against homophobia, she is interested in a broader anti-bullying strategy, which makes up part of her portfolio as a principal. Bette does not, in her interview, see the same depth of problem as the Minister acknowledges in the Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools (DEECD, 2008) document. It is worth noting, however, that this document came out after the interviews took place and it may have altered Bette’s perspective. As Bette is the most experienced and senior participant by decades, it is difficult to parallel her experience of activism with anyone else’s in the study. The other, less experienced teachers find the issue of homophobic language more concerning than Bette does.

While years of experience may alter the way a teacher views homophobic language, the teacher’s own status of being out appeared to make no difference to how they address it. Jodie “calls” students on homophobic language, Lucy ensures it is “challenged and questioned” and Dawn went further than other teachers, raising homophobic language/bullying at a staff meeting and imploring all teachers to stamp out homophobic language. As she was new to the school and not holding a position of responsibility doing this took gumption, perhaps more than if someone in a position of power, such as Bette, made this statement.

Even if all lesbian and gay teachers addressed homophobia, it would still be the minority of teachers confronting homophobic language. And if it

3 Full title at the present time is Department of Education and Early Childhood Development at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/. A State government body, it does comply with national standards and receives federal funding.
were only they who did this, it would clearly identify them as lesbian or gay. This places lesbian and gay teachers under more pressure, as their ‘otherness’ is reinforced by having to face this language as a teacher as well as a lesbian or gay man.

"I think the language is a big problem. People just think, oh, don’t be so politically correct, or don’t, you know, it doesn’t matter; it’s just something people say. But, I think it does matter" (Susie). Heterosexual teachers, as noted by several participants, may not pick up that language – sometimes because they are homophobic and therefore not interested in resisting it, but more likely out of complacency and the issue’s lack of importance in their eyes. In fact Susie notes, “some teachers use homophobic language”, which would make her work even more challenging. As heterosexual teachers are clearly in the majority, the work on halting homophobia needs to be addressed by them as well. Given the amount of power they have, they can, as Susie highlights, hinder the work that lesbian and gay teachers undertake. This undermining makes the school culture more homophobic and the lesbian or gay teachers’ job significantly harder.

- “If you yourself [were] gay, you would probably be drawing attention to it and be seen as having a barrow to push”

Bette, as a leader, can set an agenda better than any of the other participants. Yet even she says that it would be hard for her to halt a homophobic culture: “if you yourself was gay, you would probably be drawing attention to it and be seen as having a barrow to push”. So,
despite the frontline work lesbian and gay teachers do to stop homophobia, even a lesbian principal “think[s] it would be much easier if you were a straight one”. In this, Bette emphasises the pervasive influence of working in a heterosexist culture. Despite her own personal investment in the issue, she sees the necessity of not overstating, or pleading her own case. Lucy agrees, and this confirms for her why she is not out to students, despite feeling conflicted about the matter.

"Even though I’d like to come out, it’s not a pressing, burning thing, ‘cause I feel like I’m doing this amazing job of opening kids eyes up, all the kids eyes up and they don’t have to sort of go ‘she’s just going on and on about how wonderful gay people are because she’s gay.’ They don’t have that as a block, in that sense."

The key term here is “block”, and its possible interpretations. The first layer is that lesbian and gay teachers have less of an impact on homophobia and can actually inhibit challenging it. To Lucy, someone with a vested interest, this diverts students from engaging with their own and society’s homophobia. Coming out could inhibit her main goal of teaching students to be “…open and tolerant, and…accept each other and all that sort of thing”. A secondary analysis is that this is Lucy’s own personal “block”. Whilst being in the closet allows her to do her “amazing” work, it also ensures that she censors her own identity. There is symmetry to this – by externally maintaining the status quo, she can be more effective in actually undermining it. By being in the closet, Lucy can teach students, amongst other things, to be less homophobic. The irony here is hard to
miss – a lesbian or gay teacher who is invested in halting homophobia can be seen as having a “barrow to push” and is thus ineffective. However a closeted teacher who promotes diversity may actually succeed in making her students less homophobic, by being seen as an open-minded straight woman, rather than as lesbian with an agenda.

- “It’s my private life, it’s not something I chose to broadcast”

The key difference between participants was the knowledge their students had about their sexuality and their responses varied based on this detail. As already discussed, teachers can theoretically come out to students with the protection of anti-discrimination legislation. However, the reality of this depends on the teacher and the teaching culture, rather than the theoretical protection. A significant amount of the data so far does separate into two camps – the teachers who are out, and those who are not. Lucy, who wants to come out, calls it “the last frontier”. And this seems to be the case, as all participants were out to staff and were open about their sexuality in the rest of their life (as far as was discussed).

Susie, Brian and Lucy are all closeted to students and all have different reasons as to why. Susie, the newest teacher of the three does have concerns that students would use her sexuality “…like an ammunition or something extra they can get me with then it would cause kids to bully me” However, she does feel that this “…might become easier and it might even become you know, just a case of just being honest”. Using a phrase like “ammunition” shows the fear of discovery and the consequences that could follow. The likening of a classroom to a place of violent conflict is not
a rare one, but it is telling coming from a teacher who faces it, relatively happily, every day. Add to this the perception of a role reversal – that the students can and would “bully” a teacher, as they would another student, based on sexuality. Susie describing her classroom in this intense and fearful way highlights the minefield that some queer teachers have to negotiate on a daily basis.

Lucy and Brian, having taught for longer, have more entrenched approaches to keeping their private life private. Brian firmly has the “shutters” down on his personal information:

“…it’s my private life, it’s not something that I choose to broadcast. It’s not something that I say, ‘oh, I’m really embarrassed about’ but it’s, it’s just not, not any of their business, it’s not relevant to what I do…”

MI: “What do you think they’d [students] think [if they knew you were gay]?

Brian: “I don’t know really because I’m kind of contradicting myself. ‘Cause I know they wouldn’t think of me as a less good teacher, but that’s what I would worry about. Even though I know in my heart of hearts they wouldn’t act like that…that’s kind of what I’m thinking.”

There are two key points in Brian’s response. There is the discourse of shame and embarrassment and there is the ambiguity of the teacher’s role and how much they can and should reveal about themselves. Brian
knows that the discourse surrounding hiding one’s sexuality is that of embarrassment and he immediately qualifies why he is not out and emphasises that it is not out of shame. His concern that his very academic students would think of him as a “less good teacher” demonstrates that perhaps it is a point of shame. They, who respected him, may see him as a lesser teacher, due to his “private life”. He immediately qualifies that this is probably not true. This tension is not something Brian can explain, but it is constantly present – his private life is to be kept separate, yet it is difficult to articulate exactly why this is the case.

Ferfolja addresses this very point in her study of lesbian teachers (2007b). While Brian is not a lesbian, the findings do translate. Silin (Ferfolja, 2007b, p575) draws the distinction that “…a right to privacy is very different to a need for secrecy”. Brian’s privacy discourse in fact “reinforces the dominance of heterosexuality” (Ferfolja, 2007b, p.576) by ensuring lesbian and gay teachers remain in the closet. Even though saying someone is lesbian or gay does not give any more information “than labeling someone divorced or married” (Silin, 1995, p.167), the societal discourse surrounding it leaves this sameness very much in the realm of the theoretical. This is not to say that Brian, or any teacher should or should not come out, but that their understanding of how this decision has been made is heavily bound to the dominant discourse of assumed heterosexuality. While most of the participants discussed their sexuality being integrated with their personality, that has been shaped in a heterosexual world. Given all teachers operate in a heterosexual
paradigm, why do some teachers choose to come out, and others do not? The next two sections shed some light onto why this might be.

- “I would never pretend…”

Bette in her current position has not “told students here”. It is noted again that her student contact is significantly less than other teachers due to her role as principal. Bette states “would never pretend” she was not a lesbian and has marched in the Pride March with a previous school, on their invitation. She says of her early years in teaching “…if you’d interviewed me as a third year out teacher… it was a big part of my identity then”. For Bette, being a lesbian and adopting queer politics have become less important as “teaching took over from that gay identity” over time and as she has progressed out of the classroom and into leadership.

This statement shows that the two identities – as lesbian and as teacher - are very separate. They can coexist, but one always takes precedence over the other at any given time. This contradicts the earlier assertion about personality and sexuality being integrated: “It’s a very hard thing ‘cause it’s who I am.” Even though Bette is out on a theoretical level, in practice her identity is bifurcated. She operates in a similar vein to a teacher Kate Evans describes as “…recognized as a gay man in one setting and as a teacher in another setting, as though those two identities are completely incompatible” (Evans, 2002, p.125). The man Evans is referring to is completely closeted at school and even in the town he teaches, whereas he is out elsewhere. Bette is less restricted - she is out
to an extent, yet she too has the sense that her sexual identity and her identity as a teacher are unable to be unified.

The other issue Bette raises is that of student contact. She was out to students in other schools (especially when she was a classroom teacher), but no longer is. Is she no longer out due to her status as a principal, or her lack of opportunity, because she has limited contact with students? As she is the only principal in the study and has more experience than the other participants, it is difficult to compare her situation.

- “You’ve got to walk your talk”

In looking at teachers who are out, Jodie makes a strong statement about why she is out:

"I honestly think that it can’t be something that people have to hide or are ashamed of. And I think if we reinforce that to kids all they’re going to do is continue to believe that it’s something that should be secret and I think that’s bullshit."

Jodie raises an implicit aspect of being a teacher - being a role model – an issue that has been raised in other forms in this analysis. This is where the core of difference between the participants lies, as with the notion of welfare provision, some teachers wanted to be role models, while others did not raise this as part of their role in a school. Jackson says “The longer I stayed in the closet, the more I realized I was a role model of shame” (Jackson, 2007, p.x). Jodie actively resists being such a negative role model. All the teachers in this study condemn homophobia - for
example countering homophobic epithets - yet there was a split when it came to actively exposing their own worlds.

Dawn agrees with Jodie “…you’ve got to walk your talk, you know what I mean?” For Jodie and Dawn “shattering the glass closet” (Silin, 1995, p.167) is as much political as it is about comfort. For Dawn and Jodie there is a need to be visible as lesbians, and as whole people. Foucault (1978), Sedgwick (1990) Silin (1995) and others agree that the closet is a heterosexual construction which “den[ies] the reality of hidden secrets” (Silin, 1995, p.165). However that does not detract from the fact that queer teachers need to make an acute to decision as to being out or not. The secret may always reveal itself, but the process of revelation is still a fraught one that is sensitive to the individual and their surroundings.

Having to make the decision to come out – self-evident for some participants, a dilemma for others – has a dependency on the school culture, as the teacher constantly needs to reflect on possible reactions.

The negotiations and dilemmas surrounding coming out have become the crux of this study, which is consistent with significant anecdotal data from the USA (Jennings, 2005) that also centres around coming out to students. This point is the site where lesbian and gay teachers decide how a myriad of other situations, pertaining to students, will be managed. These classroom dilemmas differ from how queer teachers interact with their colleagues – relationships that are consistent across the six participants.
Leadership and colleagues

- “…tell just about anybody”

All participants were out to their colleagues, or would “…tell just about anybody” (Bette) if it came up. Susie continually has to come out to staff as “people are often surprised…like if I say partner, they assume that it’s a guy”. She will happily correct them but her vigilance shows the deep-seated heteronormativity of the school’s culture. Dawn felt comfortable being out as “there’s so many lesbians at my school” and even though she was the only one out to students, the support she felt from the other lesbians helped her feel comfortable at school.

There are many other lesbian and gay teachers at Brian’s school, but unlike Dawn, he does not draw comfort from this: “I didn’t like it when I first started here because, in some ways, because there are so many gay teachers that work here… And it was like walking into ‘The Greyhound’⁴ [on the first day] or something …it’s like [being] new meat and I don’t like it being obvious”. There are several strands to Brian’s opinion on his school and colleagues, the first being his instinctive separation from his peers. His assertion that he “didn’t like” there being so many gay staff could be a concern about his sexuality being revealed through proximity. The abundance of queer teachers may establish an environment where students can easily recognise gay or lesbian teachers. According to Foucault, sexuality is the “secret that always gives itself away” (Foucault, 1978, p.43), which is consistent with Brian’s’ statement. The knowledge

⁴ The Greyhound is a down-at-heel gay pub in Melbourne’s inner city.
that the secret can be exposed so easily means that extra cues (other gay staff) would act to open the closet that he is trying to keep closed.

Brian enjoys the separation between his public and private life and exposure would threaten this. He is “very conscious about my image”, and does not wish to be “immediately label[ed] … as being gay”. His concern that staff could see his homosexuality as “obvious” shows his concern for privacy and being about to reveal his sexuality on his own terms. As mentioned previously, however, the separation between privacy and secrecy is a fraught one.

Jodie is out to staff and while she is determinedly out to students, she is “not politically active or anything in the workplace”. For all the thought she put into coming out to students, colleagues are not an issue for her. As all participants are out to colleagues, this appears to be a less fraught issue. This is different to teachers in older research (Blount, 2004, Khayatt, 1992) and it could point to a trend over time to a more tolerant society. Given the small sample size, and the self-selecting nature of it, this may not be true for many lesbian and gay teachers. It is worth noting that being out to colleagues was one of the few things that interviewees had in common.

- “Things now are very different to how they were twenty years ago…”

There are many studies of lesbian and gay teachers struggles in the first half of the twentieth century and the slow change in the subsequent fifty years (Blount, 2004, Silin, 1995, Lesbian History Group., 1989). In Victoria, the anti-discrimination legislation has protected lesbians and gay men in state secondary schools since 2000 (2000). However before that
teachers took their own risks. Bette reminisces about requesting that library to order a copy of the controversial text *Young, Gay, and Proud!*, saying, “kids need to see this book.” Bette took a stand to have this book in her school, even though the staff were “ashen faced” at the prospect and it was kept under the desk. In 1985 in the USA, teachers were dismissed for disclosing their sexuality to other staff (Rowland v Mad RiverJackson, 2007, p.3).

With the exception of Bette, the average length of time the participants have been in teaching is only 8 years (compared with Bette’s 34). The next most experienced teacher, Lucy, observes “things now are very different to how they were twenty years ago for people who identify as gay or lesbian.” She is not solely referring to teachers, but she is the only other participant who makes mention of change in societal understandings of homosexuality over time. The evolution from hiding and banning books for lesbian and gay youth to teachers being out in the classroom is clearly not a consistent one, with teachers experiencing different levels of comfort in different school cultures. A clear gap in this research is voices from regional and rural schools as experiences out of big cities might be different for lesbian and gay teachers due to limited access to LGBT communities and support.

- “I’m so caught up in the fact that they do it but I don’t.”

A couple of participants directly commented on the inequality of expectation between gay and straight teachers in their ability to discuss their personal life if they wish. Susie states that “I think what annoys me is
that heterosexual teachers can talk about their partners”. For Lucy, the idea of mentioning her partner to students does not sit well “…but I couldn’t. No. I wouldn’t”. The three quick protestations show how such a prospect is foreign to her, even though she says, from her first day of teaching “…that I would have liked to have just been able to… do what, not all straight teachers do, but [what] some [do]” and talk about the more hidden aspect of herself.

Brian, when asked about his impressions of his colleagues states:

“I think in my experience here most people are like that, most people don’t tend to talk about what goes on at home. Um, some people can go a bit mad when they have kids and things and all they can talk about is babies and stuff, and the kids will know if they’ve had a baby or something. They’re not really, they don’t really sort of, no. No.”

Again, Brian unintentionally raises a conflict within his own representation of his work environment. Having children is arguably a personal process, yet he distinguishes between talking about this and one’s ‘private’ life. He is suggesting that people change when they have children and their private lives are no longer private. This is not the only explanation – perhaps he is implying that when teachers are pregnant it is apparent, so students know and talk about it. The distinction he made between having children and other aspects of private lives is distinct. Clearly, gay men and lesbians can and do have children, but it is still not as common and socially sanctioned as heterosexual couples reproducing.
Susie says “…and then I… start to think, well you know, is it appropriate [to reveal aspects of private lives to students], or not? I’m so caught up in the fact that they do it but I don’t”. As with a teacher’s welfare role, there are no clear lines in place. Homosexual teachers are breaking the ground and testing boundaries that are unclear, yet heavily policed. Jackson sums up the idea in the dichotomy that a man discussing his wife is a “family man”, yet a gay man mentioning his partner creates a “firestorm” (Jackson, 2007, pp.2-3).

Sedgwick opposes this binary of sexuality, rather viewing homosexuality and heterosexuality as parallels - with heterosexuality establishing its own precedence over homosexuality (Sedgwick, 1990). On a theoretical level, Sedgwick follows the canon of Foucault and this theory holds water. However, these ideas are operating in the realm of the theoretical, whereas for these teachers it is a more functional decision. They need to choose to come out of the closet, or stay in. Of course being in maintains the societal status quo more effectively, because assumed heterosexuality is privileged over homosexuality. These choices are based on personal understandings of the world around them, their school, their students and also the leadership team within the school.

- “Does it come from the top down? Of course it does”

According to Dawn, the leadership team “…have a lot to play in how the schools culture develops.” All the schools the participants work in are under the auspices of and directed by the Department of Education. However, every school culture is obviously impacted upon by a range of
factors from its location, demographic and leadership team. Bette agrees with Dawn, asking the question “Does it come from the top down? Of course it does. You can…influence things…that’s the joy and terror of being a principal”. As Bette has said previously, her role as a principal is far more than keeping a lid on homophobia. She acknowledges her major role in the teaching culture of the school and her limits. She has also expressed that asserting a strong anti-homophobia stance could be seen as “having a barrow to push”.

Brian makes few comments about his principal, only that the principal is “…very socially conscious, I guess. And he is very much pro, um, your rights as a human being and stuff.” Brian has few concerns about his school culture, and this is reflected in his minimal commentary on the matter. Lucy’s experiences mirror Brian’s, but her reaction to her principal is the very opposite:

“The principal is sort of interesting in that she doesn’t think it’s an issue at all… Because I don’t think she understands, I mean she’s had gay friends her whole life and she’s very out there and very open and all that sort of thing but I don’t think she understands what, um, gay people and lesbians have had to go through in the past. Why we’re sort of, nervous.”

Here, Lucy sees an aspect that Brian does not, that of heterosexual privilege (Petrovic, 2005). For her, her principal’s acceptance is naïve, and omits the discrimination that lesbian and gay men have and can be subjected to. Brian takes his principal at face value; he’s accepting, easy
to talk to and therefore supportive. Brian feels no conflict about coming out. He does not want to; therefore his principal’s stance is irrelevant to his working life. Lucy, who does struggle with coming out, takes a very careful note of her principal’s stance and its limitations. There may also be a gender bias to be taken into consideration. Brian’s principal can arguably afford to be open minded without risking the respect of, for example, parents, as he and Brian both have male privilege and face less structural disadvantage than, say, Lucy. Lucy’s principal, while seemingly apprised of the disadvantage lesbian and gay teachers may face, is unaware or unconcerned by possible discrimination.

In teaching at the same school, Susie and Jodie have unique understandings of their leadership team, though they come to very different conclusions. Jodie was out to students while Susie was not, and as mentioned earlier, they did not know of each other’s participation in the study. Susie felt:

“I don’t feel secure enough in the leadership of the school that it would be, if anything happened, like a problem happened or, you know, if there was a complaint from a parent, I don’t even know where I get these ideas from, that they wouldn’t really be very supportive.”

Jodie saw the leadership differently, on the notion of coming out. “Our leadership team were in no way hands on. They wouldn’t have given a shit. And they wouldn’t have ever really known, I don’t think.”
They are not addressing exactly the same issue – Susie is concerned that if there were a backlash to coming out she would feel unsupported, whereas Jodie felt as though the leadership did not know or care what went on in teacher's classrooms. The common factor in their perceptions is the lack of ‘leadership’ and support from above. Susie has an unsubstantiated fear of their disapproval, a generalised concern about feeling unsupported “I don’t even know where I get these ideas from”. What separates Susie and Jodie is the impact the ‘panopticon’ has on them. Jodie feels the observation from above is innocuous, while Susie is concerned that it may be punitive and place her and her job at risk.

Having two teachers at the same school, yet handling the environment in very different ways provides a great insight into the paradoxes teachers face. In this ‘hands off’ environment, Susie and Lucy act in very different ways, ruled by their own internal compass. The teaching culture can be seen as almost a blank slate and the teachers own identity takes over. Yet the analysis circles back to the very first point in this analysis – it comes back to personality. Jodie is “a bit of a shit stirrer” whilst Susie’s concern is more passive and she is worried that being out “…would cause the kids to bully me”.
Conclusion

Issues in school culture

In answer to the primary question of how teacher negotiate the teaching cultures of the schools – they actually do this quite effectively. The teachers in this sample have their own rationalisations for how they do this. These rationalisations are informed by their politics, their personality and their role in the school hierarchy. It is also apparent that lesbian and gay teachers are silenced by the culture of their schools to various degrees. While the teachers sampled did not use the word ‘silence’, the participants make concessions and regularly consider and ‘check’ the interplay of their lesbian or gay and their teacher identities to operate successfully in a heteronormative school environment. As lesbians and gay men operate in a heteronormative world (outside school), they are possibly accustomed to these concessions. What is somewhat comforting to uncover is that these concessions have changed over time. In previous studies (Blount, 2004, Khayatt, 1992), teachers would not consider coming out to other staff. In this sample, all participants were out to colleagues. This changes suggests an evolution over time and a possible scission in the heteronormative world of state secondary schools.

Coming out was an issue that teachers came back to throughout their interviews. It informed their actions and reactions to situations and, at times, their pedagogy. All participants, with the exception of Susie, related their position as in or out of the closet to their personality. Phrases like “it’s who I am” (Bette) or “that’s just me” (Brian) were repeated throughout
interviews in matters concerning coming out, especially to students. However, it is impossible to know whether their personality determines whether they are out or not, or whether that decision dictates how they project their personality in managing relationships with students and the broader school community. Regardless, participants felt the choice to be in or out to students was integral to who they are as a person and a teacher.

This contradicts Evans’ findings, whereby her participants felt acutely split, or “bifurcated” but having to separate parts of themselves in order to operate in their school environment. The focus on coming out sheds a different light on the literature undertaken in the field of sexuality. Several theorists (Foucault, 1978, Rasmussen, 2005, Sedgwick, 1990) also view coming out as a dominant concern, but one that allows heteronormative binaries to flourish. Therefore they view the focus on coming out as unnecessary. In this regard, this study falls closer to the North American focus on the coming out narrative – these are the pertinent concerns of lesbian and gay teachers in schools.

The second key recurring theme was the participants wariness of the myth of homosexual as pedophile /recruiter. Despite the fiction of this discourse, all participants considered it a stereotype that is difficult to overcome. This, along with the stereotype of ‘looking gay’, was an issue in the minds of the participants and each teacher made a conscious choice about how to confront these concerns. These two issues that equate to presenting non-normative sexuality to students meant that participants felt they had to either come out, or be definitely in the closet.

The potential ‘obviousness’ of sexuality and society’s impression of its
inherent deviance meant that participants had to choose whether they came out or not; they needed to consider how they would present themselves in a heteronormative institution. Again, this brings us back to the teachers’ dilemma of whether to come out or not.

This then raised external concerns; primarily how these participants negotiated being in or out. Those who chose the former option felt they needed to protect themselves against allegations of abuse, uncomfortable questions and any perceived disrepute that their non-normative sexuality may bring. Teachers who were out were not as concerned about any backlash and expressed comfort and conviction in their decision: “you’ve got to walk your talk, you know what I mean” (Dawn). Bette was in a unique position of being out, but having such limited contact with students and therefore not in a position to have to clarify, defend or negotiate her identity with students in the context of classroom teaching. She therefore occupies a third space - not in the closet, not out, but resting on the margins. This breaks down the dichotomy of being in or out, but it is unclear how sustainable this would be if she were not principal, but in the classroom on a daily basis.

The dilemma of coming out or not had very little to do with systemic protection. The participants were all legally protected and theoretically should have felt the same level of safety in their school. Each teacher naturally had differing impressions of their school’s culture and the broad brushstrokes of legal protection meant little when a teacher felt unsupported by their particular principal or leadership team. A unique aspect of this study was the opportunity to interview two very different
teachers from the same school. They were a similar age, taught similar subjects and had similar levels of teaching experience, yet Susie and Jodie still had differing opinions about their ability to come out to students and to be supported. While Jodie interpreted the management’s ‘hands-off’ approach as beneficial, Susie saw it as a threat to her position. These teachers show the nuances of different subjective experiences within the same context, but also the silence surrounding lesbian and gay men’s experiences as teachers. Side by side, their teaching culture impacted upon them differently. This brings us back to the initial point that personality and one’s internal landscape play a large role in the individual’s understanding of their environment.

*What next?*

There are openings in this study that lend themselves to further research. Primary teachers and teachers at independent and Catholic schools are clearly left out of this research. While their contexts are different investigation of their experiences would allow for a broader and deeper understanding of lesbian and gay teachers. A limitation of this study is its lack of cultural diversity; ethnically diverse queer teachers’ perspectives would expand our understanding of the normative cultures of schools.

A follow-up study to this one would shed light on how attitudes and situations change over time. Would the three teachers who were not out during the course of this study choose to come out in the future? And if so, what impact would this have on their views? Is there any backlash
towards the teachers who are out, during the course of their career? These questions could only be answered over a longitudinal study.

The major voice that is omitted is that of the student, particularly (but not exclusively) gay students. What difference does having a teacher who discloses their sexuality make; do students feel differently about their teacher? Understanding how teachers feel about their profession opens the floodgates to investigate whether having their private world intersect with their public one makes them a better or worse teacher.

*Implications for schools*

The data poses a challenge to individual schools rather than policy makers. Broad systemic change, such as “Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools” needs to be followed up by principals and individual institutions. In the introduction, the Minister for Education “recognises the importance of assisting schools in their efforts to provide “[e]ducation that is inclusive” (2008, p.2). She also encourages all Victorian “principal and teachers to consider the contents of this booklet when reviewing their school policies and curriculum” (2008, p.2). It would be hard to find a clearer imprimatur on supporting inclusiveness and diversity in schools. However, this document seems unnecessary for some participants in this study and not enough for others. Only Jodie ever mentions the upper workings of the Education Department; other participants are firmly rooted in their own schools and leadership issues. Their concerns were located in their school, with their principals, leadership team and colleagues. As Bette
says, “it come[s] from the top down”, however the message needs to be maintained every step of the way, from the Department to the classroom.
Appendix 1

Plain language statement for persons participating in research projects

PROJECT TITLE Silence, sexuality and teachers: The impact of heteronormativity on teacher’s professional practice

Explaining the ethics process: communicating procedures to applicants

You are invited to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Associate Professor Ray Misson (supervisor) and Madelaine Imber (Masters student) of the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne. Your name and contact details have either been provided by someone you know or you are acquainted with the research team. This project will form part of Ms Imber’s Masters thesis, and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

The focus of this study is to identify issues faced by lesbian and gay teachers in secondary schools. The interview will explore how you feel about teaching and what, if any, impact sexuality has on your day to day professional practice. Individual school culture plays a role in how teachers understand the culture of their work environment, so this will also be discussed.

Should you agree to participate, we would ask you to meet for a one to one and half hour interview. This interview will cover issues relating to teaching and how personal identification may impact upon your professional practice. With your permission, the interview would be audio-taped so we can ensure that we make an accurate record of what you say.

We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data that you supply. This will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers. Your school’s community will not be informed of your association with this study. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. We will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity; however, you should note that as the number of people we seek to interview is very small, it is possible that someone may still be able to identify you.

Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be available to you on request. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences or in academic articles. The data will be kept securely in the Graduate School of Education for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

Please be advised that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice.

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it in the envelope provided. The researchers will then contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time for you to participate in an interview.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either of the researchers; Associate Professor Misson: 8344 3510, Ms Imber: 0402 329 671. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact The Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073; fax 9347 6739

Appendix 2
Consent form for persons participating in research projects

PROJECT TITLE Silence, sexuality and teachers: The impact of heteronormativity on teacher’s professional practice

Name of participant:

Name of investigator(s): Associate Professor Ray Misson, Madelaine Imber

1. I consent to participate in the project named above, the particulars of which - including the details of the interview - have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

2. I authorise the researcher to use the interview for the purpose of research.

3. I acknowledge that:
   (a) The possible effects of the interview have been explained to me to my satisfaction;
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;
   (c) The project is for the purpose of research
   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of information I provide will be safeguarded subject to legal requirements.

4. I consent to the interview being audio-taped

5. I have been informed that I will be referred to under a pseudonym in any publication arising from this research.

6. I have been informed that the small sample size of this research may have implications for protecting my identity in any publication following this research.

Signature Date

(Participant)

Appendix 3
Sexuality, silence, and teachers: Negotiating heteronormativity in school culture

Interview questions:

1. How long have you been in teaching?

2. What do you teach and what is your current position within your school?

3. Have you identified as lesbian/gay for your entire teaching career?
   - If no, did you notice a difference in your feelings about teaching when your identity shifted?

4. Are your colleagues, management team or students aware of your sexuality?
   - Why/Why not?
   - How/Why has this come about?

5. In what way, if any, do you feel your sexuality has had an impact on your career?

6. Have you encountered any issues at school that you feel are connected to your sexuality?

7. Do you feel comfortable at school?
   - What could schools do to help make school more comfortable?
   - OR
   - What is it about this school that makes you feel comfortable?

Appendix 4
Transcript, Bette

.00 - Teachers College in 1973, taught for most of the time between now and then. Teaching for round 34 years (drama, media, extra method – ESL, Masters in policy)

1.20 AP – 4 years, prin 8 years.

1.50 ID’ed as lesbian through teaching career

2.05 (who have you come out to) “…tell just about anybody”

2.10 (out to students) “I haven’t …um…told students here…and not at my last school. So when I’ve been a principal, I haven’t told students. It’s probably more to do with the kind of school I’ve been un (yep) and…the kind of role I’m in. I don’t think it’s to do with being the principal, I think it’s to do with the role I have, Uh um, the schools, the nature of the schools. Um, Collingwood College, I might have told one or two students. You know, if there are kids going through some crisis or other and you’re involved in that. Oh, when I was acting principal at Princes Hill for a while I, um, they, they knew about it, because we went in the gay parade, the Pride march. And it was the first year P____ had done that and the welfare teacher organised it and there was a couple of gay teachers and I always go to the Pride March anyway, and it was great to go with the school.”

3.15 “It was something that school was doing, was recognising gay kids and teachers. And I would never pretend I wasn’t if people were, were doing that within the school”

3.40 (sexuality impact on the career). “I think it has, in a way I can identify with minorities and they’ll often be a situation where parents might be saying ‘You don’t know what it’s like to be in our situation’ or ‘we’re getting picked on’ or whatever (yep) and you go ‘yes I do’. You don’t say it (yep), you sort of think it. So...understanding prejudice, and looking out for underdogs and trying to make sure everybody’s got a chance in life. You know...abhorrence of racism and bigotry and all that. For me, I think that has...the experience of being on the outer in society has informed that. Although I know for other gay people it doesn’t. You know, it pushes them further towards that. (yep) So it’s not a defining thing in and of itself, it’s just my approach to it, so maybe I would have had that approach anyway”

5.00 (has that changed through career?) I don’t know. Sth Melb tech, second year of teaching, put ‘young gay and proud’ in library. “You guys need to order this book. Kids need to see this book and everyone was a bit ashen faced” Kept “under the desk”, but it was there.
“I was always pretty out there about looking out for kids who might need to have this information.”

Forgot question, are you asking if it changed my career path? Yes.

“Cause I think there, there’s the attitude you have, the approach you take, the sort of person you are and then there’s the decisions you make, in terms of career choice. Um...you know, it’s hard to know...what opens doors.”

boys club, workers who socialise go further – does that influence career progression?

Partner example works with female Vice Chancellor, far closer than with previous male VC

“...so maybe the gender thing, um, does have an influence, but does the gay thing have an influence?”

“I sometimes walk around thinking I’m not a real principal, I’m a fake (really?) but I don’t know that, that’s whether I’m gay or whether I don’t get a thrill out of the authoritarian, make everyone shake in their shoes approach.”

other principals thrive on the authority “...and I kind of work to cut under that all the time and to be human.”

People used to principals being bullying and leading aggressively. I don’t work that way, but I can still be firm.

Make sure not bullying in approach to staff. Staff complain, I draw the line where it’s necessary, with consultative processes and accountability.

“...has being gay changed where I’ve been? It’s a very hard thing cos it’s who I am. You might say does being somebody who doesn’t drink and socialise after school, does being somebody who hates wearing suits; you know, straight girls hate wearing suits too.”

Male principals as good, better than lesbian ones at times. No girls network, that you can draw on.

(so you’re on your own?) “I don’t feel on my own, but it’s not that the networks are defined by sexuality.”

Count the dykes at principal meetings. Five women, three to four men. Four were lesbians.

Main issue at such meetings are about educational issues, not sexuality. Issues are more important that sexuality.
“You sort of divide your lines along those lines more than you do about sexuality.”

(critical incidents relation to sexuality?) No.

Gay people everywhere, even in regions. It’s about politics and leadership style, commitment to school., honesty etc.

Talking at region meetings honestly is more important. Saying if you think something is being handled badly. “That’s not to do with being gay, it’s just personality.”

No longer in classroom, but still has hand in curriculum.

Like being engaged with curriculum meetings etc.

(feel comfortable at school) “Yeah”

Was in a school that closed and went school shopping and thought about where I’d fit in

“…because square pegs and square holes is very important with, um, choosing a school that you can be yourself in.”

Walked and saw old fossil prins, “and thought oh, this school’s never going to appoint a female principal.”

School has good feel, warm, nice etc.

“So, yes, I do, I do feel that I can be myself. And I have also made a decision that for my second time as a principal that if you can’t be yourself in a school you might as well not be in it. Because I can’t play a role. And I mean there are people out there who can put on the corporate drag and go out there and be…straight. And I can’t do that. And I guess that’s why I’m talking to you and maybe not some other people who are playing the straight game.”

“That doesn’t mean I go around being an out lesbian all day. I mean, but I do talk about my partner and my world in the staff room and with colleagues and stuff.”

Comfort in school is also about the other stuff, parents etc.

“Being comfortable in your school is about being comfortable with its discipline policy, with its parent body, and all those things.”

School has Deb ball, for chaplaincy, it’s a fundraiser, for a good cause. “What’s the point of my values on this?”

Awkward about being at Deb ball. But took it as a game.

Ditched Deb ball. Also, need to be practical about choices.
17.45 Chance to shape school, so can put energy into certain things, set culture?

18.17 Lots of opportunities for schools projects, and it’s about saying yes and no to ideas that come across you desk. Always say yes to reasonable student ideas. “A whole lot of support for kids ideas”.

18.45 Teacher ideas – say yes. Be supportive. Example – P_______ in Pride March. It’s a good leadership idea.

19.15 P_______ is different, no uniform, and cool to do that stuff.

19.30 I’m approachable; student and staff know that they can come to me if there are issues.

20.00 (question about school process, and how good the school is with gay staff)

20.40 Not many gay staff. One person comes to mind, been at school a long time.

21.00 “When I had been here about a week, as an acting principal, the AP’s came in here absolutely ashen faced and said ‘Bette, Bette, so and so is in, in the umm…’ I was going to say cupboard, but not really the cupboard, the storeroom ‘in the store room and he’s really upset, he’s sobbing, he’s absolutely sobbing because somebody’s called him a poofter’ and um, I said ‘oh, well, is he a poofter’ and they said ‘yes,’ and I went oh. And they said ‘this is unusual, you know, this doesn’t happen, and um, what should we do?’ And I can’t remember what we did, but I think there was some friend of his, someone he could confide was with him and I just thought, let them talk it out, we’ll cover his class, we’ll let him get over it, we’ll find out who the kid was that said it, you know (yeah) deal with it as a discipline issue.”

22.00 Three and half years later, would be surprised if a kid said that and he got that upset. “So I now realise that it was a significant critical event (yep) umm, I’ve never gone and talked to him about it, but obviously it just touched a nerve cos he’s not ah, he’s a very popular teacher, he’s a very able teacher, he’s very respected”

22.25 I’ve never follow it up, must just have touched a nerve.

22.55 “Everyone…isn’t that silly, everyone who’s gay is open…they…” (laughs)

23.00 “The could of people I’m thinking of are very open. Talk about their partners, bring their partners to things. Um, on of the other women had a marriage ceremony and one of the teachers on the staff was the celebrant for it.”
“And everybody’s very involved with everybody’s partner and what’s going on in a very open equal way. Except there might be someone closeted that I don’t know about, or that I’ve forgotten about.”

(out previously) “Probably P____, because of the march, yeah, yeah, that would of…and that was just osmosis. It’s not like saying here guys I’m gay, it’s just like, we’re there and here we are together.”

1985/86 came out to students at Huntingdale tech as fifth year out teacher. Year 12 co-ordinator.

Had taken time off and made film about parents of gays

Was doing community stuff pre-PFLAG, activist

Students asked to see film, and I came out on film

(worried about repercussions?) “No, not at all”

(cos of the school?) “Probably because of the school. Huntingdale was a pretty cool school. First names, teachers and kids mixing together in the staffroom. No barriers between…and you know, that’s where I’ve come from. Collingwood College was first name’s basis” etc.

Coming from relaxed schools “where my heart lies.”

“Where I’ve had to be a principal, and had to be a bit stiffer and a little bit more boundaries between me and people and kids and teachers…I… you know that is uncomfortable for me. Not ‘cause of the gay thing but ‘cause of, I’m a much more that kind of person and I know it upsets come of the ridgy-didges on the staff, the broomstick up the backside teachers, I call them, who have rules and that’s all you do. And f you bend off the rules you’ve had it.”

Staff conflict, how there people work differently.

Conflict management black/white v’s grey zone

Question from me

“I think things like how flexible you are, how much empathy you have, I think they shape who you are as a principal more than your sexuality does. But those initial personal qualities probably determine how you act as a gay person.”

“So I’m comfortable sometimes being open, sometimes not. I’m not afraid to come out, I won’t ever tell lies, if someone asks me straight up – you know, you can be evasive, if it’s an inappropriate question, or the time’s not right.”

92
I have every confidence that coming out at that time would be fine, and the kids were overwhelmingly positive.

“...they felt valued by me, that I had trusted them with my story.”

“This teacher has put herself on the line for us, she believed in us enough and trusted us that we were adult enough to deal with her personal story.’ And that was the rewarding thing about that experience.”

(did that make you worry about your career?)

Not sure I want to be a teacher. Not sure that system is perfect personally. Bounced round schools, seeing what works, unlike teachers who stay in school for whole life and career.

Been in 6-8 different schools in different roles, loved first school.

Reason for leaving that school - school and curriculum changed went from TOP to VCE

Put in excess went to other school, hated other school

Went to RCH pysch ward, “It was just part of I want something different, I'm not sure I want to be a teacher” and made friends.

“I've got more personal friends who are straight who have got no children and I've probably got more in common with them than I have with lesbians who've got kids.”

“You never know when you're going to meet people that are most like minded.” Went on to another school, then closed, the Collingwood

“Some of my decisions have been reacting away from something, some of them have been accidental luck things, like being sent to Collingwood.”

Collingwood prin mentored into principalship, after four years of being an AP, wanted to be prin. Then closed first school as prin

“There’s my inability to lie, my inability to say it other than how it is,” so school had to close. So personality plays a key role choices.

(how does principal impact/ shift culture, esp. in culture of homophobia)
“I think it would be very difficult to shift that mentality if you were a gay principal. (right) I think it would be much easier if you were a straight one (ok, why’s that) And that’s I suppose, the SWC at P________, who’s straight, was able to talk about um, understanding, tolerance, empathy, um, open mindedness, inclusiveness. She could talk about all those things as good human qualities.”

“And if you yourself was gay, you would probably be drawing attention to it and be seen as having a barrow to push, (yeah, yeah) ummm, so I mean if you have other people in school who could act as your agents you could say ‘Now Liz, I want you to go and, I think we should do something about this what can you do?’ and so you’ll have other people (yeah) doing that stuff. It’s not to say I’d tolerate a school that was homophobic. You wouldn’t. And you’d roll it in, if they were homophobic, they’d no doubt be racist and all sorts o other things. Class conscious or something.” Would do a whole lot of wellbeing stuff about that.

Roll all that stuff into a process against it

(does school have an issue with homophobia?) “Kids say ‘gay gay, you’re gay, you’re gay’ it’s like ‘you’re stupid, you’re bad’, now it’s a different word now, that kids have appr - misappropriated or taken, umm for their own to mean that, they don’t, kids are always conservative about homosexuality if you ask them. However...um...I don’t find homophobia going on here.”

AP will speak to me about gay kid having hard time.

“We don’t tend to have kids getting picked on. We’ve had a couple of outlandish kids that are a bit different. Whether they’re gay or not I’m not sure and they’re tolerated. [The school] has a toler….a tolerant group. A tolerant culture. (yep) for kids like that.”

Good student welfare team and student leadership

“Difference is tolerated amongst the kids. Racism. I’ve just had somebody telling me the school’s racist. “ Don’t really believe that teacher.

Somali kids, staff struggle with them and generalise about them. Pull teachers up on that.

“I think everybody’s attitude adds up to what the school’s culture is.” If parents and teachers and students are racist, they’ll be a problem. [the school]has elements of that.

“Scratch the surface and you might find people that are homophobic, but it’s less obvious, and it’s not like there’s
thirty homosexual kids sitting around with um, some form of dress that designates them... as gay. And they’re not all together, they’re more dispersed that the Somali kids who sit together (and can be identified) and can be identified."

41.53 "Does it come from the top down? Of course if does. You can, you can influence things and you know, that’s the joy and the terror of being a principal. Because theoretically you can influence these things, is the converse true? If they are not being influenced is it your fault? If you’ve got racism in your school, if you’ve got homophobia in your school, what are you doing about it? You can change this – you have the power, the authority, the influence, you should be changing this. And that’s the weight of being a principal." More about responsibility.

42.35 “That’s how I feel about being a principal. I feel very responsible for the things that go on.”

42.44 Hearing about failing Northern suburbs schools and they’ll be new super principals and a lot of pressure on them.

43.15 “Ultimately you should be able to have all, you know, influence over everything, but you can only do what your time allows and what the talent of your staff allows. So I would hope that I’m having an influence on the teaching and learning at this school.”

43.37 More about curriculum and teaching philosophy and that’s where the influence should filter down.

44.15 “You have to choose your battles. And you have to choose the one that’s going to make the most difference.”

44.30 Student survey data – about good relationships with students

45.00 Principals dealing with students and staff as a prin, either authoritarian or collaborative.

45.30 General explanation of prin role.

46.15 Lots of gay and lesbian principals

46.30 S**** (school close by) environment – uncommon

47.40 (what makes a school) "I think it’s that other unquantifiable thing. Schools have cultures and they are bigger than all of us (yeah) bigger than us as individuals.”

48.00 Merging issues, school community banding together. School history plays a role.

48.30 Changing culture – how?
“A place that’s safe to come out in? It’s also about the staff and how they talk to each other.”

People come out when there is a collaborative culture, and people work relatively close together.

People find their niche in schools by whatever defines them – conservative, arty etc.

Schools do things differently, you can find a niche

“There’s a teacher here, on this staff, who I suspect might be gay. And um, is a very very close person. Doesn’t um, speak about very much at all and is having a bit of a struggle, generally. And I was going to make the point that if that person spoke to some other people, they’d have a whole lot more support. And they’d have a lot of people – I know because come and say ‘we’re trying to help her, we’re trying to do this, we’re trying to do that, but she won’t talk’ and I know that if she did, and if that included anything about sexuality, everyone would be more than supportive. And yet she may well be walking around like you’ve described.”

What can you do? Put people round her and hope she’ll talk.

New principal – the focus is on their process, curriculum, their style and their manner, their openness, rather than if she’s gay.

“Interviewing me, at this point in my life is interesting, cos you’ve done so much in education, it does shrink down. Yet, it’s actually very interesting, when I started off I was very gung ho with that thing with the ‘young gay and proud’, let’s buy these books for the library, let’s be totally out.” People yelling out dyke from a car while I’m on yard duty

Going off at night working with lesbian activism, and making films.

“So it was a big part of my identity then, so if you’d interviewed me as a third year out teacher”…. Film making about gay issues

“It was a much bigger part of my identity and so it mattered a whole lot more to me, to be able to be in a place where I could be myself, and I always was, I just said to the teachers here I am and I’m gay.”

They asked awkward questions and sexuality: “It just never was an issue.”
“Teaching took over from that gay identity.” But don’t really ‘identify’ as a principal.

“As I’ve gone on, and got older, and done other things” balance has changed.
Appendix 5

**Transcript, Lucy**

.00 - Got Dip Ed 20 years ago, been in and out of schools, in department for 5 years. Teaching for about 12 years.

.50 Leading teacher, in charge of PD, VIT, mentors, performance appraisals. Teaches film studies. Year 9 and 10. And 10 English

1.40 Identified as lesbian/ queer for whole career.

2.06 (who are you out to?) “The colleagues are aware. Um, the management team is aware. And the students are not aware.

2.15 (rational behind decisions). Um and ahh-ring

2.35 “I became a teacher late in life. So not – I wasn’t 21 when I started. (yep). And um, so before I was a teacher, I was, I spent sort of 10 years being a political activist, including sort lesbian and anti nuclear and what not. And was an artist.” Political art, feminist art.

3.05 “Had a life of a sort of bon vivant, sort of an artist, political activist, kind of. Very free.”

3.20 Came to Australia to follow boyfriend, lived as gypsy. Needed a job, to make a living.

4.00 Went back and did Dip Ed here 10 years after original degree.

4.25 “I’d wanted to be a teacher since I was three years old, when I used to line up dolls and have a chalk board and give lessons. And spank the ones that hadn’t done their homework.”

4.35 Had fairly traditional upbringing. Thought about teaching and thought; “What will I do – I’ve always wanted to be a teacher, oh, that’ll be easy, I’ll have summer holidays, and it’ll be fun.” Done some education stuff pre Dip. Ed. Done lecturing and taught art in prison.

5.05 “I did the Dip Ed and it was very frustrating because it was incredibly conservative, the course, in Western Australia”. Sexist language.

5.30 Got Dip Ed, ended relationship in Melbourne, did Dip Ed in WA, then came back to Melbourne. Ran out of friends and lovers in WA.
Got here, feel in love at lesbian festival. Decided to stay. Easy to leave WA as a gypsy. Then started looking for a job.

“I got a job out in the West for a couple of years. And luckily there was a lesbian there who, um, was pretty out with all the staff and everything and so... And ‘cos I’d met her at the conference, festival, whatever it was. It was sort of this thing, well, if she’s a lesbian, I can be a lesbian with her, and, and, I felt very safe and protected in that school. So it wasn’t that – Like I was a very out there sort of person, so I’d done the whole political thing. I wasn’t afraid in that sense of it. I had no issues of shame, or – there were no sort of personal private issues, or not sore of sense of having to be secretive with, um, for those internal kind of reasons.”

“It was more, when I start teaching, and I realised this when I left Perth was that um, that it was going to be very difficult, because you know Fremantle and Perth are very small communities. And, and I what I want to get to at some point is this idea of heteronormativity or, or the idea- my lesbian identity, I mean that’s the least of my worries in some senses in terms of, of really what’s problematic in a school for me.

“So I was in this school, I felt like I could be open with the staff, because I had this other lady there. I’d been teaching a week. And there were a couple of girls in one my year 8 class who were very tall big girls. And one of them was quite boyish kind of girl and the other was quite girly kind of girl and they were best mate and la la la. And one day, in the first week of my teaching, one of the girls – the sort of boyish one – looked at me as I was coming round to see how they were going and she said to me ‘Um, Miss, Cathy wants to know if you’re straight and she doesn’t mean ‘do you do drugs’?’”

“And I was…. I mean, I was, you know, thirty years old, but I was still, ah very young, in a way, cos I had all that time as being free and young and everything. But I was still quite shocked, and I sort of just took a minute to think – a) what clever girls you are, you little things, but b) Oh Goodness, what am I going to say to this? You know, I’d been doing all this activism…you know.”

“I said ‘Look, this probably isn’t the best time to talk about all of our sexuality. But, you know, if you want to see me at lunch time we can, you know, go into that further.’ And that was the end of it, of course.”

“Five years later I bumped into the boyish one at Midsumma, where I ran the dog show for ten years, and sort of came up to me and sort of introduced me to her 26 year old cricket
playing girlfriend and um, we laughed and of course it was cute and fun.”

9.55 “It sort of set the scene, really, for me not feeling like – and life, when I read these stories or some of them later. Things are very different now to how they were twenty years ago for people who identify as gay or lesbian. You know, just in the world generally. There were very few – aside form Elton John or whatever – people that anyone knew was gay anyway. You know, at that time. So it was sort of still the thing that kind of thing that was (sigh) you know.”

10.30 “There were pockets where you felt safe and where you could be open about your sexuality but there were places where you just didn’t feel that people where going to understand necessarily.”

10.40 (so felt you couldn’t be out in classroom) “No, absolutely not. No, and I don’t. I just don’t know why, um, and in a way, I think part of it is sort of that feeling of vulnerability, you know, where -. It was a sense that I had. That this is not going to be a safe place to do it. That even though it was ok with the staff at that particular school, it wasn’t going to be safe”

11.07 “And then I got to the next school and the next school I was sexually harassed by a guy for two years and series of principals came and went and nobody stopped it. He wasn’t harassing me because I was a lesbian; he was harassing me because I was a sexy young woman who didn’t respond to his advances. And so that was a horrific event, and I kept thinking ‘God, he doesn’t even know I’m a lesbian’. This is what I’m putting up with; this is what the schools allowing me to go through. He doesn’t even know – not the worst of it, but how much more interesting it could be.”

11.40 That was five years later “And that sort of in a sense validated for me that whole personal life was that I go to school and this is interesting, because of course there’s a whole complexity about it. But I go to school to teach the children something. Now I believe that I go to school to teach the children about life and the world and I go to teach them, you know, the topic.”

12.13 “But it’s not only about the topic. It’s about, um, sort of all the things I was involved in. So I want to teach them to look at the world critically, to accept other people, to sort, of…” Gives examples or work.

12.35 “I want them to become citizens that that know everything, that are very open and tolerant, and that accept each other and all that sort of thing. And so, that’s sort of where I decided ‘ok, that’s what I’m going to do as a teacher’. And
I’m going to make sure that everything I do (begins to cry) But everything that I do is going to (pause) ah I don’t know how to say it. Make sure that they understand. You know, to do the right thing.”

13.25 How do that? Hard teaching German. When teaching English, went on tangents, more critical thinking.

13.50 Wants to, and tries to teach about accepting other cultures, about looking after weak people, not polluting, being tolerant.

14.05 “So, I’m sort of ruthless in the classroom about any sort of racism, any bullying, any sexism, and homophobia. And all of those things get dealt with, just – you know. I mean I deal with them in the way that is most suitable in that moment, but the kids are absolutely clear, once they’ve had me for about half an hour that there will be no tolerance about any of that stuff.”

14.30 “So I suppose that I justify staying in the closet with the kids by, sort of ensuring that everything that happens is, ah, very positive.”

14.50 So, in English “with any topic, there was always a sense that this wouldn’t have to be about just about boys and girls. This could be two girls or it could be two boys. Or whatever.” It all became very normal

15.15 “In my classes it not necessarily heteronormative, if that’s a word. It’s that we understand that there could be, and I say, that there could be people in here who are gay, there could be people in here that have Aboriginal background, there could be people in here who’ve lost a mum. There could be people in here who’ve got all of these different things, who’s um, parent have been to prison, or whatever it is, so everything in a sense gets normalised.

15.40 (worried if it would reflect back?) “I was never afraid of that. Because I’m a very, we’ll I’m very good teacher, in the sense that I’m able to control kids so that’s they’re able to learn. ”

15.55 (what do you mean by control?) “I’m able to control kids so that they are able to learn… I mean I’m able to provide an environment for them where they’re very clear that the purpose in the classroom is to lean, we, I use all sort of different methodologies to…We’re not in there to fuck about, we’re not in there to have a good time. We do have a good time…but it’s not about them having a good time with whatever topic they like. That my goal in there is to teach them something.”
Gets good material – good issues, for issues for example, to ensure engagement. Solid disciple and restorative justice process. Well structured classroom environment.

“Because I’m strict and because I developed this thing of tolerance and all that…it becomes the norm for these things to just to - they’re just normal. It’s just normal that we can talk about any sort of topic that we like, and the kids – I’ve had kids in the class that have, that I’ve presumed are gay, or going to be gay or whatever, and I’ve had kids in the class that I know are gay – I’ve heard because they’ve spoken to other people or whatever.”

“Kids don’t really come to me with their little private problems, cos I’m not that sort of teacher. I’m there to teach them, there are other people there to nurture them. I know that’s not a great thing. I do try to nurture them intellectually and I ensure that they have got appropriate places for their emotional thing. But as you can see I’m far too emotional to get wrapped up the whole emotion of the kids.”

Examples of student work from film study unit. Talk about big, controversial issues. – Domestic violence, etc. “…It’s like the whole gay thing. This thing, this idea of talking about domestic violence – what’s acceptable?”

About taking all issues and discussing things. “It’s about taking all issues, all areas and discussing those.”

Questioning of norms and behaviour and getting kids to understand what happens around them in the world. ‘Beneath the clouds’

Discuss choices made in films. Look at mainstream films and also ‘Mambo Italiano’ – gay version of ‘big fat great wedding.’

“The kids are so used to the environment that’s been created there that they sort of just – anything I come up with, there’s no surprise there really. And because I’m able to speak about Maori culture, and Korean culture and Japanese culture and Aboriginal culture they think I’m an incredible genius” (therefore you ca talk about gay culture).

“I also talk about gay culture in lots of other ways as we go along.”

“Kids will call each other gay and whatever in the classroom, all that sort of thing, happen very occasionally because it gets, sort of challenged and questioned. So one of the things I do for example, the kids are going on about something gay, and I’ll go ‘Oh my Goodness, somebody’s gay over there? Oh, do we? Do we need to talk about that
now? Was it you that? So are you saying your gay?’ ‘No, no’. ‘So is anybody gay? Or we’re all gay? What’s going on?’”

“So there’s this idea that you can sort of make fun of kids, or ‘so and so’s gay’ or ‘gay, do you mean happy?’ so depending on the situation sometimes um, this has been later, again with experience and with confidence, you know, I’ll go ‘Yeah, she’s gay, he’s gay, I’m gay, we’re all gay’”

“You know, I love saying that, of course, because the kids don’t look at me and think she’s gay. I mean, I used to look a lot more dykey, but I mean I now sort of, you know, I’m a little thing. And I’m quite feminine so the kids, really, I don’t think they look at me —”

“They know there’s something different about me though. The kids – and that’s the other thing about heteronormativity. It’s not only the hetero. They know. Even before I was a lesbian, I was different.”

“So, I’m just a different sort of person to most of their teachers, so it wouldn’t matter whether I was a lesbian or not, I still have got this difference that they know, that they sort of find absolutely fascinating, um, but that they haven’t connected to my sexuality. And that, ultimately I don’t believe they need to.”

(so, even if you were straight…) “Oh, absolutely, I’d be doing all this anyway. ‘Cause I was doing it when I was straight. I was being, I was being sort of, you know, looking at all these issues.” Always looked at these issues, even as a teenager.

Always political

“All of that is where I’m…my sexuality. I mean, I look, I live out here in suburbia, we have an oven, we have four dogs, we, I mean, we’re very normal people. And so that’s where that….the sexuality, whilst some people, I mean it’s getting of course more and more blasé by the minute, but still isn’t it interesting and this is why your project is of course so interesting, even though it’s more blaze and you’ve got Lindsay Lohan now with her cute little butch girlfriend…”

More about Lindsay Lohan.

“It’s much more normal but still there is something that is stopping…and, and, you know I don’t know why, what is it? And there’s still something stopping from all of us. I’ve got two other people at school – a lesbian and a gay guy and I’m mean she’s not - she’s like me, she’s so different. I mean her whole – she’s younger, she’s very young – but she is so different also, that again her sexuality is the least of…(yeah)..
the difference. So it's sort of like. I don't know, it's too complicated. I couldn't come up with a, you know, I like to have answers, and I couldn't come up with an answer.

24.50 “I know it's getting more, just even for myself still, it's getting more and more, I think I'm more and more ready to just say the kids ‘Look, I'm a lesbian, isn't that fabulous’.”

25.00 (do you think you would) “Oh, I don't know! I don't know what's stopping me. I mean there's something obviously, some element of fear that's stopping me. I'd love to just – because at this point, you know, I know these kids and I can't imagine- it would shock them, but it wouldn't shock them.”

25.20 “They'd be even more fascinated. Because they know there's something – But that's not - it can't be reduced down to that sexual. That's just like this other part, like I'm American, they think.”

25.55 “I can not tell you. I can't tell you why I can't just ah, you know, say to the kids...you know. Yeah. It's terrible.”

26.00 Been at school for five years. Why can't come out?

26.30 (on coming out) “I can not say what it is. I just can't! I have been wanting to, to able to say that to kids to, to. And I suppose that's that question, um…”

26.40 (so you want to come out?) “Well no. It's not a burning urge at all. But it is a something I would like to do because I'm such an honest person with everything else.. (yep) it's sort of like the last...it's the last frontier.”

27.10 Apologise to student, believes in restorative justice, has no issue with apologising, doing things out of the norm.

27.40 “I can do anything. I'm an incredibly brave person but I just can't, for some reason, bring myself to tell the kids that I'm a lesbian. And I'm just – I. And I was thinking today, is it because I'm not sure that, even though the staff know, and even though no one seems to have any...” Staff, admin, know, not a huge deal.

28.17 “The principal is sort of interesting in that she doesn't think it's an issue at all. (yeah) Because I don't think she understands, I mean she's had gay friends her whole life and she's very out there and very open and all that sort of thing but I don't think she understands what, um, gay people and lesbians have had to go through in the past. Why we're sort of, nervous.”
“She thinks it’s no big deal. (minimal expansion) I sort of got this sense that she sort of thinks it’s got no impact. And I mean maybe it would have no impact. But there’s just something.”

“But I don’t know what she would be able to do if there was a backlash. I don’t know what she would do to stop it.”

“I know that she would support me in every way that she could but I just don’t know what that would look like. And I think, because as I said before, I don’t go to school to say.” Rambly

(6-8 years ago) “Kids were constantly asking about my sex life. You know, they were desperate to know if I had big hunky boyfriend, you know.” (why eight years ago?) “Well I think I’ve just gotten older…I think they see me as less sexual.”

“I think that for a long time kids saw me as very sexual – they probably still do, in way. They know there’s something going on but they see me as a sexual person.”

(similar to mothers age?) ”I think they see me as so different to their mums that they – because of what we talk about in school and cos of what our conversations are, I don’t, I think they see me as something very unusual. Because I’m an older person. They don’t know I’m older than their mums. We’re just all old.”

Kids asked if she wore leather underpants, as she wore leather pants.

“That’s been a very heterosexual. They’ve seen me as, cos I’m so girly, as very heterosexual. And I don’t know, none of this makes any sense to me.”

“The fear, which I suppose, I don’t know if that’s what everyone is sort of talking about. I mean I don’t know where it….and I don’t like it. But I’ve come to terms, and as I was saying, it started from the first day I started teaching. That I would have like to have just been able to, um, not go on and on about it, but just be able to, I suppose, um, do what, not all straight teachers do, but some, because you don’t really know what everyone says in their classrooms. Lots of people don’t talk about their private life at all.”

different dynamics in classrooms

“There is a cohort of teachers that talks a lot about their partners. And, um, well not a lot, but you know? Whatever. And I suppose that, um, what I’d like to be able to do is not have to – you know, if there was something like a kid you
know, did a triathlon or something like that to be able to say ‘Oh yeah, my partner does triathlons and she came in second.’ But I couldn’t. No. I wouldn’t.”

32.40 discuss personal life “No, I don’t talk about anything. But you see, I’ve often wondered whether my reluctance to talk about anything personal or my, you know having gotten into a rhythm or whatever it is, a routine of not really sharing a whole lot has got to do with…the…gay thing.”

33.10 “You know, is that where it all started. Or, or is it…something else, you know. Is it not that. Is it, oh, I just don’t think it’s appropriate? I mean, I don’t know because because I started teaching at a time where – I mean I was already a lesbian, I was already pretty out there and so I don’t, I didn’t really know any, you know at that point I wouldn’t have known any different, in a sense.”

33.40 out for whole career, not sure why not out.

34.00 on reading student work out – “You know, having been in this closet for so long, um and seeing students changing.”

34.20 Watching Mambo Italiano, how teach it and watch it as class.

35.00 Been teaching this for two years, about 75 kids. Only one vaguely negative response.

35.30 Negative response – people shouldn’t be gay, they should be straight and have kids.

36.00 Read out student work

36.15 School – multicultural, social disadvantaged

36.25 “[reading student work] ‘People worry about themselves so much that they would keep something secret, personal to themselves – some would even hold it in for years’ like Ms M……. “ continues to read.

37.00 Still reading essay about students imaging how people would deal with coming out and the issues of secrecy.

38.00 Pieces are generally positive of coming out and how it’s better than lying about sexuality.

38.45 Blown away by kids.

39.00 Showing the films, with some slant, but still addresses broader issues and questions.

39.40 “Then again, because I don’t allow homophobia, racism and sexism in the class…. makes it easier to deal with these issues.
Kids are not afraid of teachers, write what they want.

Could write letters or essays – read out letter to mum from gay son.

more reading aloud, very accepting.

One kids is part of gay straight alliance

Depth of understanding is astounding.

curriculums and prescribed texts, and freedom of teaching.

Freedom to teach as wish. Have a reputation in the school

Taught year 10 half way through year and changed curriculum.

Note taking in class.

This is what “Even though I’d like to come out, it’s not a pressing, burning thing, cos I feel like I’m doing this amazing job of opening kids eyes up, all the kids eyes up and they don’t have to sort of go ‘she’s just going on and on about how wonderful gay people are because she’s gay.’ They don’t have that as a block, in that sense. It’s more that they can look at all these things and and analysis them and not feel like they have to – not sort of feel like they’re being pressured into anything, but they get to make their own minds up about it.”

“I’m incredibly happy because this stuff didn’t come from me…I just don’t see this as been me.”

“They’ve all got that understanding, some of them are obviously more or less articulate, they’ve all got this understanding which makes me very optimistic. However, at the same time I still see that there’s not really much movement, is there? There’s still not a lot of gay and lesbian teachers that are out.”

(being out hinders? Part of the dilemma about coming out?)

“It’s only one little fractional thing. Only a tiny little thing. Cos that’s not the real reason. The real reason is something that I can not explain. I mean I know it’s got to do with fear, but I can’t (pause) you know (pause) it’s like – fear of what? You know?”

“When I do think about it, you know when something sparks that thought, and it’s not frequent, but occasionally, I think ‘yeah, what is stopping me?’ But I can’t, you know, I can’t tie it down to anything and say that’s stopping me, and I can fix that. Cos I suppose that I don’t have the sense that I can.”
“Well what impact does my sexuality have on my day to day professional practice? Well, none, in that sense. I go about my job, doing what I need to do. I’m getting across all the ideas and the stuff that I want to do, which is quite radical.”

“So I’m running a very very radical agenda. And that’s something that happened in the early days, now that I mention the word radical. That, that, there was this sense that if I came out, you know, this is a thought from a long time ago. If I came out if would endanger my ability to run a radical agenda. Now I haven’t had that thought in ages cos I’m so used to running my little radical agenda. But that was a thought I had early on, that I can’t, that everything that I say will be seen as coming from this feminist lesbian perspective, by my colleagues.”

“So when I sort of suggest to them that we do these different things, like maybe we could do a little gay support group thing - I mean I have said that to the different welfare coordinators, you know, I sort of leave it at that, and leave it from them to get on and do it, because I don’t want it to be seen that I’m sort of pressuring, because that’s how they will see it.”

[unclear] “because there are these people who still do think ‘what’s she going on about?’”

“And I suppose that that’s something that has given me a freedom to just be as over the top as I like in a whole range of different ways, and not have that be attributed to my sexuality. Now, that’s’ the best I can come up with.”

“And because I’m running a very radical agenda, I don’t have a sense of guilt. I don’t have a sense of that real repression that some people – I don’t know.”

“I don’t if people who are gay and lesbian who are teachers are really – I don’t know what they’re thinking. Who knows what they’re thinking.”

“I just know that I just feel quite free to do what ever I like in terms of the teaching. And don’t have to worry about that other aspect.”

Coming out? (my dilemma, perceived shame)

“I know I’m not ashamed of it. I know I’m not ashamed of it.”

People who are closeted verses obvious dykes.

A-sexual until 19, got through school without tortured adolescence.
Coming out in 80’s was very welcoming, women’s meeting and issues of boy children. 

“There was always that sense of acceptance, there was never a minute of shame.”

(phone call – stop tape)

Difficult family, coming out to family was a nightmare.

Family in denial, gave them an ultimatum.

Family came and stayed, and all went well, were comforted by partners family.

Anti racism program at school. “But I thought I might get the principal or managers or whatever to make the anti homophobia thing a little more explicit. Because there still is a lot.”

“But there are lots of classes where that whole ‘gay’ thing and ‘poofter’ and whatever whatever goes on and on and on. And kids are called that and everything else. And they’ve sort of put that on the agenda a little bit.”

“The straight teachers, maybe they just don’t see that as…and I cant say that I see, I mean calling someone a poofter – Because I’m beyond that. But I’m not a bloody 14 year old!”

All teachers deal with things differently, so who knows?

Had to explain pin ups in PE office to admin and get them removed earlier in career

“When I first started there were not any regulations that protected anyone from anything.”

Dealing with sexual harassment case.

“All that time, like, it was the homophobia, it was the sexism, all that had been going on creating this incredible culture and um, again, I was able to um, I mean at the beginning not everyone knew I was a lesbian obviously, because he didn’t know.”

“I was able to survive that better not being out [to staff]. You know, 15 years ago it was a different, there was a different environment.”

“No one would say it to me again, because you know – they’d be afraid – but you know I think there is a sense it’s none of you, it’s none of our business. Like we don’t really
care about your sexuality. Even thought they’re quite happy to talk about whatever.”

1.05.1 “And ultimately, because there are so many other areas where I don’t see eye to eye…I can’t, I don’t have time you know to discuss in depth all of those different things. But I think systemically, what cant he school do to make – I think it’s not about me, I don’t think it’s about my sexuality, I think it’s about the kids. I think we need to have more things in place that allow the kids to um be free of that.”
Appendix 6

Transcript, Brian

.00 - Teaching since ‘94

.25 Teach geog and history, classroom, no positions of responsibility

.40 Identified as gay for whole career

.45 (do colleagues know?) “Yeah. Yeah. There’s a big gay teacher community here. (really?) It’s like gay pride sometimes, yeah, there’s ah, probably at least ten.”

1.02 (how many staff?) 100

1.10 (does management team know?) “It’s not, eh, yeah they do, well one persona defiantly knows. He’s one person I have the most kind of contact with, but it’s not really a discussed issue. He knows without me having to have said anything. He’ll like sometimes refer to my partner and him being male. Which is quite interesting considering that I haven’t told him, and it’s not that obvious, so...(laughs).”

1.36 (do students know?) “No, no.”

1.40 (was that a conscious decision?) “Yeah, it always has been. (yeah?)

1.45 taught in England for 8 years, then here for 4-5 years.

2.00 (why not tell students) “Well, it’s not, I don’t think it’s got anything to do with my ability as a teacher. And, it’s my private life, it’s not something that I choose to broadcast. It’s not something that I say, ‘oh, I’m really embarrassed about’ but it’s, it’s just not, not any of their business, it’s not relevant to what I do. And I’m sure there are kids, I know there are kids who are, we have a lot of kids here who, um, come out and you know that they would twig upon things you say, you know that they might know, but it’s just not spoken about, and I just don’t go any further.”

2.45 “Like people chose not to talk about their private lives, you know, I’ve never actually been as- I mean sometimes they ask me if I’m married and stuff like that, but (indistinguishable) I just say to them ‘I don’t ask what you do when you go home.’”

3.05 (gay kids associate with gay teachers) No, they go to counselling team.

3.30 “We had one outrageous kids here, God, he was really out there. And he got in a lot of trouble because they went on a
school trip and it was during the Sydney Mardi Gras, and he ended up getting off with this lad in the street, and then getting drunk, and then ended up in a gutter and was suspended from school and stuff like that. He was quite open about talking about all that. But you know, because this is a school where their eccentricities or sexualities are actually really accepted...it's unique in that they can talk about it to their friends, so it's not really pushed under the table as much as in some other areas."

4.12 (culture of acceptance?) “Yeah, I was really surprised, we have our formals and maybe every other year you'll get boys going with their partners and stuff, which is pretty interesting. And not one really bats an eyelid really. Or if they do, they’re not, they don’t feel comfortable to criticise.”

4.30 Generally accepting culture in the school, not mandated

4.50 (how has sexuality impacted on career?) “[long pause] It’s hard, it’s hard to think of anything that’s had a direct kind of...in the early stage of my career I think, eum, I think probably the advantage was being male rather than anything else, in the school that I worked in. I was able to get promoted really really quickly in England. And I think, err, because of my gender but also because, um, people that were single and didn’t have children got promoted very quickly as well, so...”

5.40 “But sexuality. No, I don’t think so. No. Like my direct gay-my direct boss is gay here, as well, so...”

6.00 (sexuality ever an issue – here or overseas?) “Never (really?) no, no. I’ve been very, well, very fortunate. I’ve never had a single negative comment about my sexuality within my earshot. Never. Never ever”

6.20 Been at this school for 4.5-5 years.

6.40 (comfortable here?) “Yeah” (what’s that about?) Sexuality, or in general? (both)

7.10 “I think there’s a number of different things about this, the way this school is. In that when I worked in England I worked in a really really tough inner city school where their problems were just horrendous, and I was more of a manager of kids rather than teaching them. And here I really like having to use my brain and I teach older kids here which is good, whereas in England I taught year 7 up to maybe 10 was the oldest I could go, whereas here I can be 12 as well.”

7.35 “And because they’re intelligent as well they understand, or they can tolerate my humour as well. And they’re, the people that I work with are very generally easy to get on
with, ummm, in England I worked with neurotic people generally, yeah, quite a lot, (muffled). And also there’s also less, although it’s extremely academic here, there’s a lot of pressure on results and that kind of stuff, it’s much less formal. Yeah, much less formal.”

8.10 Less clock watching here, can leave when not teaching

8.30 Do a lot of after hours work

8.40 Extracurricular stuff camp, activities, etc

9.35 (partner functions?) “Um….yeah, well, uh yeah, we don’t have um, a big like staff social thing going on. Because there’s quite a large staff here, it’s quite clique in some ways and I’ve never really been one for. .. like my best friend works here and you know I socialise with him and his girlfriend outside of school and whatever. And then there are three or four other people that started with me who I get along alright with. But, um, yeah, partners could come to social things, but we don’t have that many official whole school things, like one a year.”

10.20 (like a graduation, something like that) “Well, we have like a speech night, and then we have, um an end of year meal for the teachers which partners can go to. But I’ve never really encouraged it cos it’s really boring. I wouldn’t really put anyone through that…and most people feel the same, (yeah) yeah, most people feel they can bring their wives and partners or whoever, same sex it doesn’t, no one really bats an eyelid, but it’s (muffled)”

10.46 (it’s boring) “Whereas we have to go to some of these things”

11.00 (to bring a same sex partner) “It would be perfectly acceptable if I wanted to do that, you know, if I wanted to bring somebody along.”

11.15 (do straight teachers talk about their private lives, what do you think, given you public/private distinction)

11.25 “I think in my experience here most people are like that, most people don’t tend to talk about what goes on at home. Um, some people can go a bit mad when they have kids and things and all they can talk about is babies and stuff, and the kids will know if they’ve had a baby or something. They’re not really, they don’t really sort of, no. No.”

11.50 “The kids aren’t real….it’s funny in England they were hugely interested in your private life, whereas here they don’t tend to be so nosey.”
(why?) Not sure. Maybe different backgrounds. English kids were impoverished, being educated separated you. Here, they question why are you a teacher, not private stuff.

“Here, very early on, you know, they know if they ask anything then the shutters just come down and I don’t say anything. I teach a lot of year 9’s and then you follow them through the school so you don’t have to keep repeating yourself” England different kids every year.

(would it be different if you were straight, would boundary still be there?) “Yeah, I think so, I think that’s me (yeah?), I think that’s me.”

(school culture, where does it some from – especially given it’s reputation. Could you voice concerns to leadership?)

“I think... we have a principal who has very um, what’s word. He’s very socially conscious, I guess. And he is very much pro, um, your rights as a human being and stuff. So, for example, if anyone ever has any problems with their families or anything like that, cos, you know he doesn’t bat an eyelid about you having time off for stuff like that. And, you know, he, it’s a lot of um, I’m just trying to find a way to word it, he...there’s a lot of hearsay about things he’s done at previous schools.”

managements issues, bullying managers, principal, when approached he “was very reasonable about it, very fair...[personal issues and raising them with him]...he’s just very open to things like that.”

“A couple of the lesbians that have worked here and have had babies and stuff like that and ah, you know, he’s very much been a part of the conversation about, you know, sperm donors and all this kind of stuff. And you just know that he’s right on with stuff like that.”

“I don’t think he’s cause a big turn around in the way they think. I just think he’s incredibly easy to talk to, but I don’t think he’s made a massive change in my teaching here.”

He’s new (has their been a change since he started?) No. It’s not that different, some people at the top end have noticed changes. Pros and cons.

“I wouldn’t have any doubts you know, about being completely honest about my sexuality in (muffled) front of him. Really, not at all, no, not at all.”

(choosing schools – what influenced/s your decisions?) “Sexuality doesn’t come into it at all, um, consciously. Um, I wanted to work in an academic school after working in such
a horrible school for eight years. It wasn’t horrible, it was just different and I actually wanted to use my brain again.”

17.35 Done research, wanted to work in inner city, close to city, didn’t want private school

17.55 (why not private school? Personal preference?) Yes

18.05 (did you think about coming out, doesn’t sound like it’s a big issue?) “It’s never been an issue, no.”

18.15 (any staff here who are out to students?) “Not, um, only by hearsay, and gossip. Like I can tell you, yeah, they have. We’ve got quite a few outrageous queens who when they have too much to drink say far too much. And so probably those two are infamous, yeah. (right) But not as a rule, no.”

18.43 (is there an issue with that, would there be a backlash if someone came out?) “Um, I don’t think so. Um…. No. I don’t think so.”

19.13 “There have been a couple of times when I think I have been caught out. So, I. I have a year 12 form, so they’re quite switched on quite old and ehm, I was walking down Chapel St with my boyfriend at the time, and I’m not a big one for public displays of emotion, and at that point I actually was holding his hand, it was quite late at night, and one of my year 12s was coming straight towards me and I know that he saw me but it didn’t go any further than that.”

19.40 (yeah) “And I kind of worried about it for half an hour and then I thought, well…(had a bit of a sleepless night?)…yeah, no, that’s even an overstatement. It was, I probably just thought about it for half an hour, thinking ‘oh shit’. But then, I knew this kid. I taught him for quite a long time and I kind of just thought he wouldn’t even make a big deal out of it… And then um…”

20.00 “A lot of them do guess about your sexuality. But it’s just not particularly an issue. I mean, it’s funny, because sometimes I’ll see them after they’ve left school, and they’ll, they’re a bit more bold then. Then one of them said, oh, um, you know we had some issues, we had some doubts about your sexuality at one point. So there wasn’t anything major. And then they move on to the next topic, you know, leaving my jaw on the floor. “

20.20 “You know, but I don’t think it would be an issue” (what if it had been a different student?)

20.35 “I don’t think so, because a lot of the stuff here is that they’re very, they’re so concerned about their academic progress
that they’re more concerned about what you’re like as a teacher. And that’s really what it boils down to.”

21.01 Students care more about academics and teaching. Weird teachers, but they enjoy that, regardless of sexuality.

21.30 (why part of study?) “I kind of thought, when I got your email, I just thought, I wanted you to have, like, I’m not saying you’re going to get all negative things, but I just wanted there to be the example of me where yet it hasn’t been an issue – I don’t know whether you’re going to come across people like that at all. “

21.49 “But I’ve been very lucky, fortunate, whatever but it just hasn’t been an issue when you boil it down. And I teach in an all boys school as well, you know, and if anywhere it’s going to be bad it’s going to be an all boys school.”

22.00 Taught all boys in England. Not conscious decision

22.15 Choosing schools – preferred location of M******* to R*******.
Lots of contact with R*******, so connection exists

22.50 Not conscious decision to work in all boys. “It alters the way that I say things.”

23.10 “A lot of teaching is all about being an actor, and the performance, so it probably alters the way I do things (yeah)”

23.12 “I do catch myself being very camp sometimes. And I think ‘Oh God, what are you doing’ [laughs] Yeah. (do you stop yourself?). Mmmm.”

23.25 “Only cos I just think ‘Oh God, that’s just chronic’. You know sometimes I’ll catch myself at the back of the class and I’ll be standing with my hands on my hips and ‘what the hell are you doing?’ (both laugh). You know. It really is not, not needed.”

23.20 (why stop yourself? For students, or don’t want to be camp?) “I don’t know. I’m very conscious about my image. Um, and how I portray myself at school. I’m not overly worried outside of school. But, I don’t actually want the to immediately label me as being gay. And so I think I probably do think about it a lot in that sense. In terms of what…”

24.25 (what do you think they’d think?) “I don’t know really because I’m kind of contradicting myself. Cos I know they wouldn’t think of me as a less good teacher, but that’s what I would worry about. Even though I know in my heart of hearts they wouldn’t act like that…that’s kind of what I’m thinking.”
(school sounds like it always comes back teaching? But it does come up a little bit)

“Yeah, a little it. Yeah. You’re making me think about it”

“But I think that, that’s not just to do with being gay though. I, I’m always very conscious about what other people think about me. Like other teachers as well. Not in terms of being gay or whatever.”

“I didn’t I didn’t like it when I first started here because, in some ways, because there are so many gay teacher that work here. And it was like walking into the Greyhound or something. And we have this lecture theatre. And that’s where the first day is. And they’re all sat there. And it’s like new meat.”

“And I don’t like it being obvious. People gaydars being all di-di-di. On the first day. And there were eight of us that started on the first day, and um, three of us were gay. Me, and two lesbians. And both of them guessed, as well, straight away.”

Proportion or male to female teachers – 50/50. Lot of women in leadership.

(Main concerns are academic. Concerns about being camp, separation between public and private)

“Which is how it’s always been, yeah. Um, I kind of compartmentalise it really, I guess. That’s my workspace and then I’ve got my home time as well.”

(Gay students – any contact with you? Or just welfare). No, because there’s not a lot of one on one time with kids. “They were so paranoid in England, and they are here to an extent, about abuse allegations and things like that that you just never put yourself in a situation where you’re one on one with them.”

“The situation or timing has never kind of been right for that kind of thing.”

 Wouldn’t have had much contact with gay kids if not in form, or on camp etc.

“I mean, this one outrageous kid I was telling about last year would come in on a Monday morning and he’s start telling you what he’d done at the weekend and it was just like ‘I really don’t need to know.’”

He was quite outrageous and fucked up. He tried for shock value with other kids and didn’t get it.
“I kind of dreaded bumping into him, actually, outside of school, actually.”

Haven't bumped into kids at gay venues, seen them in the street, but not in venues. “I don’t worry about it. It doesn’t stop me doing anything.”

(Do kids have the same feeling about school being primarily academic?)

Kids get on with their work. Hard to say if there’s bullying. Very rare overt bullying. Still use homophobic language here.

Will pick them up on homophobic language. The expect it, harsh bullying policy throughout the school.

(why such strong bullying process?) Kids are eccentric, have been bullied elsewhere, so this “has got a reputation for accepting….have come from backgrounds in other schools of being, going through absolute hell.”

Get used the accepting nature of kids, because it's so prevalent. Even kids with major mental problems are not hassled.

Strong mental health focus at the school.

What’s the aim of the study? (Professional practice, teaching culture)
Appendix 7

Transcript, Dawn

.00 - 1.06 Teaching for 8 or 9 years

1.12 Teach visual arts, 9-12. Art coordinator

1.30 Been at this school for six years on family leave contract, was at other schools.

2.05 Identified as lesbian for whole career, only been out at this school.

2.15 Been out to students for four years.

2.25 (why out to students?) "I was just really comfortable at the school. And it’s a small school, it’s only about 600, 650 students and uhm I was fairly well known and it just – it actually happened accidentally. I know that sounds strange but, had some good relationships with some kids and one of the boys kept asking me – in year 8 actually."

2.45 "It’s really strange how it happened, you know, ‘have you got a partner? What’s their name?’ And I said, ‘oh, it start with S’ and then I finally said ‘oh, her name’s Sarah’. And then, yeah, I panicked after they left. And it’s really funny because I had year 12’s after then. And I said ‘oh look’ to some of the year 12’s. ‘Look, you’ll probably find out lalala that I’ve actually come out as being gay.’"

3.08 “One of the girls said: ‘Miss, don’t worry about it, we’ve kissed all the other girls in our year level, it’s no big drama. Get over it.’ And I’m like ‘oh, ok’ and that was as as easy and as smooth as it was."

3.18 (backlash?) “Nup, no backlash what so ever. They’re fantastic. Yeah…the guys and the girls. Sometimes the boys will come up to me and talk about stuff. Same with the girls. Yeah.”

3.30 (accidental – had you thought about coming out before you went into teaching) “I was at school – G________ – and to get the Bundoora job, I left, and one of the students I sort of…gave…became not friends with, but acquaintances with afterwards because she was devastated I left. And then she told me that they all knew when I was at G________. And that…yeah…she sort of came out as well. So blah blah blah.”

4.05 “So I sort of thought, well, ahm, I’ve never really hidden it. You know what I mean? Like it’s not been a big issue. Cos, I don’t know, I just think that visibility is important. And to
be…not… You’ve got to walk your talk, you know what I mean?

4.30 “I just sort of thought, ah, well, just to be strong and to basically think, well, if they have a positive role model…I was happy that they knew me before I came out. Instead of being a gay teacher who was coming to the school. Do you know what I mean? With their pre-conceived myths and, you know, concerns about what that meant. So they knew me before they knew I was a lesbian. And then that might make them question their homophobic, you know.”

4.50 “Yeah, and I thought to be a positive role model, in terms of if they only know one, cos it’s fairly working class up at B____, they knew one gay person and it’s positive role model, then hopefully they won’t, in their later life and with their own kids, be you know, perpetrating homophobic attitude and stuff like that.”

5.15 (worried out coming out before teaching, in Dip Ed). Did some gay stuff in Dip ed. “It was made aware to us when we were doing our Dip. Ed. And I sort of understood the importance of it then, I suppose.”

5.59 “Funnily enough, at this school, almost – oh, there’s about, there’s so many lesbians at my school. The assistant principal’s gay, the bloody ah, library teacher’s a lesbian, the media teacher who used to be there when I came out was is a lesbian, the woodwork teacher’s a lesbian. So within my own faculty – they music teacher’s is a, is going out with a woman. So there’s a lot of us!”

6.25 (they out to students?) No

6.30 (what’s that about?) “The library teacher, umm. She thinks a few of the kids know and that’s ok. Ah…I just think they’re fairly private people anyway? So I’m fairly out going and you know, I used to be very in your face. So, um that sort of suited my personality, too.”

6.50 “And I’m not sharing my private life with the kids constantly on a day to day basis, but, you know, there’s certain things that come up, that you share your, ah, experiences, cos you bring that back into the, you know… As somebody who lives, not a holistic lifestyle, but someone who’s into a lot of things and your experiences. And you share that, who you are, with the kids, and they grow from that, vicariously in some ways, so…”

7.15 (other teachers) “They don’t want to come out. And I’ve never. Some of the kids a couple of times have asked: ‘Oh is Miss M____ gay’ the assistant principal and I’ve said
‘Look, I’ve chosen to come out, I’m not going to out any other teachers, it’s up to them if they want to. If you feel comfortable, in an appropriate manner, to ask…’ you know.”

7.30 (backlash? – panicked in the moment, worried?) “No. And then later on I thought, I had really spiky hair, I think it was a bit purple at that stage, I had a piercing, what more can go wrong – you know that I mean? And being in the arts you sort of get away with a little bit of stuff.”

8.00 “Yeah, no, I really wasn’t [worried]. I really wasn’t. And the staff are really supportive there, so. We make jokes about it sometimes. The principal we have at the moment, he’s quite aware of the – he knows he’s got quite a few lesbian teachers and um he once said to the woodwork teacher about – we all put in for staff association – and they get, buy presents for people having babies, people getting married, and he once said to her ‘I know your crew don’t get any, any acknowledgement during those times…and I’m aware of that.’”

8.40 “It was really funny actually, last Christmas we were having a big get together, a meeting, and he said ‘oh, apparently there’s a surprise marriage that I wasn’t aware of that I need to hand a present out to’ so I pretend to get up (laughs). To pretend it was me. And everyone just laughs, the older guys, cos I’m out to the staff and we – you just make jokes about things here and there. Not in a derogatory put down, but just to make the point ‘oh yeah, the gay people will never get acknowledged in that area.’”

9.08 out to all staff, make jokes about it. “I just thought, the jobs hard enough as it is, if I can’t be reasonably myself, I just…. I don’t put on any facades about authority. I speak to the kids the way I speak to you, sort of thing. I find that works well for me and my teaching style.”

9.33 (sexuality had impact on career?) “I think…ummm…..I think that oh, this is a, this is a very um….I think that it’s enabled me to identify future queer students and, if not queer, maybe not fully straight. You know, and and, people, and kids…we’ve got quite a few kids who are struggling, you can tell, with their um, gender identity and maybe sexuality in some ways. So just to be aware of those kids, give them a little bit more support.”

10.25 “You know, even if I don’t teach them, just to find out who they are and you know, just generally make them feel that I care about them. And to try and, in away, open up a channel if they need to come and talk to me or whatever. So that’s been a good thing.”
[being out] “It’s made me more interesting. (how so?) Oh, the boys come up and say ‘Oh Miss, what do you think of the ‘Pussycat Dolls?’ You know, (muffled). Some of the kids, I mean, I don’t think I’ve had anyone, and of the kids be disrespectful about it, in terms of laughing behind my back or anything. I think I’d be very aware of that.”

“Um, yeah. Like I think it’s had a positive impact. On me, as a teacher and the experiences and who I am on the… I mean it’s so hard to separate sexuality and who you are, in your identity from what you do in a day to day, on a day to day life.”

“I mean sometimes I use gay examples. In discussing design elements and principles. When I’m discussing colour and use of colour in posters. Dark colours compared to the joyous gay colours of the Mardi Gras posters, and you know, all of that, so….”

“Or maybe tongue in cheek. I get away with more than I should actually. You know, when you’re talking about realistic art versus to abstract art and the slider (unclear) stylistic art in between, sometimes I say ‘Not everybody is fully heterosexual, not everybody’s fully gay, but then there is the slider.’ You know, I sort of use examples like that, to the seniors, to get them.”

“It’s improved my, grab-bag of jokes, I suppose, in the classroom”

(that you wouldn’t have done if you weren’t out?) “Yeah. I don’t think I could have stopped myself. I’m not very good at censoring myself.”

(so the impact of coming out is you are more open?) “Yeah. And I think that’s quite appreciated by the students at school. So that’s a good thing.”

(does the school matter?) “I do. I do. Because I just remembered as I’m speaking to you. Before I left G________ and, um we had – it was much more multicultural, and I, I’m glad I left because we having a lot more of a, a lot more of an intake of Turkish Muslims. And I remember someone yelling out ‘lesbian’ when I was walking across the quadrangle. They were in year 8. So…yeah…I think that…um, oh, I don’t know, maybe some different reli– See, this is the thing, because I’ve got Muslim kids in my class who are fantastic. And who we just have the best time with.”

“So, I don’t, ah, it’s really hard to, to work out. I think in a larger school, kids who don’t know me or don’t know my
reputation I could have opened up myself to be sort of like discriminated against.”

13.30 Size of school helps, taught most of kids at schools. Had a good rep.

13.50 (issues related to sexuality at school?) No, can’t think of anything

14.25 “There’s a couple of kids I’ve got in year 12 who ask me about my partner all the time and I have shown them, when I have had my computer, when I was doing reports, I’ve shown them photos. And they’ve been really cool, and they ask me about things.”

14.45 (Has being out helped or hindered teaching?)

14.55 “Yep, it’s helped” (how so?). “It’s just helped me be myself. So, um, I’m not finding that I’m having to consciously censor myself, ah, um, when using examples, when speaking about life experiences with the kids. A lot – I think because, not that I’m younger, but a lot of the kids I…who’ve got problems and issues tend to, not gravitate, but they, I do have a fair bit of welfare, sort of, you know, involvement.”

15.30 “I think some of the kids realise that I’ve been through a few things, so they’ll be more, ah, likely to come up and speak to me about some troubles that they’ve had, or whatever. And know that they’re doing it in a safe environment, and a respected environment, and, ah, yeah.”

16.00 Takes on welfare role. Had student “a young girl who wanted to speak to me, and me alone and wouldn’t speak to anybody else” and assistant prin wanted that to be referred to welfare team.

16.42 “Sometimes I put myself at risk, I suppose. In that way. By, um, you know, offering welfare support um when I am not trained in it. Cos I could. If there parents aren’t happy about their kids talking to me. I don’t know, I’ve never really had an issue where I’ve had parents complain or anything like that, so I’ve been very fortunate. But I suppose I have to be more careful about that in the future.”

17.15 (welfare team, structures for kids) Took gay lesbian allies kids to conference.

17.50 “It’s very supported at our school. In terms of ah, if you are feeling that way inclined, there is, there is discreetly a way of getting information.”

18.20 Conference for kids run by Felicity. Avenues for kids to find out info about sexuality, privately.
(does kids being comfortable make you being out easier?)
“Yeah our school’s really proactive on addressing homosexuality when they’re doing their, it’s called ‘sex drugs and hip hop’” 9 & 10 core subject. Discuss homosexuality etc in those areas.

Well supported in the area with lesbian AP, Koori students are well supported. “huge massive push in our school”

“It’s a good school. It’s an inclusive school which I really like.”

(comfortable there?) “Yeah. Oh yeah”

(any other reasons you feel comfortable there). Own ceramic room, it’s located in the bush.

“It’s just a really relaxed, ah, school. I’m not saying it doesn’t have its problems. It’s just the atmosphere there is ah, easy going, the students are easy going and friendly.”

Lots of extra curricula stuff. “It’s a really friendly, comfortable school. And I suppose, as well, having quite a few gay women in my faculty and around, dotted round key positions at the school as well makes me really comfortable there. But not just those people.”

Small school, get to know families, friends, a lot of the kids.

“You walk in and just sort of feels like home, really.”

G_______ all rooms are used, here there can be no one round. More space. Do job and can be own boss, limited admin interference.

Parent tours come though art room, kids well behaved. Sculptures/art work are let in yard and not destroyed. Gives place culture.

“It’s really good, I feel comfortable there. I mean that’s not to say I don’t suffer anxiety at the school with certain parts of the job, like having extras and things like that which I hate.”

Just one of the down sides of job. Extras etc.

Take extras for nature walks. B_______ location. Primary school attached

Hoping to get ongoing job. Would look to go to private school if had to go elsewhere. Less classroom management. Don’t have many classroom management issues though.

Would like to teach tertiary, use ceramic qualifications.
Teaching year 12 visual design.

Happy to stay at this school and that should happen. Coordinating is easy, all women, share the load. Help each other out. Everyone takes on roles.

Some shit-heads there – Can’t stand 1% of student population. Rarely raise voice there.

(would you be out at other school?) “I think I’d have to be settled in there, and feel the vibe of the school, and the dynamics first before I, I’d probably make more of conscious choice this time.” (relating to school and coming out)

Taught in the West “…and I don’t think I’d be out in those places.”

(would the difference?) “Oh, I just think there’s a bit more of a redneck, homophobic undercurrent there.”

Went back and did teaching round at old high school in West. “And they had an incident, gave us a PD on gay students because a couple of years after I left year 12 there was a student who was…who, wrote back to them and was going to sue them because she wasn’t protected…by teachers. And was quite, um, like discriminated against by students as well. She was fairly androgynous looking and yea, there was a lot of taunting going on through her high school experience.”

“And yeah, she was going to sue the school. And so they had to do a PD on gay students and …” Remember own experiences, had a teacher who said all art teachers where lesbians “There can be even be homophobia that exists within the staff.”

Starting at B______ “There was always a lot of homophobic ‘oh that’s gay’ ‘she’s gay’, ‘he’s gay’. And I really noticed that at the school. And I brought it up in a staff meeting in the first couple of weeks, when I first started there and I think maybe from me being there and me being out and me working on the kids that has really minimised. And the other staff are onto it as well.”

In combating it: “They’ll say ‘oh, but I didn’t mean it that way’ but I say ‘what’s- let’s use your last name, cos you’re saying that’s gay, you’re saying it’s shit, it’s crap. So let’s use your last name – that’s so…Smith’, or whatever – you now what I mean? Or that’s so, let’s use a racial thing – ‘that’s so Abo’, or that’s so, let’s use a religious thing, ‘that’s so Muslim, it’s crap, it’s shit. You find that…That’s offensive now’. Just trying to make them – and I know they don’t mean to do it and they apologise to me after class if it does slip out. It’s
just a part of their, their um popular culture vernacular and I
think that hopefully I’ve had a bit of an im-, you know…a
influence over trying to stamp that out or trying to make the
kids think twice about it.’

30.23
“I mean, Christ, I used to use it when I was at high school as
well. So I’m not too heavy on it, you know but…yeah. And
it’s not just me, it’s other teachers. Like the woodwork
teacher who’s a lesbian gets onto that as well and she’ll site
me as an example ‘How do you think Ms____ feels when
you say that’s gay’ and, you know, makes ‘em feel like shit.”

30.43
“We all, we work together, I suppose, to create a culture in
the school, um, that is inclusive and that’s not homophobic,
racist or sexist, which is really good.”

20.50
“‘But, you can only do what you can do. Because they go
home, and I know some of the parents will – are
homophobic, or you know.”

31.05
(does it make a difference having someone who’s out to use
as an example?) “Yes, yes. Like even though she’s gay
[woodwork teacher], she’s not out, so she’ll say, ‘oh
Ms____, so your saying Ms____’s shit’, you know?”

31.15
“Just trying to make them questions. Even if they use the
word cunt I say ‘oh, ok, vagina. So you’re calling him a
them think twice about their…” Gangster talk comes to kids,
and is derogatory towards women.

32.00
(anything else?) “One of the year 12 kids said once ‘Miss, if
we ever heard that you were having an affair with a student
we would know that you would never do that.’” Talk about
them being her babies and being protective of them.

32.25
“I’m really happy that I’ve never had this happen, but you
know that old myth oh, if you’re gay then you’re into kids.
Especially (muffled) from a gay male perspective. But the
kids just know that that’s just not, you ca, you don’t, I don’t
sexualise the kids and if any staff do I just look down at…and
luckily that’s never happened in my school.”

32.48
“But from the feedback I’ve got from them it has been
positive that they have picked up on how I present myself in
regards to that stuff.”

33.00
(Other GL teacher hang out with at other schools?) No

33.30
other rough schools, friend works there

33.53
“Admin have a lot to play in how the culture of the school
develops, I think. Our principal at the moment is very into
being inclusive and and pushing the respect and things like that. And he works really closely with the assistant principal who’s a lesbian. So I always feel protected, within the aspect of being a gay teacher on staff."

34.17 “I haven’t been told if there’s ever been parents ringing complaining about anything I’ve said to the kids or anything like that.”

34.32 “I’m just really lucky.”

34.39 “I think it just comes part and parcel with my personality. I know a lot of teachers come in with this authority figure, and they don’t - I know when I was growing up a lot of teachers keep the kids at an arms length, and I think that they’re the ones who get more vilified, because kids want to bring them down a peg or two, to see the real them.”

35.00 Boundaries being an adult dealing with kids but “I’m pretty much myself at school, so, I don’t really have major issues with anything.”

35.20 Could change, hopefully won’t.

35.30 (Does having a lesbian AP make a difference.) Yes. “I think she’s so busy, that I think it’s a very small part of her job.”

35.55 “She’s pretty balls-y. She’s frickin scary sometimes.” She’s firm and through.

36.15 If a student was harassing me in a homophobic way, she’d deal with it very firmly.

36.40 Getting over teaching, spending so much time doing paper pushing, losing classroom time and it gets frustrating.

37.00 Principal out of favour at the moment, due to admin stuff. Find the job exhausting and wearing.

37.00 Have friends at school, and have a “safe, nurturing environment” so am really lucky.

38.30 (discuss research)

38.48 “It’s a fine line, because would you discuss your private life in general with the kids? Do you know what I mean? Like I don’t look down on teachers who aren’t out um, for that reason that they want to keep their private life private.”

39.04 “But then on the same hand if one of the kids said ‘Miss, are you gay?’ then, do you lie? I don’t know?”
“The kids do like to have that personal interaction with you every now and then. To feel special to you or just to bond with you on some level.

Can talk while kids are working, so a lot more connection with kids.

They appreciate the familiarity; dislike teachers who are very distant with the students.

Do need to be clear about boundaries between being relaxed and keeping respect. New kids can be too relaxed, not following rules.

Run a tight ship. Once respect is established, then we can have fun. I can fire up, and that scares them and then there is no need to do it a lot.

Tough job, same pay if you do a good or bad job. Most teachers have integrity and do more than bare minimum.

“I’m just really lucky to be able to go work and be reasonably who I am, you know what I mean? And to be accepted by the kids and appreciated by the kids.”

Some kids are very protective. “I that they learn better when you do endear yourself to them. And it’s not sucking up, they don’t want to have you as a bet friend. It’s not about that. It’s about treating them as a reasonable human being.”

When you were growing up teachers had a big role, it’s a big job and big responsibility.
Appendix 8

Transcript, Susie

.00 - General info – years teaching, no formal positions of responsibility. Teaches English and SOSE from 7-12

1.18 Will stay in teaching, ultimately interested in curriculum, rather than student management.

1.40 (out to staff?)

1.43 "Other staff who I talk to…People in my faculty who I talk to would know…ummm…yeah one of the vice principals does. It just depends on who I talk to about social stuff…but I think that people are often surprised…like if I say partner, they assume that it’s a guy."

2.17 (do you always correct them?) “I just correct them either way.”

2.40 (on coming out to as a teacher, how decisions made?) “I thought about it, but not in terms of other teachers. I think that I thought about it in terms of students and thought mmmm, I’ll wait and see. And (pause) and now I think (pause) I don’t feel like I’d be comfortable to tell them still (pause) ummm (pause). But teachers I think I just thought well, I’ll wait and see who I end up talking to…and…if it comes up, I’ll tell them and there shouldn’t be any problems”

3.24 (why not tell students?) “I think it’s partly (pause) partly just not quite feeling confident yet (pause) in my own teaching. So if they had that as like an ammunition or something extra they can get me with then it would cause kids to bully me….I’m starting to feel less like that’s the problem at them moment though. It’s it’s all coming together a bit more now.”

3.50 “I think that won’t be much of a factor in future (pause) um (pause) but then (pause) I think it’s also (pause) that I’m not I don’t feel secure enough in the leadership of the school that it would be, if anything happened, like a problem happened or, you know, if there was a complaint from a parent, I don’t even know where I get these ideas from, that they wouldn’t really be very supportive…(yep)..and I get that from attitudes to students… and just…yeah…and just the closeted nature of some of the staff at the school who are in leadership positions… (ahhhh).who are gay as well. So it’s just kind of …yeah…it’s just what gives me the impression.”

4.48 (so, from the top?) “I just don’t think that they would respond very well (pause) or be supportive. I think they would be the kind of people who would say ‘well, you shouldn’t have said anything’”(right, so it’s your fault?)
“Yeah….but it’s difficult, because if you’re asked directly by a student, and you lie…” (and have you been in that situation?)

“Yes (one to one or in front of a class?) In front of a class. But I think the thing is, the kid was just saying it as like a joke, or maybe he’s got family who’s gay, so he feels comfortable to say it, but I actually said ‘No. I don’t have a girlfriend’. And I’m like … ewww …well, I said to myself well, technically it’s not true, she’s more of a wife, really. She’s not really a girlfriend.”

(did you feel bad?) “I felt a bit bad. But I think it was difficult as well because it was in front of the class and maybe if it was one on one I wouldn’t have felt the need to. They’re also my most difficult class…it’s just mayhem, that class”. (so, it’s a student management issue)

“It’s also that, I just feel that I don’t want to create anymore distraction for this class, because there are a lot of boys who are really lovely, but they’re just really immature and they can’t sit still and I reckon that me being a lesbian would be more kind of excuse to be silly. Basically.”

(on coming out in career) [long pause] “I think it’s a matter of trusting as well that you’ll be supported if you do and it you are attacked on that basis.”

would leave school if felt coming out had led to feeling physically threatened and the school didn’t support. Smaller scale would probably stay there.

(coming out – eventually?) “I don’t, I would have to weigh up that risk as well but I suppose thinking about it now, that you’ve asked me that…I think that it’s [long pause] it’s also ummm an issue of whether or not teachers should talk about heir personal life in the classroom.”

(what do you think about that) “I think that to some point it’s ok. Like obviously you’re not going to talk to them about your sex life and I hope that no one ever does…I think Helen Garner did and she got kicked out…but um, I think what annoys me is that heterosexual teachers can talk about their partners and, I know that some of them are aware of the flaw in doing that. Like there are friends at school who go you know I shouldn’t do it, because you guys can’t really do it, or it’s harder for you guys. But, it still comes out…(yep)..just in conversation. So that bothers me.”

“And then I, and then I, start to think, well you know, is it appropriate, or not? I’m so caught up in the fact that they do it but I don’t (yep). So I’ve got to find other ways to
…because you do need to show some part of yourself like, you’re building relationships so you’ve got to find things in common that you can talk about, or common interests, or things, you know, family stuff maybe, but…so I think that, I think that, it’s ok for teachers to bring their personal lives into the classroom but I think that…where’s there’s no….where there’s a lack of support for queer teachers, there shouldn’t be straight teachers talking about their relationships as well.”

9.56
“A friend at school did have this great idea. She’s straight; to get all teachers to wear a tee-shirt that say ‘I could be gay’. For one day. And just confuse the hell out of them, which I reckon is a great idea.”

10.17
(double standard is problematic) “Just the lack of awareness of some teachers around that as well. And also that fact that some teachers use homophobic language, like ‘gay’ or ‘this is gay’. Probably thinking that I’m not gay, or probably not even aware of it…ummm… (like the kids are)...yeah, and then I just think.. why’s it only up to a few people to pull people up on that stuff? Yeah, I think the language is a big problem. People just think, oh, don’t be so politically correct, or don’t, you know it doesn’t matter; it’s just something people say. But, I think it does matter.”

11.09
(Staff using homophobic language)

11.30
“It think that there would be teachers who would not say anything if they overheard a comment like that [homophobic], or a kid calling another kid a faggot or whatever.”

12.12
(is the comfort level of sexuality an issue for you?) “[pause] It is something I think about. And that I worry about. But it doesn’t…I guess it’s easy for me as well because I look like the typical straight person most of the time….so it’s not something that worries me regularly, but it is something that I would think about every now and then, or I’d be worried about, you know if girls found out they’d think I was trying to crack onto them and all that sort of stuff. I do fear that.”

13.00
(Boundaries with students. Crossing boundaries, regardless of sexuality. Duty of care issues)

13.30
Student with paedophilia writing folio stuff. Sexuality not at issue, it’s about teaching maturity.

14.45
(does being out make you more vulnerable?) “I guess it just adds another layer…I think…it depends on the schools demographic, I suppose. But, yes. I think that people who are queer teachers would be more, you know, first of all they’d be showing their sexuality in some way. Or you know, they’d become a like a sexual object in some way. But then,
on top of that, I think that if they were queer that would cause other problems, just because it’s still not accepted by a lot of people in society.”

15.30 (school demographic) middle upper working class. White, European

16:12 “…very clear boundaries of gender. Like, like there are some kids who look alternative and are probably queer and some would be defiantly queer. They, they really stand out, and they hang around together…they’ve got a little gang, that’s like at the opposite end of the school to the footy oval.”

16.40 “There’s not a lot of diversity in the school.” Alternative kids hang out together across year levels, shows lack of diversity.

17.15 Queer kids tap into welfare team, they struggle, unmotivated, seem older than they are

17.50 “They don’t really come out to teachers. Even quite, like traditionally gay looking teachers.” come out to het teachers

18.20 Come out to teachers who build good relationships with students.

18.50 Come out to teachers who seem less intimidating

19.20 No formal network for queer teachers

19.30 (on typically gay looking teachers having a harder time) “No, I don’t think so. They’re older and more confident. Actually, one of them comes out to students and they just don’t believe her because they’re kind of naïve in that way.”

20.08 “She’s older, maybe they see her as like a mother or grandmother figure. You know, but she’s totally butch looking”

20.30 On above older gay teacher: “She’s feels very comfortable”

20.45 Has your sexuality impacted on your career?

21.00 “I think it’s…I don’t think it’s really impacted …in a negative way, apart from the fact that it worries me every now and then, to think about students finding out.”

21.20 (do you change your life to protect yourself?) Moved further away for own reasons

21.45 “Now that I’ve moved further away I do feel more comfortable to hold my girlfriends hand on the street or something like that.”

22.08 Wouldn’t kiss girlfriend in public round kids
22.20 Partner spoke to kids on train.

“I think they’re more self obsessed, more than anything. I don’t think they really notice, so it’s more probably in my mind.” Didn’t notice dykey girlfriend

22.30 “I think it’s not really part of their world”

22.40 “I think unless they’ve got someone queer in their family, they don’t really have those sort of signals, they don’t have the ability to read those signs.

23.00 partner speaking to students in public makes me uncomfortable, just because they’re students

23.35 (Will sexuality impact career?)

23.45 “No….I think, if anything it will become less of a problem as I teach more.”

24.00 “As I get more comfortable with it, and I don’t feel as threatened by students and, you know, having to deal with issues that come up in class. Yeah, just not feeling so stressed about that. Just feeling more of a teacher presence.”

24.15 “It might become easier and it might even become you know, just a case of just being honest. ‘No, I don’t have a boyfriend. I have girlfriend.’”

24.25 “I think I could get to that point. It’s just that I feel I need to be more comfortable as a teacher, in a way.”

24.36 “Just feeling calmer, because I think it takes a little while to know what you’re doing…and if your strength is not in building relationships, it takes a little while to do that, as a teacher as well.”

24.50 It’s taken four years to get comfortable, so that will get better over time.

25.30 (do you feel comfortable at school?)

25.50 “Mostly yes, I feel comfortable” likes faculty, has friends.

26.15 Not a good connection between leadership and teachers

26.40 Inconsistency about values and ethics and inconsistency between faculties. Poor leadership

27.15 Feels decisions are not supportive of teachers

27.30 Different leaders have different approaches and problem solving)
Requires more self sufficiency and less seeking of leaderships advice

Seeks advice from friends rather than ‘leaders’

Leaders give bad advice

(question 6 – critical incidents?) No.

(Other issues?)

question of whether I want to be a support person for queer students? Do I want to? Part of me does want to set up structures to support students.

Think I’m not qualified, untrained, unsure of aims and possible outcomes

no time for it, don’t want to start something as it could be unprofessional if not done properly. Should be done by those who are trained

“There’s a danger of becoming like… some sort of figurehead and it’d be kind of like having a little cult of students (laughs).

“I think that that’s a problem for teachers anyway, teachers can become too close to students and want to solve all of their problems…and that’s really dangerous because then they feel like, you know, in a way it’s helpful because maybe they don’t have support from somewhere else, and they want support from you. But it’s also crossing a line.”

“I don’t really want that kind of close relationship with students. I just want a bit of banter and, you know, to be able to tell if they’re going ok or not. (yep) I don’t really want to know that much, I think. That’s what worries me.”

(relationship building)

crisis management, dealing with kids. “I think that unless that’s your job, you probably shouldn’t be doing it”

Teachers who invest in kids with problems. Become overworked.

“There’s just, there’s no time for that in your job. (yep) You need to teach, you don’t, you’re not a counsellor.

PD on homophobia, supporting queer students

There’s a need for a whole school approach for dealing with homophobia
Would like to do something but “...it needs to be done with maturity and some sort of wisdom...it can't just be based on forming relationships with the kids who are gay.”

(whole school approach?) Yep.

should be about educating other kids, and including it in the curriculum.

Should be about finding out about what's going on for those kids, because we don't really know enough.

Wasn't queer at school, so don't really know what's going on for them. Wonder if they're ok, because friends who were gay at school, have heard bad stories.

Issues of queer suicide

Own experience was different; so don't really know what it's like to be queer at school

Don't want to be complacent, because it wasn't own experience, didn't have to hide it etc.
Appendix 9

Transcript, Jodie

.00 - 3rd year out, English/SOSE, at new school in third year
1.01 ID’ed as queer for whole career
1.13 (at old school) “There were quite a few queer staff at my previous school, so it was quite fine to be out, because everyone else was. Here, I’m still using it out. Like, if people I ask, I tell them the truth as far as, you know, your partner. And I’ve got a ring on my engagement finger, so people often ask questions, so, and when they ask, I answer them honestly, but it’s not something I, you know, I’m not politically active or anything in the workplace, but yeah, I don’t feel that I need to conceal anything”
1.50 (out to students) not at this school, as less conversation
2.00 “But at my previous school, I was absolutely out to students.”
2.10 “I thought about it very carefully when I started and I honestly think that it can’t be something that people have to hide or are ashamed of. And I think if we reinforce that to kids all they’re going to do is continue to believe that it’s something that should be secret and I think that’s bullshit. “
2.30 “And also, I don’t believe in queer stereotypes, so I like that I kind of represent something that’s possibly a bit different to what they might think a lesbian is (yup) because I’m femme and I like, you know, being girly in the inverted commas…(laughs)...whatever that means. So I kind of like that I can challenge them on that kind of stuff too.” (yeah)
2.55 “And I had conversations with kids about it. And I defiantly called them on it when there was any homophobia in the classroom, you know. So, and that lead to conversations. And, yeah, it was fine. It never anything that I had to worry about.”
3.10 (before you started teaching…) “I worried about it before I started, cos I, you worry about everything (laughs). I was defiantly nervous about, you know, what that would mean, but you know, I sussed out the culture within the school and I guess, being a State school made it a lot easier, because I knew it wasn’t something I could be fired for.”
3.30 (did you check that out first?) “Oh yeah, (yeah) oh yeah. You know, if I was in a Catholic school I certainly wouldn’t have... (yep)... been so free. I probably still would have umm found it difficult to lie about it. (yeah) but I wouldn’t have been as open.”
3.50 (why thinking about Catholic schools?, friends went to them etc)

4.10 Got a job at state school. Didn’t apply many places. Got first job.

4.20 (about taking job) “Yeah, I guess I kinda researched it and sussed it out a bit. But yeah, I knew a State school couldn’t fire me for being queer”

4.35 (worried about repercussions of coming out, not just being fired) “Yeah, look, I think I might have been a little naive not worrying about it...umm...I think I’ve had one or two parents who really appreciated how umm I cared about their kids...because I’m very much give a shit about what’s going on with them [doing psychology now, wants to more that teacher]...a lot of parents are really encouraging of that, and I think a couple of them backed off when they found out that I was queer. So (pause) I think, perhaps I didn’t think that through as well as I could have.”

5.15 (clarify?) “The parents became a bit more cautious about me. Um, I don’t know, maybe that’s me being paranoid, but I think I sensed sort of a bit more caution there. And I think that might be why. Again, there was never a ‘get away from my children you dirty queer kind of thing’, just a bit of cooling off. Not all of them, just a couple.

5.40 (how came out). Comes up in conversation, queer characters in books, homosexual undertones in texts?

6.15 (possible gay subtexts) “I just wanted them to think about it in that way. I wasn’t pushing it as that’s how it is, but just kind of open up different readings.”

6.42 “And kids are naturally curious. They ask you, don’t they? You know, are you married, do you have children, all this kind of stuff. And I think it’s good to be honest about that kind of stuff. You know, to a point.”

6.55 (tell any leading teachers of intentions?) No.

7.00 “Our leadership team were in no way hands on. They wouldn’t have given a shit. And they wouldn’t have ever really known, I don’t think.” Very separate to staff

7.10 “And if they’d had issues I would have called them on it.”

7.20 (has sexuality had impact on career....pause...re-state question)

7.37 “I think it’s influenced the friendships I’ve had with other staff members...I mean obviously you gravitate towards people
with similar interests, and similar, well often similar experiences of life. So my first school, um, I was friends with a lot of other queer teachers…not exclusively, but there was that. Um…I don’t’ think it’s been that…it hasn’t been that big a deal, to be honest. No.”

8.15

(any issues at school connected to your sexuality)

8.25

“Nothing spoken. There have been a couple, well there was one time where there was a student who I think was possibly questioning her sexuality and who saw me as, I don’t know if there was attraction going on, but I felt that it was very important to keep very clear boundaries with her because she was feeling a bit vulnerable and all that kind of stuff going on. So I think that may have, could have become an issue had I not been careful. Not that I was in anyway interested in her, but I think her attachment to me could have become a little bit, um, beyond safe, you know.”

9.08

“No, I don’t think there have been any negative sort of repercussions or issues.”

9.15

(school culture was accepting, or your own attitude?)

9.23

“I think it’s a combination. I think it is what you make it. I think if you act like you’re ashamed, or…um.. it’s something to be secretive about, then it becomes that. But yea, um, I was lucky that I wasn’t the token queer teacher. I mean this was a massive school, and it was a staff of, you know, 110. So, I mean statistically speaking I was never going to be the only one.

9.48

(were the others out?)

9.50

“Yeah, well, most of them. I was conscious of not outing them, cos I didn’t know, particularly with students, because I didn’t know how that was, but to most people, yes. To most, sorry, (laughs), students don’t count as people, to most staff members they were out. Yeah.”

10.13

“But at my new school, I’m not so sure. I’ve only been there for a few months”

10.18

Didn’t start at that school til March, as their enrolments came through later.

10.25

“I wouldn’t know who was queer there. There’s not a, I don’t know, there’s less interaction there…it’s, a, you talk to the people who sit near you. It’s a really office-y kind of environment.” (at your desk a lot?) “yeah”
(How many staff?) – lots, big school, probably about 100-150 staff. Less interaction than other schools. And I’m new. Some collaboration, but I’m still getting to know people.

(are you comfortable there?)

“Yeah”

(did you at previous school?)

“Generally speaking or relating to queerness?” (generally). “Generally speaking I feel much more comfortable where I am at the moment, because the leadership staff are much more positive, encouraging and involved. Um, at my old school, I never knew where I stood as far as you know whether I was in trouble, when I got sick, for not turning up at school. You know, that kind of stuff, it’s very much, it’s just, they weren’t, there was never any good feedback. I sort of felt, I was much more anxious and on edge there than I am here. I know I’m on the right track, I know I’m being appreciated for the work that I’m doing and I feel confident in what I do.”

(how much of that discomfort related to sexuality?)

“Oh, not very much, I don’t think. I think it was more to do with just shit stuff, leadership stuff…didn’t care”

(career path?)

“I’m going to stay in schools for the foreseeable future”

(does sexuality have an impact on future decisions?)

“I think it’s important that kids are exposed to different lifestyles in grown ups, you know, um, I don’t see it as my job to be um, some kind of, poster girl. But I do like that I can be somebody who shows them something different. And shows them that’s ok. Because I certainly didn’t know it was ok when I was that age. Um, I was told very clearly that it wasn’t. And that took some getting over, so, you, know, I like to think that of I’ve made it easier for anybody that’d be really awesome.”

“But, it’s not just, it’s broader than that for me. It’s broader than gender and sexuality and all that kind of stuff. I mean, I just think adolescence is a really shit time and if anyone can make it any easier for you in any way at all (laughs) then that’s a good thing. So...I really like working with young people, and I think I would always like to do that in some way.”
(would you work somewhere you would have to be closeted? Catholic schools?)

“I would find it very difficult. I can’t lie. I mean I can physically lie, but I really hate it. And it makes me feel really horrible, makes me feel like a really terrible person. I...So, I would see that as a kind of dishonesty and I don’t think I would feel comfortable with that for a long period of time.”

“I mean, if it was a matter of having to work for a few months CRT-ing because I needed the money, then maybe. But I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t commit myself to a school when I felt that way.”

(apart from feeling bad, would it impact on your teaching?)

“Yeah. I think so, cos I like, I like having open relationships with my kids. Again, like there are very strict boundaries, but I think kids know when you’re bullshitting them, and I think that affects the relationship you have in the classroom. So...yeah, I think it probably would.”

(other teachers and impressions – no idea, they could be closeted, no one I know of.)

(conversations with queer teachers?)

“Yeah, um, yeah, the main person was actually the woman who worked at reception. She was just, every dykey cliché ever. She was awesome. She was just totally hard core, you know, and I really liked her. So we’d have sort of jokey chats and she’d leave cut outs of Missy Higgins on my desk, things like that. So that was fun.”

“And I knew which other staff members were queer but, we, it wasn’t, again I don’t see it as something that defines me as an individual, I see it as part of who I am. So I don’t, it doesn’t end up being something that I talk about everyday. Like I would have been much more likely to talk to them about actual curriculum and actual students than I would be about that kind of stuff.”

(although, it is an issue. If I had had problems I probably would have gone to them and talked to them about their experience. But I didn’t have any problems with it.)

(homophobia amongst students? – referring to previous school)

“It was an extremely multicultural school and kids come out of very strong cultural traditions of religion that was really anti queer. So they’d be told by parents, their religious leaders, whatever, that this was not on. And I had some kids
who were quite vocally homophobic. And they would- it wasn’t ok in my classroom. It was a simple as that. You don’t, you don’t speak that way. We’re not racist, we’re not homophobic, we’re not sexist, we, everyone here has to feel safe and that’s the bottom line. You want to say that kind of stuff you can leave.”

17.15 (we’re you one of the only teachers doing that?)
1724 “I didn’t sit in other people’s classrooms, but yeah, I think a lot of it went by…unchecked.”

17.30 (can you change culture of school?)
17.35 “Yes, I do. I think, you can change how it is within school. I think you can change what it means for some kids. I don’t think homophobia is going to be eradicated because schools don’t tolerate it, but I think it makes a big difference. Because if kids are never challenged on it at school and it’s part of their culture at home, then there’s no reason for them to ever think otherwise. I don’t think it’s going to change the world, but you can make a difference.”

18.03 (why are kids like that?)
18.06 Asserting their own sexuality, self protection, they are dealing with their sexuality and peers a lot. Lot of anxiety round it for teenagers.

18.40 (teenage thing?) And cultural thing – home culture, not nationality.

19.00 “That school was very much a lower middle class school where people read the Herald Sun and watched Today Tonight and that’s were their politics came from. That’s a massive generalisation and I don’t think it’s fair on a lot of people.” But it would be the average student.

19.25 “It wasn’t something they’d ever had to think about before. It wasn’t part of their consciousness. And I like shaking that up a little bit.”

19.45 (that puts you out there a bit) “I’m a bit of a shit stirrer though. And I’m quite happy to take the consequences of that.”

19.50 (so you think it’s a personality-) “-yeah, I mean I can take it. I’m not a shrinking violet, I’ve got a big voice, I’m a big girl, you know what I mean? I don’t get intimidated by some kids like other people might.”

20.05 (was being out ever a problem?)
Was a school where kids would damage teachers cars if they didn't like them. Never happened to me, ever.

“And I think that’s partly because I built such good relationships with my kids. They knew that I cared about them. They knew that I was interested in, you know, their well-being and all that kind – it’s broader than just the queer stuff. So I think they respected me on different level, even if they didn’t think that, you know, my sexuality was right or whatever, there was more to it.”

(did you come out after building relationships?)

“Yeah, because that’s when they start getting interested in you and start asking questions, when they know that, you know, when you become more than Ms____ who teaches me English, then they want to know about who you are. That sort of stuff didn’t start happening until term 2, you know.”

“It’s not something I build up to and plan to happen, but it’s something that when it does happen, I’m ok with it.”

(current school) Less isolating, because not always rushing round. Still getting to know people. Like the one on one with kids on the phone, so don’t miss classroom as much.

(leadership – does it matter in relation to coming out?)

“It would in a non-state school, but again state school I know where I stand. If they give me shit, I’ll call them on it. I’ll say actually say no, this isn’t ok, I’m not going to lie to my students. I mean I think it’s also I’m not being too political about it. I’m not making everything about that. I think that they’d have a right to be concerned if that was going on. But I don’t think they have a right to be concerned about me being honest.”

(anything else?)

“I have had times… I think I’ve already mentioned this, when I’ve worried about a student (yeah) in that way.”

[teachers accused of misconduct] “It’s a position of risk when you’re in position of carer, you know, of responsible adult.” Not sure if it’s more common for gay teachers, have worried a little about it.

“You know, if you’re a person with integrity, and you’re open with you colleagues and your kids respect you, I think that if ever those kids of accusations were made, everyone would know that’s it’s bullshit.” (pretty confident with your
“Yeah, I have integrity and care about what I do and respect the people I work with and for so. I’m cool”

(main questions – teaching cultures, what impacts teaching)

“I’ve never been a conformer, I’ve never been someone who’s given much of a shit about that kid of stuff because I’ve always been the girl from the single parent family, I’ve always been the girl who has been a bit weird and a bit different and never particularity socially popular or anything like that. So conforming’s never been much of my, you know, who I am.”

“I think institutions are there to be challenged. I mean, I respect, I respect sort of structure and organisation and whatever. I don’t know, growing up in the Church as a queer person has meant that my respect for institutions has always you know, bit dubious.”

( come to schools with this understanding) “And my chin out a bit.”

“Cos the people, I’ve looked around me, who’ve have had the hardest time as teachers, it’s been a personality thing more than anything else. It’s been people who have been very quiet, and very shy. And who have also had to – you know, who are physically small and who have to assert themselves so much more, just because half the kids are taller than them. You know, all that kind of stuff. That’s’ the kind of thing that I would find hardest.”

Older queer teachers, had good relationships with kids.

“Most of them were…older? I don’t know of any first, second, third year outs there who were out. Um, and, as I said, my gaydar is pretty shit, but I don’t actually think any of them were actually queer. And again, I was so open about that I think I would be really surprised if in conversation none of them felt comfortable. Although that’s a pretty big assumption to make.”

On contract, felt undervalued and under appreciated. “No one paid any attention to what I was doing and no matter how hard I tried it wouldn’t have made any difference anyway.”

Getting good feedback at new school, enjoying it.

(thinking about coming out by before teaching rounds?)

Told teaching rounds school about sexuality before rounds, and they asked not to come. Ind. Christian School. School I went to.
Religious schools less tolerant, school itself is more conservative.

Rounds at P______, really open to staff there, did PBL at Melbourne.

Out to staff there, not students, didn't come up.

(does leadership matter?) “Not in a state school. I mean, they set the culture generally, but. No, I don't think it does. But I think at a private school it makes more of a difference because they literally control what happens. And I think, I'm sure staff, leadership staff can make it something that's celebrated and appreciated and valued.”

“I really hate it when sexuality becomes the defining feature of a person. That just really, really frustrates me. I don't want to be the gay teacher. You know, I want to be Ms ____ and that's part of who I am, but not everything.”

“I'm sure leadership staff can make it easier or harder, but I want to be appreciated for being a good teacher more than anything else. It just shouldn't be a thing, you know.”

(sexuality as defining point)“Some people love that. They see it as a community forming thing, and an identity generating thing and if that's something that makes you happy, then that's fantastic, but for me I just, I don't like being pigeon holes and I don't like being….I guess it's also 'cause I don't identify with a lot of queer stereotypes.”

Judgemental queer community, distancing myself from that.

(non normative sexuality – definitions etc)

“I don't particularly like being defined as a lesbian. Queer is probably the closest approximation to… I just love the people I love, you know.”

Discussion of gendered language etc.

(personality stuff) “That's’ a good lesson learnt. Working where you're comfortable. I didn't realise you didn't have to take the first job you were offered and try and keep it for as long as you can. Because I'm much happier where I am now.”

(why did you leave?) “I didn't like the culture of the school, more broadly, but it wasn't because of homophobia or anything like that. It was just; it was an underfunded state school who treated their staff like shit. Now I'm in another underfunded State school who treat their staff much better.”
Flexible for study, much better for those reasons. Got offered contract at old school, no option for ongoing. Felt underappreciated, unsettled.

Had hard year, applied for uni, got in, re-assessed school.
Bibliography


MELBOURNE GAY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS GROUP. (1978) *Young, Gay, and Proud!*, Melbourne, Gay Teachers' and Students’ Group.


Sexuality, silence and teachers: negotiating heteronormativity in school cultures


http://hdl.handle.net/11343/35133

Terms and Conditions:
Terms and Conditions: Copyright in works deposited in Minerva Access is retained by the copyright owner. The work may not be altered without permission from the copyright owner. Readers may only download, print and save electronic copies of whole works for their own personal non-commercial use. Any use that exceeds these limits requires permission from the copyright owner. Attribution is essential when quoting or paraphrasing from these works.