DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR ATTITUDES

TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND THEIR SEXUAL MINORITY COUNTERPARTS

by

MARILYN MITCHEL MCCLUSKEY

(Under the Direction of Robert Hill)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the attitudes of heterosexual educators toward homosexuality and sexual minority educators, and ascertain what factors contributed to the heterosexual educators' attitudes. The study also sought to determine if continuing education was believed to be valuable to learn about sexual orientation. This study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What are the attitudes of heterosexual educators toward sexual minority (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer, or LGBTQ) educators? 2) What factors lead to the attitudes that heterosexual educators hold toward homosexuality and sexual minority educators? 3) What value is placed on continuing professional education for learning about homosexuality and sexual orientation?

Twelve self-identified heterosexual educators participated in the study. Nine were elementary teachers, and three taught in middle schools. Seven African American, three Caucasian, one

Asian and one biracial educator participated. Two participants
were male. The group's religious affiliations were: eight
Baptists, two Non-Denominational, one Methodist, and one
Catholic. Data were collected through the use of semi-
structured, face-to-face interviews.

The data revealed four major themes. To the majority of
educators in this study, 1) Homosexuality is immoral and
unnatural; 2) Homosexuality is a personal choice; 3) Sexual
minorities do not conform to gender role expectations; and 4)
Homosexuality has a negative impact on children. Religion,
sexual minority acquaintances, and aging were found to have
fostered the heterosexual educators' attitudes toward
homosexuality and sexual minority educators. A significant
finding is that many teachers exist in a state of cognitive
dissonance. Educators in the study frequently held mutually
exclusive and conflicting notions, simultaneously. Some
educators, while holding negative attitudes toward sexual
minorities, acknowledge the rights of sexual minorities.
Teachers in this study expressed the belief that Continuing
Professional Education would be valuable for addressing the gaps
in their knowledge about homosexuality and sexual orientation.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to several people who have tremendously impacted my life and enabled me to reach this plateau. I know I wouldn't be where I am today without them. First, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, MAJ Derrick McCluskey, who whole-heartedly accepted the task of becoming momma, so that I could focus on my studies. Will, I know that it's over now, but you can still cook. Of course, I can't forget my babies: Se'von, McKenzie, and Blanche; I want you guys to follow in mommy's footsteps.

Secondly, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Thomas and Linda Gosier, and Marion and Velvie Mitchell. I thank God for blessing me with such wonderful parents. Since day one, I have been nurtured, supported, and encouraged to strive for GREATNESS!

I would like to also dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents, Ulysses and Johnnie Marable and the entire Marable clan. Guys, we have seriously put Dixie, Georgia on the map.

Lastly, without hesitation, I dedicate this dissertation to Dr. Robert Hill, my major professor, who truly deserves more than an acknowledgement. I am deeply indebted to you for your "unlimited supply" of support, encouragement, and wisdom.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

Since 1969, the time of the Stonewall Riots when gay rights came to broader public attention, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people have been at the center of a contentious debate over *sexual orientation and gender identity rights*. In 2004, because it was an election year in U.S. politics and the topic entered the partisan arena, the struggle became pitched as some states and local municipalities offered marriage and civil unions to same-sex couples; Right-wing conservative opposition to such unions also emerged. However, the national *gay marriage* debate was only the latest incarnation of the civil war about values of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) equality. It joins a list of social and cultural contests over sexual minority rights spanning more than half a century--and education has not been exempted from the fray.

For decades education has been at the heart of passionate debates. For example, "Homosexuality was considered to be innately evil; teachers were required to be role models of exemplary behavior" and school administrators were empowered to fire sexual minority educators at their discretion (Harbeck,

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1992, p. 121). The controversy of sexual minorities and education is one of the "publicly volatile and personally threatening debates in our national history" (Harbeck, 1992, p. 121).

According to Harbeck (1992), sexual minorities are seen as a threat to the traditional cultural principles that American education was founded upon, such as traditional family values and patriarchal social structure. Schools are the arena where this social conflict is played out. Altman (1982) claims that the moral majority sees the affirmation of a sexual minority culture and identity as a "threat to their most cherished values, to their children, and to the prevailing sexual order" (p. ix). This "majority" stresses those traditional values, such as religion and moral development, not homosexuality, be incorporated into school curricula (Harbeck, 1992). According to Lipkin (1999), in 1996 sixty-three percent of Americans disapproved or did not think schools should teach about "homosexual lifestyles" (p. 8). Anderson (1994) posits, "Our schools are in denial, and our administrative staff is in the deepest depths of denial" (para. 19). Teachers, guidance counselors, nurses, psychologists, and administrators need information and education about sexual minorities. "Professional development workshops go a long way toward accomplishing this goal" (Anderson, 1994, para. 26).

School cultures mirror the society in which they exist (Sears, 1992), and while educational institutions may choose to ignore or reluctantly address issues that pertain to sexual minorities, they will eventually have to learn about the history, culture, identity development and families of sexual minorities. If schools are to truly create inclusive environments in which the voices of all individuals are represented, educational practices and policies must accommodate sexual orientation differences.

> Remember, one of the functions of public education is to prepare students for the workplace. When we do not educate our students about the evils of bigotry and homophobia, we fail to prepare them for the world of work, which will surely bring them into contact with gay and lesbian colleagues." (Anderson, 1994, para. 25)

Sexual minorities are fast becoming more visible in society. According to Hill (1995), "A glimpse into everyday life reveals that gay and lesbian discourse is making its way into social structures" (p. 142). Hill (1995) describes a world in which gay themes are impacting education, the silver screen, politics, radio and television airwaves and the press.

Although American workplaces, including some limited number of schools, have to some degree already begun to address these issues by including sexual orientation into its

antidiscrimination policy (Day & Schoenrade, 2000), the vast

majority of schools are unwilling or unprepared to address

homophobia (Lipkin, 1999) even though other harmful prejudices,

such as those around gender and race, are challenged on a

regular basis. Schools will soon discover that there are

consequences for remaining silent. These consequences include,

but are not limited to: a distorted view of human nature,

bigotry toward sexual minorities, self-hatred imbued in those

who are or are perceived to be LGBTQ, and violence (Lipkin,

1999). Legal problems are also a growing consequence of being

silent.

People on the other side of this debate feel that schools

should focus on preparing students to live in a changing society

(Harbeck, 1992). This change, of course, includes the emergence

of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals in

society. In most schools the dominant social ideology is

reproduced (Giroux, 1983) and dominant cultural practices are

legitimatized and sustained (Willis, 1983). According to Hill

(1995), many gay and lesbian professional educators whose sexual

orientation is known by others, experience reproach; gay and

lesbian youth find little school support despite complex legal

issues facing school officials; and gay students have their

voices silenced as few adults effectively take up their cause.

Sexual minority individuals can be found in schools; thus, heterosexual students, their parents and guardians, teachers and administrators need to have accurate knowledge about sexual minorities. According to Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, & Stephan (2001):

> Teaching students the different-and often conflicting meanings of concepts and issues for the diverse groups that make up the U.S. population will help them better understand the complex factors at contributed to the birth, growth, and development of the nation. Such teaching will also help students' development, empathy for the points of view and perspectives of various groups, and will increase their ability to think critically. (p. 198)

According to Anderson (1994), ignorance perpetrates a climate of hate which cripples everyone. Professional development is crucial because teachers have considerable control over what is being taught in the classroom and the climate of learning (King & Newman, 2000). The knowledge that professional development provides can empower teachers to work with and meet the needs of diverse populations and in some instances give voice to those that have been traditionally marginalized.

School systems also need diverse role models and examples of tolerance in the classrooms. Psychologists have shown that in order to *know one's self*, we must first *see our self*; thus

invisibility works against developing a holistic perception of self in human development. More importantly, the prejudice and bigotry that sexual minority individuals face on a daily basis will not be eliminated until tolerance and respect for diversity is taught (Riddle, 1996). It is schools, according to Banks, et al. (2001) that "can make a significant difference in the lives of students, and they are key to maintaining a free and democratic society" (p. 196).

Teaching about sexual minorities and the diversity of sexual minority communities would help reduce the problem, such as homophobia, that silence creates. Unfortunately, this diversity cannot be propagated in schools if the attitudes and beliefs of administrators and teachers are not positive toward the issues affecting sexual minorities, specifically sexual minority educators.

> Many teacher educators still consider questions of sexual
> diversity to be outside their purview, a matter better
> relegated to the realm of morality and personal opinion
> than curriculum. (Birden, 2002, p. 2)

The heteronormative community that exists in some schools causes dissonance in the lives of some sexual minority educators torn between the need for acceptance by peers and the need to claim their sexual identity.

Despite the fact that school systems have "both overt and covert methods of subverting the efforts of those who challenge traditional concepts of teaching and learning" (Hampton, 1994, p. 122), the past decade has seen a growing visibility of sexual minorities. Although sexual minorities have emerged historically a number of times, most notably during the Stonewall Riots, their presence has become recognized publicly as a new minority with their own culture. According to Altman (1982), this development is a result of changes in the dominant values and structure of sexuality in modern liberal capitalist societies. There has been, as Lipkin (1999) describes, "an incremental infusion of the homosexual presence in to the nation's consciousness" (p. 97).

> More representations of gays and lesbians appeared in the mass media than ever before. Some of them were silly or malicious, but perhaps fewer than before. The gay and lesbian publishing boom has grown apace. More public figures are coming out-not all of them reluctantly. Fewer straight and gay people appear to flinch at the proverbial "we're here" and "we're queer". They are even beginning to "get used to it", notwithstanding some stubborn symptoms to the contrary. (Lipkin, 1999, p. 97)

Across the nation, a growing number of educators are electing to be out in their classrooms. These instructors are

able to create an awareness of LGBTQ issues in the educational

arena at all levels (e.g., lifewide learning).

> Lifewide learning acknowledges that learning occurs not
> only throughout, but across, lives. Increasingly, the
> school is recognized as just one forum in which learning
> takes place, as the neat division between working and
> learning, and indeed, between learning and living, is
> questioned. (Kalantzis & Harvey, 2002)

Recent public attention to the issue and legislation banning

discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation foster the

appearance that sexual minority educators have only recent

appeared; however, sexual minority educators have always taught

in our schools. In a growing number of instances, sexual

minority members of the academe are no longer forced to remain

invisible or locked in their proverbial closets.

> Despite the advances, all sexual minority educators do not

feel free to self-disclose. According to Skelton (2000), sexual

minority educators are choosing to remain invisible more so than

their counterparts in other professions. While there is little

reported on teachers in the United States, Skelton (2000)

provides data from the United Kingdom:

> It is interesting to note that whilst gay men in other
> areas of public and professional life appear to become more
> 'visible' and 'out' about their sexuality (for example, the

gay men now 'out' or 'outed' in the New Labour Government),

there remains a curious silence and invisibility

surrounding gay men in higher education. (p. 181)

It is important to note, while not forced to live in the closet, there are social, economic, safety and political reasons for remaining there. The secrecy has been further validated and reinforced by recent incidences (Sanlo, 1999), such as the backlash from the gay and lesbian marriage debates. "Additionally," according to Hill (1995), "many gay and lesbian professional educators whose sexual orientation is known by others, experience reproach. The opprobrium includes threats, rumors, anonymous phone calls, letters, notes and violent act" (p. 143). These educators find little or no school support and are constantly aware and reminded of the heterosexism that exists within their school walls.

According to *Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth: Report of the Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth* (1993), 53% of students report hearing homophobic comments made by teachers and school staff. These teachers remain unaware of the consequences of such verbal abuse on the abused and the "increasing probabilities of damage to educational opportunities and psychosocial development" (Birden, 2002, p. 1). Sears (1992) reports, "Eight out of ten prospective teachers surveyed harbored negative feelings toward

lesbians and gay men" (p. 39). One third of these teachers were classified as high grade homophobes which was "nearly five times as many as classified by Hudson and Rickets (1980) in their study of college students a decade ago" (Sears, 1992, p. 40). Prospective teachers were also found to be "reticent about assuming proactive counseling or teaching roles, working with an openly homosexual teacher, or striving to end discrimination against lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men in their community" (Sears, 1992, p. 62).

Despite modest gains, the aforementioned statistics vividly remind some sexual minority educators that the fears they have because of their sexual orientation are "founded in reality" and "serve to keep lesbian and gay teachers hidden and silenced" (Sanlo, 1999, p. 18). Although homosexuality is no longer an unmentionable subject in many, but not all quarters (Whitley, 1990) and many heterosexuals are becoming more outwardly tolerant of sexual minorities, an ever-present undercurrent of prejudice toward sexual minorities still exists (Birden, 2002).

Sexual Minorities and Educational Research

It was only recently that issues pertaining to sexual minorities in academe have been researched. According to Berger (1983), earlier investigations generally assumed that homosexuality was an illness or antisocial behavior, or else

limited itself to the study of disturbed homosexuals who had sought treatment. Since the early 70's, there has been an increase in research about sexual minorities. Recent research has chronicled the many aspects of negativity toward sexual minorities that exists, which includes, but is not limited to homophobia, negative attitudes, and heterosexism. The studies examining heterosexual's attitudes toward sexual minorities, mainly focusing on undergraduate populations, have identified many predictors that determine the levels of negativity toward sexual minorities. Predictors include age, education, sex of respondent, familiarity with sexual minorities, political affiliation, traditional sex-role beliefs and peer influence. Of all listed, there are only a few that are studied in any detail: age, sex of the respondent, religion and familiarity with a sexual minority. Specific studies pertaining to heterosexual educators could only be found pertaining to preservice teachers. Research shows that negative attitudes do indeed exist toward sexual minority individuals (Kite, 1984; Herek, 1988; Whitley, 1988, 1990; Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Newman, 1989; Lock & Kleis, 1998).

To study and understand the attitudes that heterosexuals have and display toward sexual minorities is necessary. Not only do schools provide legitimacy and sustain a culture's practices, they also "teach sexual scripts for appropriate

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gender arrangements during adolescence and adulthood" (Hill, 1995, p. 143); thus the importance of determining the attitudes held toward sexual minorities. Ultimately, it is the beliefs and attitudes of educators that shape the lives of our children. Teachers have considerable control over what is being taught in the classroom and the climate of learning (King & Newman, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the advances made toward equality, many sexual minority educators choose to remain closeted as a means to safely manage their identity (Kissen, 1996). Society's attitudes and behaviors often lead sexual minority educators' lives to be "complicated by stresses of which most of their heterosexual colleagues are completely unaware" (Kissen, 1996, p. 9). It appears these pressures lead to more sexual minority educators being closeted than any other profession.

A framework for creating safe educational work and learning environments in K-12 schooling must include the planning, operation, and recognition of adult professional development. While there are distinctive needs and demands of teaching in K-12 schools, the most vital areas surround the needs of the learners: Teacher attitudes must reflect the legitimate needs of students. One such need is for a caring environment in which learning can take place for all children. Adult heterosexual

teachers' attitudes toward their sexual minority (LGBTQ) counterparts, and their attitudes toward sexual minority students, create the milieu in which the school climate exists. This climate is also affected by the degree of self-disclosed (Out) as compared to hidden (closeted) teachers. This dissertation primarily explores three significant factors: the attitudes of heterosexual educators toward sexual minority co-workers; factors that lead to these attitudes; and the value of continuing professional education for learning about sexual orientation.

Negative attitudes by heterosexual educators toward sexual minority educators become problematic when the negativity is translated into practice. The beliefs and attitudes that heterosexual teachers hold toward sexual minorities can enhance or inhibit their ability to interact with sexual minority educators (and students), provide accurate information pertaining to sexual minorities, and aid in the creation of policies and curriculums that are beneficial and equitable for sexual minority educators.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand the attitudes and interpersonal dynamics of heterosexual teachers toward sexual minority educators. It explores their beliefs and

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values; aims to learn factors that inform their assumptions; and probes their understanding of the worth of continuing professional development in learning about homosexuality.

Research Questions

This research will seek to determine the attitudes that heterosexual educators hold toward their sexual minority counterparts and offer recommendations for continuing professional education in K-12 settings. The following questions will guide the study:

1. What are the attitudes of heterosexual educators toward sexual minority (LGBTQ) educators?

2. What factors lead to the attitudes that heterosexual educators hold toward homosexuality and sexual minority educators?

3. What value is placed on continuing professional education for learning about homosexuality and sexual orientation?

Significance of the Study

Issues pertaining to sexual minorities are no longer invisible inside the walls of educational institutions. Many campuses now have, although often contentious, support groups for sexual minorities, such as the Gay, Straight Alliances (GSAs). Some school districts have also passed legislation

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prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. According to Yared (1997), nine states, including the District of Columbia, have passed such legislation.

The National Center for Education statistics in 2003 reported that there were 2,206,554 teachers in public schools across the nation. If Kinsey's often quoted statistic of 1 homosexual in every 10 people is considered, there may well be 230,000 sexual minority educators in the United States (Harbeck, 1997). This number, Harbeck explains, "is equal to the entire teaching staff of the states of California and Washington combined" (p. 17). The increased visibility and the estimated number of sexual minority educators make this study significant. It is important that the attitudes of heterosexual educators be studied, because these attitudes will influence whether sexual minority educators are acknowledged in academic institutions and accurate knowledge about them provided. It will also provide accurate knowledge about heterosexual belief systems related to LGBTQ co-workers.

This study can also provide theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of adult and higher education. From a theoretical standpoint, the results of the present study will add to other research about sexual minorities and add to the limited body of knowledge about teaching and sexual minorities. From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study can aid

school systems in developing staff development opportunities that address issues pertaining to sexual minorities. Having a better understanding of the attitudes of heterosexual educators will also assist sexual minority educators in their decision to remain in or out the closet. The latter point is important since adults have needs of being, becoming and belonging. Furthermore, knowing the factors that lead to the heterosexual attitudes will also aid the sexual minority educator in successfully negotiating their outings and identities in a manner that not only enhances the learning environment, but promotes an atmosphere of acceptance.

More importantly, this study will help society understand sexual minority educators and how the attitudes of heterosexual educators circumscribe the lives of sexual minority educators. It is important that heterosexual educators not only gain knowledge about sexual minority educators, but also be afforded opportunities in which they can interrogate their feelings, attitudes, and privileges.

Definition of Terms

At the beginning of this study it became apparent that many teachers were fully unaware of the full meaning of certain terms. For instance, it was difficult for them to distinguish between sexual orientation and gender identity. The notion of

"straight privilege," which is termed "heterosexism" was not a part of their cognitive frames.

These definitions are provided solely for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of individuals and to allow the reader to better understand how I employ these terms; people's rights to self-identification must always be respected. While generally accepted, some individuals would critique the following terms and definitions.

Closeted

Also referred to as being "in the closet," closeted is the experience of living without disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming out

Coming out is a continuous life long process in which sexual minorities openly identify themselves as being lesbian, gay or bisexual in a series of disclosures to family, friends, coworkers and acquaintances (Kissen, 1996).

Gender

Gender refers to a sense of being male or female or having the recognizable traits of one's sex (Cassell, 2002).

Gender Identity

The gender to which an individual identifies: a sense of being a woman or man; a personal sense of who "I am."

Heterosexism

Hill (2001) has written that the terms *heterosexual privilege*, *heteronormativity*, *heterosexism* and their variations describe the hegemony of heterosexual discourses. He writes (2003), "Heterosexism is the assumption that everyone is heterosexual. Heterosexuality permeates all aspects of the lifeworld, and as such, becomes unimpeachable, accepted uncritically, and beyond interrogation because of its commonplace status. A multiple, interlocking system of intolerance and oppression emerges and homophobia and heterosexism are intertwined with gender injustice and sexism."

Homophobia

"Homophobia is the fear and/or hatred of homosexuality and homosexual persons" (Lipkin, 1999, p. 45). More recently the term has been substituted by *homohatred, homoaversion,* or *homoprejudice*.

Homosexual

Homosexual is a clinical term used to describe "anyone whose erotic interest is predominantly directed toward his or her own gender" (Lipkin, 1999, p. 25).

Identity

Identity is an individual's source of meaning and experience. It should be noted that there is no monolithic agreement on the following identity-based definitions. In fact, "any effort at

definition is not so much description and inscription" (Lather, 1991, p. 19). Definitions surrounding identity should never be used to label or deny someone else's self characterization (or their rights).

Lesbian

Lesbian is a term used to describe females whose erotic interests are directed toward other females.

Sexual Minority

Sexual minority is a unisex term that encompasses all categories of sexuality that differ from heterosexual which include, but are not limited to, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. I use the term consistent with Hill (2003), who writes "sexual minorities…refer to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender, intersexuals, and self-identified Queer individuals, cited as LGBTIQ." I did not complicate this study by examining intersexuality. This is because most intersexuals do not claim identity with LGBTQ communities.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual preference for partners of the same, opposite or either sex; *distinct from gender identity*; e.g. a person born a biological male but whose gender identity is that of a female can be (sexually or emotionally/affectionately) oriented to either a male or a female as the object of his/her desire.

Therefore, both *heterosexuals* and *homosexuals* have a sexual

orientation.

Sexual Prejudice

Sexual prejudice is the negative attitudes toward an individual

because of his or her sexual orientation (Herek, 2000).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review is divided into three major sections. The first section focuses on sexual orientation. In this section sexual orientation is defined and a selected body of literature is reviewed. The next section addresses sexual minority educators and the professional development of teachers. The review concludes with a final section that discusses prior research on heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuality.

Sexual Orientation

Although sometimes used interchangeably, the terms sex and gender are considered by social scientists to have different meanings (Cassell, 2002).

Sex refers to the physical characteristics that make a person male or female. The term is also used to describe the sexual activities that occur between individuals who are involved in an intimate relationship. Gender refers to a sense of being male or female or having the recognizable traits of one's sex. Characteristics and behavior generally associated with being a male are called masculine. Characteristics and behavior generally

associated with being a female are called feminine.

(Cassell, 2002, p. 2)

Most obviously noticed is the biological sex or the physical features of a person. Although often confused with biological sex, gender as explained above is socially constructed. Some (e.g., poststructuralists) also believe that sex is a social construction; however, that perspective is not the focus of this study and will not be used.

In society there are specific expectations, or roles that are associated with the male and female genders. Parents, friends, teachers and other sources, all influence these expectations which include, but are not limited to values, attitudes, and behavior (Cassell, 2002). According to Cassell (2002), "each of us develops general beliefs about males and females, including assumptions about appropriate attitudes and behavior for each gender. Our concepts of masculine and feminine gender roles profoundly affect our sexuality and our relationships" (p. 3).

Far more complex, sexual orientation encompasses the emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to individuals of a particular gender. The sexual orientation of a person determines who a person is sexually attracted to; individuals of the opposite sex (heterosexual), one's own sex (homosexual), or to both sexes (bisexual). "Scientists estimate that 1 to 10

percent of American adults are homosexuals, and a smaller

percentage considers themselves bisexual. Despite considerable

research, the origins of sexual orientation are not completely

understood" (Cassell, 2002, p. 5). Although we may be aware of

the gender of the persons that we interact with on a daily

basis, because of their gender presentation or expression, we

are usually not aware of the sexual orientation of these

individuals until, in most instances, that information is

disclosed by the individual.

It is essential to note that, definitions of sexual

orientation may vary, in part, due to the fact that many

cultures have a wide range of perceptions and attitudes about

sexual behavior depending on factors such as gender, religion,

and social status. It must be kept in mind that not every

society has created sociological categories or defined people

according to their sexual behavior or preferences. In other

words, "gay" or "homosexual" are not universal designations with

similar meanings everywhere (Hill, 2006a). Therefore, we must

speak of homosexualities in plural form-and offer civil

rights/full citizen to each unique type.

Sexual Orientation and the Classroom

Practically no studies could be found that examined the

effects of sexual orientation on classroom teaching-learning

dynamics. Of the two located, Fletcher and Russell (2001) discussed incorporating issues of sexual orientation in the K-12 classroom; and Tisdell (1995) studied the instructors' perception of how his or her sexual orientation effected the adult education classroom dynamics.

Fletcher and Russell (2001) found that the greatest challenges for instructors when incorporating attention to diversity regarding sexual orientation into their courses was the beliefs and behaviors of students.

> It has been our experience that although social sanctions prevent students from making inappropriate comments in class concerning race and ethnicity, social class, or religious beliefs, it is perceived by many students to be acceptable to make inappropriate remarks regarding sexual orientation. (Fletcher & Russell, 2001, p. 37)

This provided a challenge for the instructors who had to find a way to balance the need for sensitivity towards the students' race, ethnicity, social class and religious beliefs while simultaneously creating a learning environment that was safe and inclusive or accepting for individual LGBTQ students.

The instructors also found that sexual minority students felt privileged in the classrooms that were taught by other sexual minorities. According to Fletcher and Russell (2001), "When students suggest that attention to sexual orientation is

'special treatment', we respond with a discussion of the degree to which heterosexuality is culturally privileged" (p. 37).

The professors in Tisdell's (1995) study felt that their sexual orientation had a "significant effect both on what goes on in classroom interaction patterns and on student's learning" (p. 325). Here again, sexual minority students felt empowered and came out in an environment that they perceived as being safe. Once more, the teachers in this study also reported "unpleasant experiences of having to deal with what they interpret as students' or faculty members' homophobia" (Tisdell, 1995, p. 328).

Sexual Minorities in the Workplace

According to Hill (2006), "the challenge of dealing with sexual minorities, that is, LGBTQ people, in organizational settings is formidable" (p.8). Shaped by the wider social milieu, sexual minorities "traditionally joined organizations where the dominant organizational culture has been silence regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, with the concomitant expectation of invisibility, to which sexual minorities have often complied" (Hill, 2006b, p. 8).

Researchers estimate that sexual minorities comprise between ten and fourteen percent of the United States workforce (McNaught, 1993; Powers, 1996; Harbek, 1997). This percentage

is significant in that "other minority groups such as racial and ethnic minorities often make up lower proportions of the American workforce, for example, Asian Americans (4 percent) and Hispanic Americans (10 percent)" (Munoz & Thomas, 2006, p. 85). In recent years, sexual minorities in every profession are coming out (McNaught, 1993). "Unprecedented numbers of gay, lesbian and bisexual people today are publicly acknowledging who they are and what they need from their employers to be fully productive members of the workplace" (McNaught, 1993, p. 35). According to McNaught (1993):

> Employers who want a cohesive, productive work force ideally want gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees who are as comfortable with themselves and with their work world as possible. Though being out of the closet as a self-affirmed gay person does not guarantee productivity, it does increase the chances that the employee is focused, happy and energized. (p. 35)

In their study of 900 lesbian, gay, and heterosexual workers, Day and Schoenrade (2000), found that those workers who were open about their sexual orientation at work had higher job satisfaction, perceived the top management to be more supportive of their rights and had less conflict between work and home.

Still, all sexual minority workers are not self-disclosing. According to Skelton (2000), sexual minority educators are

choosing to remain invisible more so than their counterparts in other professions.

Skelton (2000) states:

In the UK it is interesting to note that whilst gay men in other areas of public and professional life appear to become more "visible" and "out" about their sexuality (for example, the gay men now "out" or "outed" in the New Labour Government), there remains a curious silence and invisibility surrounding gay men in higher education. (p. 181)

It is important to note, while not forced to live in the closet, educators may be choosing to remain closeted because the social, economic, safety and political consequences are far greater for this profession. This may be because educational institutions have historically been permitted to regulate themselves. Harbeck (1997) explains:

Political and judicial leaders have deferred to school administrators in most matters of governance, policy, educational content, and personnel selection. At certain time of intense social conflict, however, these internal features of control within the school system are challenged. An appeal is made to other social institutions, such as the legal or political systems, for guidance and resolution. (Harbeck, 1997, p. 19)

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Sexual Minority Educators: A Life Circumscribed

Although society has been confronted with the issue of the homosexual school teacher since Socrates educated the youth of Greece, little is known about this often invisible but highly emotionally arousing educational/social concern. (Harbeck, 1992, p. 121)

According to Niesche (2003), "the situations" faced by those in the sexual minority community in today's society have improved in recent years; yet "forms of discrimination still exist, particularly in the education workplace" (Niesche, 2003, p. 44). Heterosexual hegemonic practices tend to construct sexual minorities as "isolated exceptions" and their sexuality is seen as "personal problems" (Hearn, Sheppard, & Burrell, 1989, p. 23). This leads to one of the most prevailing problems for sexual minority educators, which is disclosure. According to Niesche (2003):

If they do not disclose their sexuality then they are perceived to be admitting that there is something wrong with being gay, and if they do 'come out of the closet', then they face the possibility of becoming targets of discrimination, physical violence and cultural abuse because of their sexuality. (p. 44)

These prevailing fears cause many sexual minority educators to "walk the line between concealment and disclosure, never knowing

exactly how much their colleagues and students actually guess, and never sure exactly how they would react to the truth" (Kissen, 1996, p. 51).

In terms of an individual's experience, we do know that since colonial times the most common scenario is one of a person living an exemplary life in fear of discovery. In that rare instance when his or her homosexual orientation became known, the teacher quietly resigned or quickly left town, since the potential consequences of challenging the system alone were extreme. At various times in history, homosexuality has been perceived as a sin, a mental disorder, and/or a criminal activity. Numerous social and legal restrictions have been placed on homosexual behavior and the consequences of infractions at times have been as severe as execution or imprisonment. Furthermore, having been socialized in this culture, lesbian and gay persons often have incorporated a negative self-image. Thus, remaining invisible and not challenging the status quo were reasonable responses in the face of personal danger or financial ruin. (Harbeck, 1992, p. 124)

Unfortunately, the "self-protection" associated with concealment requires a great deal of planning, work and energy that could be focused on teaching (Kissen, 1996). Furthermore, for many sexual minority educators, not being able to disclose

their identity is painful and having to *pass*, or pretend to be heterosexual is humiliating (Kissen, 1996). Narratives of sexual minority educators usually reveal the trade-offs that they are forced to make (Rofes, 2000) because of their sexual orientation.

> We [teachers] are probably the most deeply closeted group in the gay community. You all know THE BIG RULE for Being Out. 'It's okay as long as you DON'T FLAUNT IT.' For us there is a different rule: 'It's not okay. You are not fit to teach children. You are fired!' Being so deep in the cloakroom is not healthy for us as individuals, but by far the most damaging effect of the 'NO GAY OR LESBIAN TEACHERS ALLOWED' rule is how it perpetuates stereotyping, bigotry and fear by controlling the perceptions of the young.
>
> (Kissen, 1996, p. 55)

The lives of sexual minority educators are "complicated by stresses of which most of their heterosexual colleagues are completely unaware" (Kissen, 1996, p. 9).

Many sexual minority educators feel that in order for them to equal their heterosexual colleagues they need to excel. For those whose colleagues know that they are a sexual minority, there is added pressure to be a model teacher (Kissen, 1996). Sexual minority educators face increased scrutiny as a result of their sexual orientation and their extraordinary performances

somewhat lessens the effects of disclosure (Lipkin, 1999).

>Kevin Gogin, who coordinates support services for lesbian
>and gay youth in the San Francisco Unified School District,
>works in a relatively gay-friendly environment, and his
>employer is a city agency rather than a school. Still
>Kevin admits, "I have the tendency to anticipate any
>problems that may come along and be as squeaky clean as I
>can possibly be, so that then there is no room for
>discussion. (Kissin, 1996, p. 42)

As part of their preoccupation with their professional image, sexual minority educators think a great deal about their appearance (Kissen, 1996). The constant worry about being identified as lesbian or gay, leads gay men to worry about their speech or gestures and leads lesbians to worry about their clothes and grooming.

>It was horrible… I would dress a certain way, maybe so I
>would look less butch-y…like little girl shoes and, you
>know, wear a blazer and dress pants. I wouldn't dress how
>I'd feel comfortable or the way I dress up myself when I go
>out. (Kissen, 1996, p. 42)

Those homosexual educators that do not conform to stereotypical dress codes may feel uncomfortable and provoke harassment from straight colleagues (Kissen, 1996).

Along with monitoring their appearance and censoring their behavior, most sexual minority teachers have to alter the facts about their life in order to hide their gay identity (Kissen, 1996). By using gender-neutral language and changing pronouns, teachers conceal their significant relationships and appear to be straight.

> For teachers in significant relationships, concealing a partner's identity means denying the existence of the most important person in their lives. It means listening to humiliating remarks by straight teachers, who are usually unaware of the effect their assumptions have on lesbian and gay colleagues. (Kissen, 1996, p. 45)

Passing as straight is painful and humiliating to sexual minority educators. Trying to avoid disclosing a gay identity without telling an outright lie is stressful (Kissen, 1996).

> I won't lie about the fact that I'm gay, but I won't be totally honest about it either', declares Bill, who is especially careful because of his position as an elementary school principal. 'I've had students say to me that their uncle saw me in a gay bar on Saturday night and…I just kind of glossed it over and changed the subject in a hurry. (Kissen, 1996, p. 47)

Though many sexual minority educators may feel compelled to lie, evade, or censor their responses to students and colleagues,

most homosexuals would like to be more open about their sexual orientation (Kissen, 1996). Unfortunately, in such uncertain environments, most sexual minority educators continue to walk the line between concealment and disclosure.

According to Lipkin (1999), sexual minority educators are more apprehensive that their school relationships will be unalterably harmed if their sexual orientation becomes known. This fear is weightier than fears over job retention, physical safety, and working conditions. "Educators have reason to believe that coming out would draw attention away from their teaching and toward their persons" (Lipkin, 1999, p. 205). The fear of losing students' respect is so strong that sexual minority educators with supportive administrations and communities will not come out (Kissen, 1996). "The closer a teacher's relationship with his or her students, the more painful the fear of rejection" (Kissen, 1996, p. 82).

> When I talk to kids now and I look in their eyes, there's a
> lot of joy and love, and that's really why I'm there. If
> that were to change because of who I am, then I don't think
> I'd want to teach anymore. (Kissen, 1996, p. 81)

These teachers also feel that they would no longer be seen as the academic teacher, but the sexual minority teacher instead; the esteem of their peers would be forfeited and their effectiveness in the classroom lessened (Lipkin, 1999). Lipkin

(1999) explains, "For them there is nothing more alarming than damaged collegiality and uncooperative students" (p. 205).

The biggest obstacle for homosexual educators is homophobia. Pharr (1997) defines homophobia as "the irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex" (p.1). Homophobic responses, occasionally from colleagues, but more often from students (Lipkin, 1999) include harassment, vandalism, threats, and personal violence. Several narratives in Jennings' (1994) *One Teacher in 10* describe vulgar phone calls, graffiti, name-calling in the halls and on school grounds, and continued harassment from students, parents and staff members.

> In my life I have experienced the effects of homophobia
> through rejection by friends, threats of loss of
> employment, and threats upon my life; and I have witnessed
> far worse things happening to other lesbian and gay people:
> loss of children, beatings, rape, and death. (Pharr, 1997)

According to Lipkin (1999), the homophobic reaction is sometimes camouflaged. Homosexual educators that successfully disclose may find their jobs in jeopardy on "trumped up charges" that have nothing to do with their sexuality (Lipkin, 1999).

> With the coming of winter came the frosty insurgence of
> homophobia…Before the next school day, my principal called
> me at home with a bit of homophobic intimidation of her

own. Since this meeting, she had suddenly decided that my

mentioning the lesbian relationship between Celie and Shug

in *The Color Purple* (a lesson she had observed me teaching)

was 'not appropriate' and in some undefined way not in

accordance with the Jefferson County Public Schools

curriculum. She further stated that I was not to consider

students 'captive audiences' for my own 'personal agenda'.

I was both insulted and offended, and began to realize how

much the school system wanted to keep gay people literally

invisible. (On invisibility, see Prince, 1994, p. 142)

Kicking the Closet Door Wide Open

Much research could be found to substantiate the reasons

that sexual minority educators choose to remain closeted. The

consequences of leaving the closet range from subtle harassment

to the loss of employment. Despite the obstacles that many

sexual minority educators face on a daily basis, an undetermined

number are choosing to live their lives outside of the closet.

Being open about one's sexuality is important. Researchers have

found that those persons who have a sexual minority friend,

relative, or close acquaintance hold more positive attitude

toward the sexual minority population (Herek, 1994). Some

studies have indicated that exposure to sexual minorities can

reduce negative attitudes (Herek, 1988; Herek & Capitanio, 1995;

King & Black, 1999; Raja & Stokes, 1988). Those persons lacking

experiences with sexual minority acquaintances or authority

figures, such as an educator, may show bias.

The literature revealed that it is important for sexual

minority educators to leave the comfort of "the closet" and

self-disclose. According to Beck (1983), self-disclosure

humanizes the classroom, but also encourages openness in

students, and gives credence to diversity. More importantly, as

Wright (1995) explains, "being oneself, being real makes the art

of teacher more comfortable and relaxed" (p. 28). Russ, Simonds

and Hunt (2002) feel that the most important reason that sexual

minority educators should self-disclose is for the students.

Russ, et al. (2002) explains:

> Finally and perhaps most importantly, it is pedagogically
>
> sound for gay teachers to come out because they are
>
> beneficial to students. Empirical evidence finds that
>
> instructors who 'come out' in the classroom significantly
>
> reduce their students' biases against gays and lesbians.
>
> (p. 322)

Ironically, a burden of oppression is the fact that the

oppressed person has to assume the responsibility of educating

those around them (Lorde, 1984). It is important that

homosexual educators not only raise the level of awareness in

students, but colleagues and administrators as well. Reading

materials and personal experiences should be shared with them as well so they too will be aware of the discrimination that exists against gay and lesbian individuals. According to Allen (1995), "One of the benefits to nongay people of reading about the struggles of teaching from an out gay standpoint is that they can begin to see how heterosexism controls their own teaching" (p. 141). Becoming aware of their own privilege will hopefully lead to a more authentic engagement with homosexual students and faculty members and more importantly, lead to the representation and inclusion of "issues of homosexuality" in their classes as well.

Heterosexual Attitudes Toward Sexual Minorities

Historically, attitudes toward sexual minorities have not always been negative. Boswell (1980) shares that, prior to the High Middle Ages, homosexual acts appeared to be tolerated or ignored throughout Europe. It wasn't until the latter twelfth century that hostility toward sexual minorities spread throughout the church and secular institutions. Homosexual behavior was deemed unnatural and homosexuals were believed to be deviant, demented, immoral and criminal (Donnelly, Donnelly, Kittleson, Fogarty, Procaccino, & Duncan, 1997).

The religious teachings of the era eventually became legal sanction.

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Many of the early American colonies, for example enacted

stiff criminal penalties for sodomy (which the statues

often described only in Latin or with oblique phrases such

as 'wickedness not to be name'), and the purview of these

laws included homosexual conduct (Herek, Chopp, & Strohl,

1997, p.6).

In some places, such as the New Haven colony, male and female

homosexual acts were punishable by death (Herek et al., 1997).

The end of the 19th century saw views on homosexuality shift from

"sin and crime to include that of pathology" (Herek et al.,

1997, p. 8). According to Herek et al. (1997), "this historical

shift was generally considered progressive because a sick person

was less blameful than a sinner or criminal" (p. 8). It wasn't

until the middle of the 20th century that views toward

homosexuality became more tolerant; a battle not easily won.

This was in part due to researchers from other disciplines, most

notably, Alfred C. Kinsey (Herek et al., 1997).

Ironically, heterosexual attitudes toward sexual minorities

were not formally researched until the past decade. Prior to

the mid 80's, literature and research related to homosexuality

and sexual minorities had focused on diagnosis, cause and cure.

Less than 10% of the research between 1967 and 1974 dealt with

attitudes (Morin, 1977). Many studies can now be found that

have examined heterosexual attitudes toward sexual minorities;

however, it is important to note that the majority of the studies examine undergraduate college populations.

Several predictors of negative attitudes toward sexual minorities have been found. These predictors include age (Kurdek, 1988), sex of respondent (Kite, 1984; Herek, 1988; Whitley, 1988, 1990; Herek & Capitanio, 1995, 1999; Donnelly et al., 1997; King & Black, 1999; Mitchell, Hirschman & Hall, 1999; Oldham & Kasser, 1999), ethnicity (Herek & Capitanio, 1995), religion (Herek, 1987; Brooke, 1993; Hunsberger, 1995, 1996), education (Matchinsky & Iverson, 1996), political affiliation (Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992), familiarity with sexual minorities (Herek, 1988; Herek & Capitanio, 1995) and traditional sex role beliefs (Herek, 1988; Newman, 1989; Lock & Kleis, 1998).

Sex of Respondent

The sex of the respondent appears to be the most recurring predictor in the literature. Researchers found that heterosexual males show evidence of more negative attitudes and behaviors toward sexual minorities than do their female counterparts (Kite, 1984; Herek, 1988; Whitley, 1988, 1990; Herek & Capitanio, 1995, 1999; Donnelly et al. 1997; King & Black, 1999; Mitchell, Hirschman and Hall, 1999; Oldham & Kasser, 1999). Society has encouraged men to endorse the more traditional views toward gender and traditional gender role belief systems, which

are typically homophobic, have encouraged men to be more negative toward sexual minority men than women (Herek, 1986; Kite & Whitley, 1998).

Because gender-associated norms are more rigidly defined for men than for women (Herek, 1988; Fagot, Leinbach, Hort, & Strayer, 1997), society tends to have a more negative reaction toward men who have more feminine traits than to women who have more masculine traits (e.g., Page & Yee, 1985). Thus, a man's breaking out of the mold of the traditional male role is a much more serious sex-role violation than a woman breaking out of her mold. Because society expects men to avoid female traits or activities and because gay men are often thought to possess inappropriate sex roles (e.g., Kite & Deaux, 1987), men may feel pressured by society to have negative feelings toward homosexuality and especially toward gay men. Because women may feel less pressured continually to validate their femininity, they may be less motivated to make differential ratings of lesbians and gay men. (Louderback & Whitley, 1997, p. 176)

The literature also revealed that heterosexual men are more negative toward gay men and heterosexual females are more negative toward lesbians (Herek, 1984; Herek & Capitanio, 1995, 1999; Raja & Stokes, 1998). According to Whitely (1988), the

negativity is a byproduct of heterosexuals' fear of being

approached or 'picked up' by sexual minorities whose sex is the

same as their own. Males tend to find the thought of two women

being together erotic, but are repulsed by the thought of two

men (Whitley, 1988; Raja & Stokes, 1998). Although the

literature consistently reports that heterosexual males are more

negative toward gay men than lesbians, the literature is less

consistent with females. Herek (1988) suggests that this

inconsistency is a result of sexual minority females not

differing in their attitudes toward sexual minority men and

women.

Religion

The second predictor that appeared repeatedly in review of

the literature was religion. Although Herek (1987) found

religious denomination to be related to attitudes toward

homosexuality, Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman and Johnston

(1994) found evidence that the level of religious practice and

not denomination is important, recent research claims that

religious fundamentalism is the best predictor of negative

attitudes toward sexual minorities. Altemeyer and Hunsberger

(1992) describe religious fundamentalism as "the belief that

there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains

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the fundamental basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity" (p. 118).

Results of Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) study indicate that there is a high correlation between higher religious fundamentalism and more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities. Ironically, higher levels of religious fundamentalism also correlated with less negative attitudes toward racial minorities. Hunsberger (1995) feels that religious fundamentalist heterosexuals are more negative toward sexual minorities because they are accepting of what their religion teaches them, which is mainly negativity toward homosexuality and sexual minority individuals.

Familiarity with Sexual Minorities

Familiarity with sexual minorities is the third predictor of heterosexual attitudes toward sexual minorities. Several studies have shown that heterosexuals who have interpersonal contacts with sexual minorities expressed significantly more favorable attitudes than those heterosexuals with no contact (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; King & Black, 1999). According to Herek & Capitanio (1996), "the relationship between contact and favorable attitudes was stronger to the extent that respondents reported multiple contacts, more intimate contacts, and contacts that involved direct disclosure of sexual orientation" (p. 8).

In an attempt to consider how higher education impacts students' acceptance of sexual diversity, Kardia (1996) found that contact with a sexual minority was the primary mechanism through which student's attitudes changed. According to Kardia (1996), students that entered college with negative attitudes toward sexual diversity, reexamined prior stereotypes and assumptions after contact with casual acquaintances and classmates.

There are many factors that are predictors of heterosexual's attitudes toward sexual minorities. For the purpose of this study, the three main units of analysis that will be examined are sex of the respondent, religion and familiarity with sexual minorities.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs multiple theoretical frames: critical adult education; gay and lesbian/sexuality theories; and theories of adult professional development.

Criticality and Adult Education Theory

Traditionally, the voices of the marginalized have been silenced in the field of adult education. Merriam and Brockett (1997) explain:

The professional field of education has developed without

recognition of particular groups' contributions and without

accounting for a large segment of practice: adult education

for social action or social change. Through conscious or

benign neglect, women, racial minorities, homosexuals,

older individuals, and so on have had little if any say in

determining what counts as adult education. These voices

have not been acknowledged in the construction of the

official knowledge base, in the preparation of

professionals, or in activities of the profession. (p. 243)

Merriam and Brocket (1997) attribute this "exclusion,

oppression, and discrimination of certain groups from mainstream

society" as being a result of society's evolution (p. 241).

The situation comes to feel normal, so that 'one group of

people accept as normal, natural, and in need of no

explanation, conditions that are in the interests of

another group altogether.' This phenomenon, termed

hegemony, 'refers to the standards, ideas, and modes of

behaviour that come to pervade the institutions of a

society, are accepted and lived by the population, and so

become the media through which the population is

controlled'. (Merriam and Brockett, 1997, p. 242)

According to Cervero and Wilson (2001), "these systems of

power are almost always asymmetrical, privileging some people

and disadvantaging others" (p. 10); thus the increased

importance of adult education, and more specifically the adult

educator, in creating a learning environment that empowers all

participants. Cervero and Wilson (2001) write, "Because of this

increasing visibility and importance, we now see more clearly

that adult education has a significant role in the distribution

not only of knowledge but also of social, economic and political

power" (p. 10).

It is important that adult educators become aware of the

power relations that exist within the classroom walls. Tisdell

(2001), says, "higher education has a responsibility to society,

not only to fulfill the traditional role of creating and

disseminating knowledge but also to contribute to creating a

more equitable and just society" (p. 149).

It has been recognized that adult education has a role in

teaching for critical consciousness and social change. Hansman

& Smith (1997) describe this latest discourse as critical voices

calling attention to the fields of continued neglect. Merriam

and Brockett (1997) describe it as the voices of those who have

been largely invisible to mainstream adult education because of

who they are or what they are beginning to be heard. Mainly as

a result of changes in larger society, current discourse has

urged adult education to incorporate a multicultural model into

its curriculum and pedagogy to address those that had been traditionally marginalized.

The hegemony of white, middle-class males is harder to sustain in the face of growing numbers of ethnic and racial minorities.

As a result of these changing demographics, North American society has become aware of issues of cultural and workplace diversity, bilingual schooling, diversity training and so on. Policymakers, power brokers, and educators at all levels are grappling with the implications of ethnic and cultural diversity. (Merriam & Brockett, p. 257)

Classrooms are mere microcosms of the world in which they exist. The adult teachers instructing in classrooms each bring to the learning environment distinct experiences that are shaped by the social, political, cultural, economic, racial and gendered backgrounds from which they come. Bailey and Cervero (1997) explain, "When learners and teachers enter classrooms they bring their positions in the hierarchies that order the world, including those based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation and disability" (p.1).

As in the real world, because of the distinctions that the adult teachers (who are also adult learners and professionals) bring into the classroom, the classroom is not a neutral space.

Shaul (1970) captures the essence of the dynamic process in his quote:

> There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom", the means by which men and women deal creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 16)

Ironically, until recently, the importance of ethnicity, gender, race and sexual orientation as they relate to power interactions within the classroom had virtually been ignored (Smith & Hansman, 1998). Hill (2006) describes adult, continuing, and higher education as "sites of both tolerance and homo- and transphobia. They are no exceptions to socially entrenched heteronormativity" (p. 8). It was not until 1993 that LGBTQ issues and concerns were addressed by adult and continuing educators (Hill, 2006b). According to Grace and Hill (2004), "The fight to crack open these terrains has proven to be a challenging task requiring the courage and persistence of queer educators, graduate students, and our allies" (p. 8).

"Diversity has become an increasingly important issue to individuals, leaders, and organizations in the USA" (Egge, 1999, p. 24). According to Day and Schoenrade (2000), sound diversity programs, which have been major initiatives in the U.S. over the last several years, teach the participants about their learned prejudices and the destructive effects that those beliefs have on fellow workers and the organization. Day et al. (2000) also point out that the majority of diversity programs focus on gender, race and ethnic backgrounds, omitting sexual minorities. Few organizations have diversity programs that address the needs or work issues of sexual minorities.

Managers and scholars are beginning to recognize that all organizational members need to be involved and active to ensure the organization's success (Siegall & Gardner, 2000). According to Siegall and Gardner (2000), the organization's only "true sustainable competitive advantage is its people" (p. 703). According to Bernthal (2004), "when an organization focuses attention on its people, it's making an investment in its most important resource" (p.1). It is important that employers recognize the "unique contribution each employee can make in the workplace" (Egge, 1999, p. 24).

It is about creating an environment in which everyone feels
   valued, welcomed, and able to make an important

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contribution toward the attainment of corporate objectives.
(Egge, 1999, p. 24)

Adult Professional Development for Teachers

Today's classrooms are comprised of teachers from diverse

backgrounds. Administrators are grappling with the task of

meeting the needs of a diverse faculty. According to Joyce

(1990), "until as recently as 15 years, very few school

districts acknowledged their responsibility for the academic,

social, or clinical health of their personnel" (p. xv) which is

ironic since "to a great extent, the success of any educational

reform approach depends not only on teachers' belief in and will

to implement the proposed changes, but the development of

teachers' professional skills necessary to implement such

changes" (Donnelly, Dove, & Morales, 2002, p. 5).

Continuing professional development is one of the roles of

adult education and is essential for prospective and continuing

educators. The professional development and growth of teachers

has become an important concern in the field of education

nationwide. The National Education Goals (1994), in an effort

to emphasize this importance, designated a fourth goal stating,

"Teachers need to be offered expanded and enriched professional

development experiences" (Dilworth & Imig, 1995, p. 2). The

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future has also

proposed a goal which calls for environments where all students

have access to competent, caring and qualified teachers by the

year 2006 (Darling-Hammond, 1996).   In order to accomplish

these goals, teachers, as adult learners, must be provided

adequate opportunities for learning. Although research has

shown that effective teachers are a byproduct of continuous

professional development, Elmore (2002) posits that on-the-job

training has not been highly regarded in the field of education.

Cheng and Tsui (1999) describe effective teachers as those

"adapting to external and internal changes, coping with the

different challenges, meeting the diverse expectations, and

developing themselves as continuous learners" (p. 144). Sanders

and Eberhart posit (1994) that those teachers that excel are

"self-renewing concerned with developing and refining their

skills, learning from their mistakes, and reflecting on their

development" (p. 71). Professional development, as described by

Duke and Stiggins (1990), is the process by which competent

teachers achieve higher levels of professional competence.

According to Harris (2000), "professional development is

fundamentally about individual change" (p. 29).

If teachers reject the need to change, then all other

elements of the process become inconsequential or

irrelevant. Therefore, this element of the process aims to

assist teachers with the challenges of individual change

and understanding their own attitudes to it. Kelly (1955),

Schein (1972), Smyth (1991) and Lange & Burroughs-Lange

(1994) emphasize the need for the individual to become more

conscious of his/her attitudes to change. This increased

consciousness leads to a 'meta-awareness' of the issues

that cause a teacher to become 'unfrozen' form present

constructs and behavior patterns. (Harris, 2000, p. 29)

There are various issues that cause teachers to accept or resist

change in their personal lives. Harris (2000) attributes the

reluctance of teachers to embrace professional development to

their perception of increased responsibilities, specifically,

social and political issues, such as the concept of

multiculturalism and its implications for their teaching. This

reluctance is a cause for concern because these teachers and the

schools in which they work may become "increasingly isolated

from the wider social and political community. In so doing they

may resist listening to what Hargreaves (1996) referred to as

the 'voices' of students, parents and community, including the

'marginalized' and the 'disaffected'" (Harris, 2000, p. 36).

Gay and Lesbian/Sexuality Theories

Lesbian and gay studies theorize fundamental new knowledge

and insights into, and make new meaning around, contemporary

debates over sexual minorities, and the historical development

of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities, cultures, and politics in a variety of contextual settings. These theories explore the cultural representations of gender and the socio-cultural construction of gender expression/gender identity and sexual orientation roles.

LGBTQ theoretical perspectives shed new light on the needs of sexual minority educators are being overlooked in many school systems. According to Anderson (1994), "a conspiracy of silence [based on ignorance and not malice] shrouds the issues of sexual orientation" (para. 4) in schools.

> Twenty years ago, the American Psychiatric Association recognized that being gay is okay. The American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, The American Nurses' Association, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers all say that being gay is okay. But we educators say nothing in our schools. What's wrong with this picture? (Anderson, 1994, para. 4)

The incorporation of issues relating to homosexuality is dependent on professional development (Lipkin, 1999).

An LGBTQ theoretical perspective on professional development can bring about a transformation to the practices of teachers as they pertain to sexual minorities. According to Gurskey (2002), this transformation comes in the form of

changing attitudes, practices and beliefs. Before teachers can

introduce the subject in their classrooms, they must first "work

out their own feelings about homosexuality, be trained to handle

extreme student or parent responses, and be ready for the 'are

you one of them' query." (Lipkin, 1999, p. 365). More

importantly, Lipkin (1999) feels "It would be a mistake at the

outset to force all faculty to teach about homosexuality,

especially without proper training" (p. 366).

> A reluctant, unhappy teacher is worse than none at all.
> Many students are good insincerity and sarcasm detectors.
> It would set the effort back for teachers to give the
> impression they were being forced to undertake a curriculum
> about which they were queasy or oppressed. (Lipkin, 1999,
> p. 366)

Lipkin (1999) acknowledges that "curricular change can not

flourish as a top-down mandate" (p. 366); however, when it comes

to heterosexist behaviors, professional development should not

be optional. According to Lipkin (1999), "Every teacher must be

sensitized to heterosexist behaviors, taught how to interrupt

them, and required to do so" (p. 366). "Sexuality, like race,

is an area in which a modicum of ignorance can be harmful" (p.

366).

Professional Development is crucial because teachers have

considerable control over what is being taught in the classroom

and the climate of learning (King & Newman, 2000). The

knowledge that professional development provides can empower

teachers to work with and meet the needs of diverse populations

and in some instances give voice to those that have been

traditionally marginalized; more importantly, engaging in

continuing professional development with teachers and other

educational groups "help counter the politics of fear and

caution that limits inclusion" (Grace & Wells, 2006, p. 56).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLGY

The purpose of this study is to better understand the attitudes and interpersonal dynamics of heterosexual teachers toward sexual minority educators. Questions that drive this study are: 1) What are the attitudes of heterosexual educators toward sexual minority (LGBTQ) educators? 2) What factors lead to the attitudes that heterosexual educators hold toward homosexuality and sexual minority educators? And, 3) What value is placed on continuing professional education for learning about homosexuality and sexual orientation? A qualitative design was employed to gain insights into these research questions.

The goal of qualitative research is to develop explanations for social phenomena. "The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam, 2002, p.3). Merriam (2002) explains:

The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon that is assumed to be in positivist, quantitative research. Instead there are

multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that

are in flux and that change over time (p. 4).

Qualitative researchers, according to Merriam (2002), accentuate

"how individuals experience and interact with their social

world" (p. 4) and determine what meaning it has for them.

The task for the qualitative researcher is to provide a

framework within which people can respond in a way that

represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view

about the world, or that part of the world about which they

are talking-for example, their experience with a particular

program being evaluated. (Patton, 1990, p. 24)

Understanding the experience from the perspective of the

participants involved is logical, being that the participants in

some cases are "better able than the investigator to understand

the complex interactions that have been observed and account for

the influence of local values on these interactions" (Borg &

Gall, 1989, p. 386).

Through the use of qualitative research methods, this study

sought to better understand the attitudes that self-identified

heterosexual educators had toward their sexual minority co-

workers. It explores why some teachers behave the way they do

toward sexual minority coworkers and students; how opinions and

attitudes of heterosexual teachers are formed relative to their

sexual minority counterparts; and how heterosexual teachers'

attitudes have been formed through the events that go on around them. Understanding these attitudes is vital for constructing inclusive learning environments because teacher's attitudes ultimately shape school climates.

In depth interviews were used to explore the attitudes and factors that lead to the attitudes that heterosexual educators hold toward their sexual minority counterparts. These interviews will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Design of the Study

Unlike quantitative research which is more structured, I determined that qualitative research methodology would be best suited for my study. The qualitative design was chosen because it allows greater flexibility in gathering data to build concepts and theories (Merriam, 2002).

> In many ways a major trade-off between quantitative methods
> and qualitative methods is a trade-off between breadth and
> depth. Qualitative methods permit the evaluation
> researcher to study selected issues in depth and detail.
> (Patton, 1990, p. 165)

Qualitative research methods "typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases" (Patton, 1990, p. 165).

Further, qualitative research also allows the experiences of the participants to be interpreted through the use of rich descriptive language since "words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). According to Miles and Huberman (1984), "words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader, --another researcher, a policy maker, and a practitioner—than pages of summarized numbers" (p. 1).

Participants' attitudes toward sexual minority educators and the factors that lead to these attitudes were determined from their responses to open-ended, semi-structured interview questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

Sample Selection

According to Merriam (1998), "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). When using purposeful sampling, it is critical to determine what criteria will be used in choosing who is to be interviewed and or what site is to be observed (Merriam, 2002). According to Patton

(1990), "identifying diverse characteristics or criteria for constructing the sample" helps to "maximize variation in a small sample" (p. 172).

When selecting a small sample of great diversity, the data collection and analysis will yield two kinds of findings: (1) high quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting unique-ness, and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity. (Patton, 1990, p. 172)

Criterion sampling was utilized because of its ability to "reveal major system weaknesses that become targets of opportunity for program or system improvement" (Patton, 1990, p. 177).

The participants chosen for this study met the following criteria:

1.   must be a K-12 educator currently teaching in a public school; and

2.   must identify their sexual orientation as conclusively or exclusively heterosexual.

In an attempt to create a diverse group, the participants were stratified by whether they were an elementary or middle school teacher. In actuality, more elementary teachers were accessible

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than ones in middle school, and thus the study was not as stratified as designed.

<center>*Demographic Characteristics*</center>

Each participant answered demographic questions prior to the initiation of their interview. The sample consisted of ten females and two males. Fewer males reflect the distribution of teachers in the district. The ethnic composition of the sample was proportional to the population of the schools. This composition was as follows: 58% (N=10) African American; 25% (N=3) Caucasian; and 16% (N=2) other. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 disaggrate the demographics for all participants.

Table 3.1

Demographic Characteristics of Elementary Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Sex	Grade	Religion	Experience
Vivien	26	Asian	F	4th	Catholic	2 years
Simone	39	Black	F	4th	Baptist	17 years
Deanna	45	Black	F	5th	Baptist	13 years
Martin	31	Black	M	PE	Methodist	8 years
Fannie	55	White	F	K	Baptist	32 years
Tameka	25	Black	F	2nd	Baptist	2 years
Majorie	46	Black	F	K	Baptist	27 years
Rachel	29	Black	F	SpEd	Baptist	1 year

Table 3.1 *(continued).*

Demographic Characteristics of Elementary Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Sex	Grade	Religion	Experience
John	31	Biracial	M	5th	Non-Denom	3 years

K=Kindergarten; PE=Physical Education; SpEd=Special Education

Table 3.2

Demographic Characteristics of Middle School Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Sex	Grade	Religion	Experience
Karrie	47	Black	F	8th	Baptist	23 years
Lorrie	47	White	F	8th	Non Denom	22 years
Janice	33	White	F	PE	Christian	7 years

Data Collection

The three major sources of data for a qualitative research study are interviews, observations and documents. According to Merriam (2002), "the data collection strategy used is determined by the question of the study and by determining which source(s) of data will yield the best information with which to answer the question" (p. 12).

For the purpose of this study, the primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured

interviews contain a mix of more and less structured questions (Merriam, 2002). Patton (1990) puts it this way:

> The task for the qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking. (p. 24)

Data were also collected through researcher field notes and observations made during the interviewing of participants.

For this research study, I employed a semi-structured interview approach. Through the use of this interviewing technique, which consisted of twenty-one questions, I gained pertinent information as to their attitudes toward sexual minority educators and the factors that lead to these attitudes. The instrument is found in Appendix A.

The interviews were initiated by asking each participant demographic information, which included age, sex, religious affiliation and frequency of attendance in worship services, years teaching and familiarity with a sexual minority individual. This was followed by questions designed to implore information about the participants' attitudes toward sexual minorities.

The interviews were conducted individually in the participants' classrooms. Due to the nature of my study, I felt

that the participants would feel more comfortable if they were
interviewed in the privacy of their classrooms because this
appeared to be a safe space. For the sake of all involved,
participants were informed that their responses would remain
confidential. To insure consistency during the interview
process, I created an interview script that was used for all
participants.

All interviews were tape recorded with the participants'
permission. Each participant was required to sign a consent
form included in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is simultaneous with data collection in
qualitative research. Merriam (2002) explains that "one begins
by analyzing the data with the first interview" obtained in the
study (p. 14).

Simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the
researcher to make adjustments along the way, even to the
point of redirecting data collection, and to test emerging
concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data.
To wait until all data are collected is to lose the
opportunity to gather more reliable and valid data.
(Merriam, 2002, p. 14)

After the initial interview was completed, I transcribed the tape and uploaded the transcript into QSR Nivo 7 qualitative software. This software program was utilized as my data management tool. I then read the transcript repeatedly and looked for key issues or recurrent events (Merriam, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1984).   All meaningful words, phrases, and narratives were examined for emerging patterns. The patterns were then coded, utilizing Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) method, as free nodes in the QSR Nivo 7 program. Coding allowed me to condense data sets into analyzable units through the creation of categories based on the data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). According to Straus (1987), coding allows the researcher to conceptualize the data, raise questions and provide provisional answers about the data.

All subsequent interviews were carefully transcribed and also loaded into the QSR Nivo 7 program. Each transcript was carefully read, notated, and all emerging patterns or themes were coded.

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative researchers are often criticized for their lack of clearly addressing issues of validity and reliability. Sandelowski (1986) has expressed that a research instrument is not valid until there is confidence that it measures what it is

clearly intended to measure; thus, an essential step in qualitative research is recognizing and addressing issues of validity and reliability. According to Merriam (1998, 2002), when validity and reliability are addressed, qualitative research is deemed trustworthy.

Validity

Validity is determined by the way data are collected and analyzed. Internal validity and external validity are the two types of validity. Internal validity is related to an instrument measuring what the researcher intends it to measure (Pitney, 2004). "With a qualitative study, the researcher who conducts interviews and observations is the research instrument and is extremely sensitive to the context (i.e., people, place, and environment) in which data are collected" (Pitney, 2004, p. 26). Instead of internal validity, many qualitative researchers tend to use the term credibility. Pitney (2004) defines credibility as research finding capturing "what is really occurring in the context and whether the researcher learned what he or she intended to learn" (p. 26). According to Sandelowski (1986), a qualitative study is deemed credible if it accurately describes individual experiences, so much so that, the persons having the experience would be able to recognize it from the descriptions as their own.

The three strategies mainly used to establish credibility are triangulation, member checks and peer review (Merriam, 1998; Pitney, 2004). Triangulation involves the collection of data from multiple, varying sources and the utilization of multiple analysts or data collection strategies. "The fundamental idea of using triangulation is to cross-check information or findings to ensure that a full and accurate understanding of a phenomenon is obtained." (Pitney, 2004, p. 26) Member checks involve providing the participants the interpretation of the data and having them verify its accuracy. A peer review involves the use of an external qualified researcher to examine the research processes and the data interpretation (Pitney, 2004).

The aforementioned strategies were utilized to strengthen the credibility of this study. All participants were interviewed about their attitudes toward homosexuality, and as a member of the school staff, I was afforded the opportunity to observe the teachers interacting in the school environment as well. As a member, I was also able to initiate conversations that pertained to issues related to sexual minorities, and more importantly I was afforded opportunities to discuss the themes that emerged with the participants in detail during the data analysis process. At the end of the data analysis, all interpretations were provided to the participants to determine if the findings accurately reflected their attitudes, beliefs

and values toward sexual minority educators. Lastly, the research data and findings were presented to fellow researchers to garner feedback.

External validity is "traditionally related to the generalizability of a study's results" (Pitney, 2004, p. 27). This type of validity is concerned with the degree that the findings of the study can be generalized to other populations (Merriam, 2002; Pitney, 2004). According to Pitney (2004), "Because qualitative researchers seek a depth rather than a breadth of information and insight and understanding about a specific context, qualitative researchers do not often concern themselves with generalizability." They tend to use the term transferability, which is related to whether the findings are "germane to similar contexts" (Pitney, 2004, p. 27), to describe external validity (Pitney, 2004; Sandelowski, 1986).

"To deal with transferability, qualitative researchers attempt to provide readers with rich, descriptive information about a context or participants so that they can determine for themselves whether the results speak to their situation or experience" (Pitney, 2004, p. 27). There are four strategies used to strengthen transferability: rich descriptions, user generalizability, multi-sit designs and typical or modal categories (Pitney, 2004; Sandelowski, 1986; Merriam, 2002). In this study, rich, thick descriptions were used to enable the

reader to understand the attitudes that heterosexual educators hold toward homosexuality. The data were also analyzed from multiple settings (elementary and middle school) to find common themes.

Reliability

Reliability relates to the degree of consistency or dependability of research findings (Polit & Hungler, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986; Merriam, 2002; Pitney, 2004).

> Because qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning that individuals give to their experiences, and because human behavior is rarely, if ever, static in nature, the concept of reliability is problematic. Qualitative researchers therefore often use the term dependability, which is based not on whether particular feelings can be reproduced by another researcher but rather whether they are reasonable based on the data collected. (Pitney, 2004, p. 27)

For the purposes of this research study, replication is not paramount. According to Pitney (2004), no two qualitative studies will produce the same result because of the variation of human behavior; thus, rather than assuring consistency, dependability of the data findings should be the focus (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

There are three strategies suggested to strengthen reliability: researcher's perspective, triangulation and audit trail (Merriam, 1998; Pitney, 2004; Sandelowski, 1986, Lincoln & Guba, 1985).   This study utilized the researcher's perspective and an audit trail. The researcher is the data-gathering instrument; thus, reliability is also dependent upon the researcher's skills as an interviewer and any biases that the researcher may hold. To increase researcher reliability, interview techniques that enhanced the data collection process were utilized. Each interview was conducted using an interview script. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim to further increase consistency. My perspectives and biases are the subject of the following section.

Guba & Lincoln (1985) suggest that a study is reliable if the reader can follow the decision trail of the research process. Findings from this study were written to provide the reader details, such as the attitudes, beliefs and values that heterosexual teachers hold toward homosexuality; how these attitudes, beliefs, and values relate to available literature reviewed; and whether my findings corroborate previously found information to check the "decision trail."

Positionality of the Researcher

Pitney (2004) expresses the need for the researcher to share his/her perspectives and biases regarding the situation under investigation. This section will present my assumptions and perspectives that have influenced the way I approached this research.

For ten years, I have been employed as a public school teacher primarily in the middle grades (4-8). As the wife of a military Captain, I move quite often which has afforded me the opportunity to observe students and teachers in several elementary and middle schools located in Georgia and Florida. It wasn't until my tenure as a high school teacher that I became vividly aware of the considerable number of students that self-identified as being a sexual minority and the absence of "out" sexual minority teachers. I typically wear my hair cropped low; thus, as I displayed my books (with the titles pertaining to homosexuality) and discussed my doctoral research interest with others around me, many teachers, students and administrators began to question my own sexual identity. It wasn't until they learned that I was married and a mother of three that the innuendos ceased. Still, there was an overall perception that I was supportive of sexual minorities. As a result, several sexual minority students came out to me, as well as one other teacher.

I have had the privilege of knowing several people that are
sexual minorities; however, it wasn't until I began my research
that I truly became more cognizant of the trials, tribulations,
heterosexism, and homophobia that are faced by those that choose
not to self-identify as heterosexual. I have overheard some
hurtful comments that have truly alarmed me. I can recall an
occasion when I was conversing with a group of co-workers and a
male student suspected by them to be a sexual minority walked by
wearing pink tennis shoes; After noticing the shoes, one of my
co-workers responded, "Look at what that faggot is wearing
today." She and another co-worker then proceeded to ridicule
the student's feminine mannerisms. During the course of my
research, I also received unexpected responses from my
colleagues, co-workers, and friends. Several sent what I deemed
questionable emails; most were religious in nature and condemned
homosexuality. My aunt, whom I thought was gay friendly, went
as far as to compose an email citing specific Biblical
scriptures and instructed me to send it to my major professor,
because we were "wrong to be doing a research on that topic."
More recently, I have been shocked to read things on the
graduate listservs at my university that have been negative
toward sexual minorities. For example, several graduate
students in my department requested that they be removed from
the listserv because they resented listings being posted that

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pertained to sexual orientation and homosexuality. Hill (2004) discusses this at length in his work on activism as the practice of adult education.

Personally, I do not feel that the schools in which I have taught have fostered an environment of acceptance for our sexual minority teachers or students; thus, my desire to examine the attitudes of my heterosexual co-workers toward sexual minority educators. I began this research with the hope that thought-provoking interviews might assist them to better understand, and address, their attitudes toward sexual minorities.

The final decision to explore this topic came in a class I was taking at the university. Prior to the first day, it was rumored that the instructor was "gay." My classmates made such a big deal out of a gay professor teaching one of our classes; I became curious and wanted to know what attitudes existed with students in higher education, and as a teacher, among co-workers. Personally I believed the contact was extremely beneficial in that it allowed me to explore some of my own beliefs about homosexuality. To be honest, when a member of my cohort called to inform me, "The professor is gay," I expected him to be skinny, prissy and high strung. I can remember telling my friend after that first class, "I thought you said he was gay", and her replying, "He didn't act like it. Did he?"

This research changed my attitudes and the stereotypes that I had. I definitely admire and have a far greater respect for out sexual minorities!

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to better understand the attitudes and interpersonal dynamics of heterosexual teachers toward sexual minority educators. Questions that drive this study are: 1) What are the attitudes of heterosexual educators toward sexual minority (LGBTQ) educators? 2) What factors lead to the attitudes that heterosexual educators hold toward homosexuality and sexual minority educators? And, 3) What value is placed on continuing professional education for learning about homosexuality and sexual orientation? A qualitative design was employed to gain insights into these research questions.

This chapter presents the findings obtained from interviewing 12 heterosexual educators. The findings are organized according to the following three research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of heterosexual educators toward sexual minority (LGBTQ) educators?

2. What factors lead to the attitudes that heterosexual educators hold toward homosexuality and sexual minority educators?

3. What value is placed on continuing professional education for learning about homosexuality and sexual orientation?

The Attitudes of Adult Heterosexual Educators Toward

Homosexuality

Educators over thirty five years of age were initially

reluctant to have their interviews recorded. On numerous

occasions these participants whispered responses or asked that

the recorder be turned off as they made statements regarding

homosexuality. For example, Karrie asked that the recorder be

turned off a number of times during the interview saying, "Are

you sure no one else will hear this?" Her behavior indicated

that she was clearly uncomfortable with the topic. Another

participant, Fannie, tended to whisper the direct references she

made to homosexuality. Like Karrie, she twice requested that

the tape recorder be paused during the questions that pertained

to knowledge of sexual minority individuals and their perceived

effect on the school's climate. Fifty percent of the teachers

initiated conversations after the interview had ended and the

tape recorder had been turned off. These teachers wanted to

know what information had been revealed by the researcher's

review of literature as it related to attitudes toward

homosexuality. Most participants seemed simply curious to know

if their attitudes toward homosexuality mimicked prior research.

Due to the fact that the researcher would be asking follow-up

questions at a later date, and did not want to influence

participants' responses, each participant was assured that he or
she would be given a copy of the study upon completion.

Findings Related to Research Question 1

In analyzing the data, four themes emerged in response to
research question 1. These four themes are summarized in table
4.1 below and are discussed in detail in the following section.

Table 4.1
Themes Related to Research Question 1

Theme 1: Homosexuality is immoral and unnatural

Theme 2: Homosexuality is a personal choice

Theme 3: Sexual minorities do not conform to gender role
          expectations

Theme 4: Homosexuality adversely affects children

Theme 1: Homosexuality is Immoral and Unnatural

The description of homosexuality as being immoral and
unnatural clearly emerged from the interviews. Seven of the
elementary heterosexual teachers discussed their belief that
homosexuality was immoral and unnatural. While four referenced
religious experiences as the source of their beliefs, the three
others were more concerned about the effects of homosexuality on
the balance of nature and society. Responses to this question,
in relation to morality, are directly linked to findings in

regards to the second research question on what influenced teachers' attitudes. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss religion in both sections. None of the middle school teachers viewed homosexuality as being immoral or unnatural. All believed that homosexuality was a choice that sexual minorities had a right to make, and as long as they were not approached by a homosexual educator, they were nonjudgmental. Religious beliefs will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

When asked to describe her attitude toward homosexuality, Tameka, a 25 year old, heterosexual elementary teacher, without hesitation boldly declared, "I believe that homosexuality is immoral; that we should not participate or engage in any of the practices or homosexual tendencies. I just don't think its right." When asked what led to her belief that it was immoral, she further explained:

> That's pretty simple, because if everybody was
> homosexual, there wouldn't be anymore people.
> Everybody would die off. I mean if you stuck with what you
> believed in, and you practiced and you felt like this is
> love and this is right and this is how it should be, there
> is no way you could reproduce with the same sex.

Tameka shared that the source of her beliefs that homosexuality was immoral and unnatural were the "Bible, and a little common sense."

John, a 31 year old, heterosexual educator, also believed that homosexuality was immoral. He shared, "I did not like that behavior. I would maybe in a sense not like them or want to associate with them because of their choice." Like Tameka, John also attributed his beliefs to religious dogma:

I think a lot of the attitudes and beliefs that I have toward people that are gay, a lot of it is rooted in what I have heard and read through religious arenas, especially like church, and reading in the Bible. I think a lot of it is rooted in religion, because in the Bible they say Sodom and Gomorrah, and they say that it's damnation.

John admitted that although he still had "a strong opinion against it [homosexuality]", he had become more understanding by working with, or knowing people that were sexual minorities. His acquaintance with sexual minorities had made him become more tolerant.

When asked to describe her beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuality, Deanna, a 45 year old, heterosexual educator unambiguously expressed, "This is what I feel. I attend church regularly, and I believe as the Bible says that we should be heterosexual. That's how God made us and that's how we should

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be." It was clearly apparent that her religious experiences had led to her beliefs that homosexuality was unnatural.

Simone, a 39 year old, heterosexual educator fervently described her beliefs about homosexuality being immoral and unnatural. Simone described being "disappointed with society as a whole, because they have gotten away from the Christian values." She reported:

My children can not watch TV without me being there to see what is appropriate for them. When I turned on the television set one day, I saw a man kissing a man, a black man kissing a white man, and it startled me. That was ridiculous. It didn't have any warning at the bottom of the screen. I think it is awful, and society has gotten away from the beliefs of God, the Christians' belief, and I feel for our children. I don't know what the world is coming to, and I don't know what kind of future that we have.

Throughout her interview, Simone passionately stressed the importance of believing in God and going by God's word.

God didn't place us on this earth for a man and man to be married, and have children and vice versa, for a woman to be with a woman. I believe he wants us, a woman, to be with a man, and not the other way around. That's what my beliefs are. I am very old-fashioned, and I don't believe

in gay marriages at all, and I don't believe in man and

man, and woman and woman, and I don't want any of that type

of environment around my children. I don't believe in it.

Martin, a 31 year old, heterosexual did not believe that

his religion played a major role in his being "against"

homosexuality.   During the interview he shared:

I know that a lot of people use religion for some many

different things. Even Ku Klux Klansmen have used the

Bible to justify points or what not. I just think the

Bible is sometimes, when you are talking about

Christianity, so broad that it can be steered to whatever

way.

Although he described himself as being against homosexuality, he

admitted that he just "didn't understand it." Despite his lack

of knowledge, he believed that sexual minorities had the right

to choose whatever made them happy. He explained:

Personally for myself, I am against it. For others, it

just seems that, if that's what makes them happy; they have

to know what they are up against in society, and in

whatever belief system they are in, whether it is

Christianity, Buddhist or any other religion. They have to

deal with that, but for me personally I just don't

understand.

Ironically, Viviene, a 26 year old, heterosexual who attended a private Catholic school for most of her life, did not feel that religion influenced her beliefs about homosexuality. Viviene did not have a problem with people choosing an "alternate lifestyle," as long as no references to homosexuality were made to younger children. It is then, she believed, that she would be prejudicial, and paint homosexuality negatively. She shared:

> I think in school, especially elementary school since that's where we are, I think I would have to probably paint it more negatively, because I don't' think that is something that the children should be worried, or even be thinking about at this age. If you were to get into high school age children, you could be more open and accepting of people choosing an alternate lifestyle or whatever, but in elementary school, I think I would have to be more prejudicial towards it.

Although Rachel, a 29 year old, heterosexual educator, did not "believe that it's right," she described herself as being "non judgmental."

> Personally, for myself I don't believe that it's right. I don't have any attitude toward anyone that chooses to do differently. I am non judgmental. It doesn't affect our friendship or work relationship or anything like that. I

would not choose, but I wouldn't choose to do a lot of

things that people do. I am sure the same would be people

wouldn't do the things that I do that are considered off

the beaten path.

Like Viviene, Rachel also described being raised in a very

religious environment. She shared, "I was raised in the church,

in a very strict church, so I was always taught that it was

wrong, it's a sin"; however, Rachel posited:

I was raised in a very liberal household. My dad was

military, so I was always exposed to different ethnicities,

races, everything. In different environments, you get in

contact with a lot of different people, and you start to

accept it. If you don't have prejudices and racial

attitudes toward most things, you are not going to have it

against sexuality either.

Fannie, a 55 year old, heterosexual, described herself as

being for but against homosexuality. She recognized, "This

[homosexuality] is what's coming about, and a lot of people now

are doing this, and I would have to say I'm against that."

Fannie elaborated that her being critical of homosexuality could

be attributed to her fear of its influence on children.

Majorie was the only elementary heterosexual educator that

held exclusively positive views about homosexuality. She

described sexual minorities as being "humans just like anyone

else." Majorie explained, "When I say that, I mean that I don't feel any different toward a homosexual as I would toward a heterosexual. They are all people. I really don't have any hang-ups about it."

The positive attitudes that Majorie held were probably a result of her being closely acquainted with sexual minorities. She was the only elementary teacher that had personal relationships with persons known to be sexual minorities. According to Majorie, she had several friends and relatives that were homosexual or transgender, and being around them was "just like being around anyone else."

Although it appeared that the overall perception of the elementary heterosexual educators was that homosexuality was immoral or unnatural, all three of the middle school heterosexual educators viewed homosexuality differently. Karrie and Lori, both 47 years old, heterosexual educators, admitted to having held negative attitudes in the past, but attributed the change in their attitudes to aging and having personal acquaintances. Janice, a 33 year old, heterosexual educator had never held any negative views about homosexuality.

Karrie believed that her religious upbringing influenced the negative feelings that she once held toward sexual minorities.

I think a lot of Southern Baptists tell you that it is

wrong. They tell you that it is not the right way to go,

and they tell you that if you do that, if you partake of

it, you will go to hell.

Lori also contributed her once negative beliefs to her religious

experiences:

I believe in the Bible in its entire word, in its entirety,

nothing added and nothing taken away. In scripture, there

is no ambiguity; it is clearly pointed out as to the

destinations of those individuals who are not of the

traditional family sexual orientation. However, as I have

gotten older, and I won't say wiser, I am going to say as I

have gotten older, I am maybe of more gentle spirit; I have

relied on the premise that it is not for me to judge

anyone's sexuality and I love them as an individual, for

who they are, and not for what their sexual preference is.

Does it make any difference to me? No. It really does

not, not at all.

Janice did not believe that homosexuality was wrong.

According to her, "sexual minorities were just as good as any

other person." Janice speculated that people had to become

educated enough to accept homosexuality. She explained, "Some

people just have a fear of homosexuals and homosexuality, and

think they are different, and no they aren't. They are the very same people as everyone else."

Theme 2: Homosexuality is a personal choice.

Surprisingly, although the participants overwhelmingly believed homosexuality was immoral and unnatural, half of the participants believed that homosexuality was a personal choice that sexual minorities had the right to make. A subtheme that emerged from the interviews with these participants was that homosexuality is caused by genetics.

Lori believed that a person's sexual preference (homosexuality) had a lot to do with their "genetic makeup." Early in her interview she explained, "I didn't use to believe that, but I believe now. There is a lot of irrefutable evidence about x y chromosomes and all that." She considered the possibility of some sexual minorities not having an option when choosing homosexuality. "Even though the scripture tells you it's wrong, the science doesn't lie. Regardless of what their environment may be, XY doesn't lie. It makes me think twice when I didn't use to."

Now that she was "thinking twice," Lori noted that she does not believe that sexual minority educators posed problems. She posited that sexual minorities had the right to "be who they are, and not for what their sexual preference is." She shared

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that if others felt uncomfortable with being in a situation where sexual minorities existed, "They can go somewhere else and get a job." She reported, "If it were openly offensive to another teacher, at this day and time, I believe that it is their problem, and not the openly gay teacher's problem."

Like Lori, Majorie also believed that homosexuality may be a result of genetics. She explained that several of her friends and relatives were sexual minorities. Having been around them practically all of her life, Majorie described the sexual minorities that she knew as being "human like everyone else." She believed that although these individuals chose to live a homosexual lifestyle, they really didn't have a choice. According to her, "They feel it is not their choice of the way they are. That's just how they are." Majorie also noted that sexual minority educators had a right to be a part of education. They could be successful in education, and should be judged on their job performance and not sexual preference.

Janice explained that "people are born with those intentions." Although she believed that homosexuality was a result of genetics, in her estimation, people had a "choice to act upon that." She speculated, "They know how they are going to be treated in some situations, so it is their choice to act upon that." However, Janice acknowledged that sexual

minorities, "really might not be able to help that they have those tendencies."

It's not fair to them at all. That's what I am saying. It's not fair that they have to walk around not being their true person, who they are. So, they have to make that choice, Am I going to like this or am I going to live like this.

John stated that he really didn't believe that people were "created that way." "I think it's a choice and preference they choose." In his subsequent statements, he admitted that it might be possible that sexual minorities had no choice, saying:

When you get into how humans are created, then there is more that I may not know of in terms of, I think we're all one sex at one point, and then at a certain time in gestation, we go one way or the other.

Tameka also believed that homosexuality was a choice; however, she did not believe genetics had a role in determining homosexuality. Tameka deemed self esteem to be the attributing factor. According to Tameka:

Self esteem-has a lot to do with the choices we make. A lot of people feel like they don't fit in with their gender. They may feel like they may fit in better if they just switch to the other, but it's not that easy. They don't realize that. They just don't fit in.

To illustrate this point, Tameka referenced experiences that she perceived some girls may have while growing up. "I guess some girls feel like I don't like make up. I like jeans. I like the stuff that boys like. They feel like well its okay if I pretend that I am a boy." According to Tameka, "girls making these choices are not okay, because this is not what they are."

Karrie emphatically assured the researcher that regardless of what others thought, sexual minority educators had a choice to live whatever lifestyle they desired. She posited:

> Seriously, I think that is your choice. What you do behind closed doors is your business, but I think in the world that we live in today, things are just judged on that outer appearance. You really don't want to see, but it's there. You can't knock a person down if that's their choice.

Theme 3: Sexual Minorities do not Conform to Gender Role Expectations

Based on the feedback from a significant number of heterosexual teachers, it can be concluded that heterosexual teachers hold negative stereotypes about sexual minorities. The teachers observed that sexual minorities do not conform to traditional gender role expectations. This was a problem for nine of the twelve teachers. The participants indicated that the nonconformity manifests itself in the following ways: (a)

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sexual minorities commit gender-role violations, which included disruptive displays, or "flaunting" mannerisms of the opposite sex, thereby making known one's sexual orientation; (b) sexual minorities display same sex affections which adversely affects children, and (c) nonconformity generated fears that a sexual minority might attempt to strike up inappropriate relationships with them-often using the term "hit" on them.

Seventy-five percent of the elementary teachers agreed that sexual minority educators would disrupt the school climate by not conforming to gender role expectations. They perceived conformity to be extremely important during the elementary years. Numerous references were made to the detrimental effects that gender role violations would have on children. Startling, these teachers acknowledged that as long as sexual minorities remained closeted, they would not have a problem with them entering their environment. Simone, a heterosexual educator who made it vividly clear throughout her interview that she harbored negative beliefs and attitudes toward sexual minorities, succinctly summarized the feelings of several of her colleagues in what might be called a "don't ask, don't tell" philosophy.

> Teachers would more than likely continue to go on like they normally go on, as long as that person doesn't make it prevailing in a way that he or she let's everybody know what his or her sexuality might be.

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A majority of the elementary heterosexual teachers believed that they could determine whether a person was homosexual or not by merely observing them, and this bias permeated several of their interviews.

Deanna disclosed as long as she did not personally know or could not "determine by their mannerisms" if an individual was homosexual, she would not have a problem; however, she noted, "If I know, It's a problem!" She shared that she would not permit her elementary aged son to enter a classroom taught by a teacher that was a sexual minority, because she feared the individual would display "those mannerisms and everything," which may unduly influence her son in some manner. She passionately explained, "I wouldn't want my boys to be gay or homosexual."

Unexpectedly, Deana queried the researcher with regards to sexual minorities in schools.

I would like to know if you find out about situations where people actually accept it [homosexuality] in the lower grades, or the middle grades and stuff. I wish you could tell me about that, because I don't feel that they do. I feel it's like in the military; you have to keep it in.

Due to the fact that follow up interviews would be conducted, the researcher agreed to share the findings upon the completion of the study.

Ironically, Deanna admitted that outside of the school environment she had no problems with sexual minorities not conforming to gender expectations. She described an experience at her hair salon:

I used to even go to a hair salon where there was a [homosexual] guy in there, but I liked that guy. He was funny. There was just a lot of fun, and he would have you laughing. He had the mannerisms and everything and I knew that as a child, but it didn't bother me.

Simone also believed that she could determine if a person was a sexual minority through observation. According to her, "It's a certain way as to how open you can be. You can dress that way, and we will know it." However, Simone admitted that she did not think that a teacher would come to work dressed in "a ridiculous way to let us know that they are really out there."

Surprisingly, Simone believed that younger children would notice if sexual minority males did not conform to expected gender roles. She explained:

The older ones automatically know. They know what's going on, so, I don't think they are going to too much question it. The little ones, I think the little ones are going to start asking their parents, and they're going to start

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asking the teachers what's going on. Why is this person

acting this way?

Simone expressed that gender violations on or off school grounds

should not occur around smaller children. She reiterated, "I

think the older children; they've pretty much gotten their

personalities. They are almost developed, but the little ones

have not." Her biggest fear was that the "little ones" would be

exposed to a sexual minority teacher "out doing something that

he wasn't supposed to be doing in public."

Tameka acknowledged that she was biased as it pertained to

sexual minorities in the classroom, but admitted that "it would

depend on the gender." She was more concerned that boys would

be confused by sexual minority male teachers that did not

conform to expected gender roles.

It would cause a lot of confusion. There are a lot of boys

who don't have role models and some of their first

encounters with a male on a regular basis are with

elementary male teachers. When you are regularly around

this type person, and they do these type things, then maybe

the boys will feel that it is okay to be like that, and it

is not okay.

These types of things, as described by Tameka, encompassed the

displaying of feminine "mannerisms" or tendencies.

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Martin also believed that sexual minority males would prove to be more problematic in elementary schools. Martin noted, "If it is a man, they are going to see if he is tough, because you always associate the homosexual man a lot of times with weakness." He recalled experiences where people made jokes, and derogatory remarks comparing weak, putatively heterosexual, males to "acting gay."

Martin acknowledged that he didn't know if he would be more guarded around sexual minority educators. He posited that he wouldn't have a problem, "as long as they didn't express or say that they liked me, or made me feel uncomfortable."

John believed that he could determine if a male was a sexual minority by observing him; however, he admitted that he found it hard to determine if a female was a sexual minority.

> I think for me as a male, seeing another male, you can kind of sense it looking at them. For me, looking at a female it's kind of hard to tell if a female would go that route. Teachers are predominately female, so you can kind of obviously see it if it was a male teacher.

Although he felt that he could determine a person's sexuality, John was less concerned about gender conformation and more concerned with being approached.

> I wouldn't go out and gay bash or beat somebody down because of their preference, unless I felt offended. Then I

would kind of confront the situation. If they were approaching me or harassing a friend of mine, or doing something, in a sense that was over the line, then I may have to react to it.

According to Vivian, "Some people may act different or act more feminine than most people you would expect," but she didn't particularly see it as being that much different. She admitted that she "just got used to it." On the other hand, Viviene expressed that displays of homosexuality should not occur around smaller children. She believed that elementary children shouldn't be worried or thinking about homosexuality at that age; however, she explained, "I think if you were to get into high school aged children, you could be more open and accepting of people choosing an alternate lifestyle or whatever."

During the interview, Viviene also mentioned her discomfort that she would be approached by an openly homosexual teacher. She explained, "I think there needs to be a line drawn for me where I can say yes, I can be your friend, or I can be on friendly terms, but this where that line is going to stop." Karrie's response mimicked Viviene's: She described sexual minorities as "good to have as friends, but I wouldn't want to be in their company like that. I don't' look at them like that, and I think they know me well enough to know that I am not about that."

Theme 4: Homosexuality has a Negative Impact on Children

The negative impact of homosexuality on children was discussed by 50% of the participants. Many believed that sexual minorities would unduly influence children, by (a) imposing their homosexual values on children, and/or (b) recruiting children to their homosexual lifestyle. There was a deeply expressed concern about the interactions between children and sexual minorities.

During her interview, Fannie conceded that she was "for, but against homosexuality." She attributed her negative attitudes to her disagreement with "children being raised up by two homosexuals." Her main criticism was the mental impact on children. She believed that sexual minority parents may impart their values on their children.

Well, the children, I wonder about them. I'm sure in studies that they'll find that they'll be fine; it's just that, I don't know, I got this big thing in my head. I just feel like it might be, I don't know, it just might be really hard on the children. They might not know their choice in life, or I feel like it may influence their choice in life.

Deanna also believed that children may be influenced by sexual minorities. She acknowledged that she wouldn't let her children be taught by a sexual minority educator, because she

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feared that they would impose their values on her children.

Since she had boys, Deanna shared that she was more worried

about male sexual minorities: "I would say not as much with a

female, because they are not concerned with my sons, but then

they still could put their values on them." Deanna felt that

she needed to protect her sons while they were young, so they

could "make the right choice." She explained, "When they go to

college there is no telling who their teachers are, but by that

time they should have already made their decision in life,

hopefully, as to whether they are going one way or the other."

Tameka possessed beliefs similar to Deanna. She believed

that elementary students should not be in classes taught by

sexual minority educators.

> I personally wouldn't feel a certain way about the person,
> but I would feel a certain way about the kids. It's not
> necessary about how I would treat them. I don't have
> anything against them, but I wouldn't want any students in
> their class.

Tameka believed that children would not be mature enough to

understand homosexuality, and may want to partake of a

homosexual lifestyle, because their teacher did.

Viviene believed that references to homosexuality were

inappropriate in elementary settings. As discussed earlier, she

believed that elementary children should not be "worried or even

be thinking about [homosexuality] at this age." She shared that
she would have to be prejudicial toward any of it, "because it
would not be appropriate in this setting." Viviene described:

> In elementary school it should be kept something more
>
> private, because fourth grade is not the time for a child
>
> to go to a parent, and say what does it mean to be gay, or
>
> a transvestite, or something like that. That is not an age
>
> that you usually discuss those types of things.

She admitted that most people, including herself, would:

> Kind of frown upon it in a [elementary] school like this,
>
> because I think we are very protective of our children, and
>
> supposed innocent that we don't want to expose them to
>
> things that might be taboo, or outside the range of what we
>
> consider normal.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Rachel revealed that
any negative discourse in relation to sexual minority educators
would be the result of what she deemed to be, "misguided beliefs
about homosexuality." Rachel explained:

> Again, I think the school would be okay. I think the
>
> problem, if any were to occur, would be with parents. I
>
> think there are a lot of misguided beliefs about
>
> homosexuality. I think it would go along the lines; a lot
>
> of people seem to think that they [homosexuals] have
>
> unusual sexual appetites, so they can't control themselves.

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They confuse it with child molestation and pedophiles, or it's contagious, and the belief system is so twisted on it right now, because we have a lot of backwards people in this area. They are real ignorant, and they would be real ignorant acting.

Karrie also didn't think that a sexual minority educator would have an effect on the middle school climate. Although she acknowledged, "some of the students have said comments before", she posited, "I don't think it phases them. I really don't think it matters." Like Rachel, she believed the biggest dilemma would be posed by parents:

Parents would be afraid for their children to be in an atmosphere or environment with them [sexual minority], because the first thing that people tend to think is that he's trying to look at my son, or she's trying to look at my daughter.

Despite this perceived opposition, all of the middle school teachers described their environments as being tolerant toward sexual minorities. Lori shared, "I think it's tolerant. I don't think that it's negative, in as much as we have suspected, or we have had an influx of sexual minority teachers in the public education system; I think it's tolerant."

Findings Related to Research Question 2: What Learning has Fostered the Attitudes that Adult Heterosexual Educators hold Toward Homosexuality?

In analyzing the data using Research Question 2 as the investigative lens, four distinct themes emerged. These themes are summarized in table 4.2 and are discussed in detail in the following sections:

Table 4.2
Themes Related to Research Question 2

Theme 1: Religion

Theme 2: Sexual Minority Acquaintances

Theme 3: Aging

Theme 1: Religion

Religious knowledge and experiences were found, more than anything else, to have fostered the attitudes that many of the heterosexual teachers held toward homosexuality. Seven participants specifically acknowledged that they attributed the beliefs that they held toward homosexuality to their religious knowledge and/or experiences.

Simone, a Baptist who attends services at least once a month, held the most negative views toward homosexuality and believed that her views could be attributed to her religious

upbringing. She described growing up in a Christian home with parents that stressed the importance of believing in the Bible.

> I think what has influenced my beliefs were my parents, the way I was brought up. I was brought up in a Christian home. I was brought up with a mother and father who loved me dearly, and I had all the things that I needed, and some of the things that I wanted. They always stressed education to me, and they also stressed the importance of your belief in God, going by God's words.

According to Simone, "God didn't place us on this earth for a man and man to be married and have children, and vice versa, for a woman to be with a woman." For her the Bible clearly stated that homosexuality was a sin, and that was what she passionately believed.

Tameka, self identified as Non Denominational, who attends services three times a month, and also attributed her negative views toward homosexuality to her religion. She believed that the Bible clearly dictated that homosexuality was immoral and unnatural. According to her, the scriptures "clearly stated that God made Adam and Eve". She explained, "If everybody was homosexual there wouldn't be anymore people."

Deanna, a Baptist who attends services almost every Sunday, acknowledged that her attitudes toward homosexuality were rooted in her religious beliefs. She described attending church

regularly and believing in the Bible. According to Deanna, "the
Bible says we should be heterosexual. That's how God made us,
and that's how we should be." Anything beyond these teachings,
she viewed as being unnatural.

Rachel, a Pentecostal who attends church once a week,
described being raised in a "very strict church." She shared,
"I was always taught that it was wrong, it's a sin." However,
Rachel believed that being raised in a liberal household enabled
her to overcome the negative attitudes that her religion
fostered.

Although he attends church once a month, John described
himself as not having a religious affiliation at this point. He
attributed his once negative views toward homosexuality to the
things he "heard and read through religious arenas, especially
like church, and readings in the Bible." John felt that "a lot
of it [negativity] is rooted in religion." As an example, he
referenced the Bible's Sodom and Gomorrah, explaining that
homosexuality was damnation. Ironically, John acknowledged that
although he still held a strong opinion against homosexuality,
his becoming acquainted with sexual minorities had made him
become more tolerant, and question some of his religious
beliefs.

Lori self identified as Non Denominational, and attends
services every Sunday. According to her, she believed in the

Bible in its "entire word, in its entirety, nothing added, and nothing taken away." She noted that Biblical scripture has "no ambiguity," and clearly designates "the destinations of those individuals who are not of the traditional family sexual orientation." For Lori, aging has caused her to question her religious experiences, and become more of what she described as a "gentle spirit." Although she still believes in the Bible, Lori admits that she now questions the religious principles that she has embraced for so long.

Karrie, a self identified Baptist who attends services twice a week, acknowledged that religion had influenced her beliefs and attitudes toward sexual minorities. She noted, "Southern Baptists, they tell you that it is wrong, and they tell you that it is not the right way to go." According to Karrie, her religion dictated that hell was the destination of those that partake of homosexuality. Like Lorrie, Karrie also believed that aging had played a major role in her becoming more tolerant of homosexuality, despite her religious beliefs.

Theme 2: Sexual Minority Acquaintances

Several heterosexual educators cited becoming acquainted with sexual minorities as another factor that influenced the construction of their attitudes toward homosexuality.

Majorie was the only elementary heterosexual educator to hold exclusively positive attitudes toward homosexuality. Unlike the other participants, Majorie described close personal relationships with sexual minorities. She described her relationship with "those individuals" as being "just as they are with any other individuals." Majorie illustrated, "We talk, hang out together, and do whatever the rest of us [heterosexuals] do." Because of her acquaintances with sexual minorities, Majorie emphatically had "no problem with it [homosexuality]."

Although Rachel stated during the interview that she did not "believe that it's [homosexuality] right, her attitudes pertaining to homosexuality were generally positive. She portrayed herself as being "nonjudgmental," and noted that a person's sexual preference would not "affect our friendship, or work relationship, or anything like that." Rachel described having coworkers and friends that were sexual minorities. According to her, "Some of them have been close in the past, just recently not anymore, because I don't live in the area anymore." Rachel acknowledged that being in environments with sexual minorities enabled her to "start to accept it."

John described once having negative attitudes toward homosexuality. According to him, becoming acquainted with sexual minorities, mostly coworkers, changed their negative

views relating to homosexuality. In spite of the religious experiences that caused John to hold negative attitudes, he admitted that becoming acquainted with sexual minorities had "opened his eyes in a sense." He was now more understanding and had become more tolerant of homosexuality. John admitted, "Before I became acquainted and knew these individuals, I had very strong opinions against people that were gay."

Although Karrie acknowledged having close personal relationships with sexual minority educators, had earlier described homosexuality as being immoral, it was interesting to note that as the interview progressed and the conversation shifted to sexual minority educators how Karrie's sentiments

considered a close friend. She discussed a conversation that her friend and she had engaged in pertaining to her friend's desire to remain closeted:

> I did one time. I asked her. I said, 'How do you do this [be a gay teacher]?' She said that her first love is teaching, and she just brings that out. I said, 'What do you do when people come up and ask you what is your preference?' She said she just ignored it. She just shook it off.

Janice also reported being acquainted with sexual minorities, attributed these relationships as being a contributing factor to her positive attitudes. Janice shared, "Yeah, I mean I know them. I talk to them. They come and hang out with my daughter, which is around me." She described sexual minorities as being "just as good as any other person." According to Janice, "Some people just have a fear of homosexuals and homosexuality. They feel they are different than they are; no they aren't. They are the very same people as everyone else."

Lorrie acknowledged having professional and a past extended family member that were sexual minorities. She explained that the professionals that she knew were closeted individuals, and posited, "They are intimidated by the social morass of a public educational institution, and therefore; I feel like they are

very limited and afraid of losing their jobs, because of the ramifications of being openly gay." Lorrie admitted that she had never, even in casual conversations, discussed sexuality with these individuals. She credited this to the fact that "most people are not comfortable in a public situation, in a school building, discussing it."

Theme 3: Aging

Karrie and Lori, both 47 years old, admitted to having held negative attitudes in the past. According to them, aging was influential in their changing attitudes. Karrie explained:

I feel that people have the right to be with whomever they want to be with. I really do. Whatever makes you happy, that's your business. Over the years, I have learned to realize that you have to go with whatever makes you happy.

She believed that older people were probably perceived to have more negative views toward homosexuality, because of their reluctance to discuss the issue.

I think a lot of people in my age category may feel like that [reluctant to discuss homosexuality] because it was never talked about. I've never heard of this.

Lori also attributed aging as being instrumental in her changing attitudes toward homosexuality:

Well, as I have gotten older, I have changed a little bit.
I believe in the Bible in its entire word, in its entirety,
nothing added and nothing taken away. In scripture, there
is no ambiguity; it is clearly pointed out as to the
destinations of those individuals who are not of the
traditional family sexual orientation. However, as I have
gotten older, and I won't say wiser, I am going to say as I
have gotten older, I am maybe of more gentle spirit; I have
relied on the premise that it is not for me to judge
anyone's sexuality and I love them as an individual, for
who they are, and not for what their sexual preference is.
Does it make any difference to me? No. It really does
not, not at all.

Findings Related to Research Question 3: What Value is Placed on
Continuing Professional Education for Learning about
Homosexuality and Sexual Orientation?

In exploring the data using Research Question 3 as the
analytical lens, four significant points emerged. Throughout the
interviews, these points were common threads with the
participants. They were: (a) all of the heterosexual educators
agreed that the district is silent in regards to homosexuality;
(b) eighty three percent of the heterosexual educators were
supportive and agreed that sexual orientation should be

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incorporated into the school's curriculum, but they could not

agree on how this implementation should take place; (c) all of

the Heterosexual educators acknowledged that they lacked the

preparation to adequately address issues related to

homosexuality and viewed continuing education as a means of

providing them the knowledge and skills needed to address

homosexuality in their classrooms and schools; and (d) the

heterosexual educators all agreed that mandated professional

development courses would initially meet some resistance, but

would be attended by all teachers. Each of these themes will be

addressed in the section that follows.

Table 4.3
Significant Themes Related to Research Question 3

Theme 1: The district is silent in regards to homosexuality

Theme 2: Sexual orientation should be incorporated into the
       School curriculum

Theme 3: Continuing professional development is valuable for
       for providing heterosexual teachers with
       knowledge and skills needed to address homosexuality

Theme 4: Continuing professional development must be mandated

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Continuing Education and Sexual Minority Issues

None of the participants were aware of any continuing

education courses or other educational venues offered by the

district that pertained to homosexuality. It was concluded that such courses did not exist.   As far as the role of the district in providing such courses, nine of the twelve participants believed that the school district should provide professional development via continuing education courses for all of their educators to address issues related to homosexuality. These teachers described themselves as being unprepared to handle issues related to homosexuality, and felt that their only resource was the school counselor. The participants believed that professional development courses could address their lack of knowledge by providing them valuable information about sexual minorities and homosexuality which would prepare them to address questions or deal with issues pertaining to sexual minorities and homosexuality that occur in the school building. There was a consensus among participants that homosexuality was "prevalent" in the county and definitely a concern that would have to be addressed sooner rather than later.

For the most part, the majority of the participants agreed that sexual orientation should be integrated into the curriculum; however, there was discord as far as the implementation strategy. John believed that homosexuality had probably not been addressed by the system, because it was considered taboo, which leads to "a lot of people being uncomfortable with it. You don't want to bring it up."

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However, he posited that professional development pertaining to sexual minorities or homosexuality would enable teachers to understand, which would lead to parents and then children understanding. "I think the more you talk about it [homosexuality], the more people can be more comfortable with it." John fervently supported the inclusion of sexual orientation as a part of the district's curriculum. He recalled childhood experiences at his school, located in another state, where sexual orientation was a part of the curriculum:

> I would support it, and I believe in it. I think it used
> to be in the school system. I remember going through
> middle school. Well, they would, you could see movies;
> they showed the old films, then they kind of graduated to
> VHS and DVD, but they would show it. It would be in our
> health textbooks, and they also showed the videos.

John felt that the classes provided him "proper education" about issues related to sexual orientation. According to him, sexual orientation classes are needed to provide students with accurate information, especially the students with parents "who may not even go that route." He shared:

> I don't remember my parents going way too much in details.
> I learned more about it from friends, outside of my home
> environment; that's probably, for a lot of kids, the same

situation, because some parents don't know how to approach it.

Rachel was dismayed that the school the school system did not already have professional development for educators pertaining to sexual orientation or homosexuality. She questioned the district's silence:

We are interacting with students; you would think it would be here first. I think it should be taught. In most job settings, professional settings it is taught. When you are in a vast area of people, you come across different lifestyles, and then things come into play. Unfortunately, things like that [courses] don't happen or exist until something happens, and there is a need for it. If there is not a need for it, it won't exist.

Rachel described homosexuality as being "more prevalent [than it used to be]" in schools. "It is something that is coming, so it's more accepted socially, especially among younger generations"; thus, she posited, "teachers should be ready to deal with it, because the kids are already doing it." When asked to express her feelings about sexual orientation becoming a part of the school's curriculum, Rachel was somewhat unsure:

I don't know about part of the curriculum, but I think tolerance should certainly be taught at every level from Pre-K on up, because that seems to be the main problem with

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it [homosexuality]. You don't have to like it; you don't

have to do it, but you should accept it and be

nonjudgmental with it. That can be interrelated to any

type of curriculum, preexisting curriculums.

Majorie also believed homosexuality was becoming more

prevalent in schools:

Researcher: Are you aware of any professional

development course in the district on sexual

orientation or homosexuality.

Majorie: No. I do not.

Researcher: How do you feel about that?

Majorie: That's another one of those tricky

questions, how do you feel about it? Yeah, we do need

to have something there, because homosexuality is

coming out so, and it is prevalent; we do need to

incorporate it some kind of way.

Although she was unsure as to how, and wavered in regards to if

the school system should incorporate sexual orientation into

existing curriculum, Majorie acknowledged that there should be

an "outlet" for students:

Although I am just not sure how the school system or

whether it [sexual orientation] should be a part of the

curriculum, if a child is confused because of their gender,

and they are not sure what it [homosexuality] is, they

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should have an outlet where they can go and talk to someone about it, and learn more about it; why they are feeling the way they are feeling and what's going on with them.

Her concept of implementing sexual orientation included "an open forum where children are allowed to discuss themselves and what others feel about them."

Fannie voiced that it would be "only a matter of time" before sexual orientation would be addressed in school districts everywhere and compared the district's lack of professional development pertaining to homosexuality to the days when teachers were not prepared or knowledgeable about issues relating to special needs students: "With all this coming about, I would have to say that would probably be a good course. Kind of like years ago they made us take the exceptional child."

As far as sexual orientation being incorporated into the curriculum, Fannie noted, "I probably wouldn't agree with it. If it was taught to the children saying that it is okay to be gay or lesbian, I am not so sure if I would agree with that." She believed that sexual orientation should be implemented in the high school curriculum, and taught by facilitators from outside of the school system on a monthly basis.

Like Fannie, Vivienne also agreed that a professional development course was needed, and considered it to be more useful for middle or high school educators. She explained, "I

think it would probably have more use in middle or high school, because I think a lot of people [elementary educators] would handle it by saying you need to go talk to your parents about that."

"As long as its age appropriate," Vivienne had no reservations about sexual orientation becoming a part of the school curriculum. She suggested that it be initiated in the sixth or seventh grade, but admitted, "After seeing some of the kids here this year, I don't know, maybe third." Although Vivienne was in agreement that sexual orientation should become a part of the curriculum, she clearly viewed this education as a "home responsibility," but acknowledged that a lack of communication at home has led to this discourse becoming a school responsibility. She acquiesced that an outside source should provide services, because she wouldn't feel comfortable doing so.

Vivienne explained:

> Well, in all honestly, I think a lot of things have transpired to the point where it seems like the responsibility of education has gone from the home to the schools. Primarily, I think it is a home responsibility and parents should be talking to their children about it. We just have found that communication in education is not happening at home, so the only place that it is going to

happen is at school, and I think it does need to happen. I

think they do need to be educated about it. I don't know

if I would feel comfortable having that discussion, or if

they would hire an outside person to come in to teach them

that, like our ACE [Academic Center of Excellence] program

or something. I wouldn't feel comfortable talking to my

children about things like that, especially since I

consider that a home issue. I don't know if I want to have

that conversation.

Lorrie noted that "something" was needed, if not for all

teachers, at minimum guidance counselors. She shared, "I do

think that we need to have something, at least guidance

counselors so that there can be some place that kids can go when

they have questions." She posited that children are becoming

sexually active at an earlier age and need to be able to have

answers for the changes that ma be taking place in their lives.

Lorrie believed that sexual orientation "could be incorporated

in the middle school program as an elective course where the

parents can decide whether or not they would like to have their

child participate."

Ironically, the three teachers that admitted they would not

voluntarily attend professional development on homosexuality or

sexual orientation and opposed having sexual orientation

included in the curriculum, believed that it was not their

responsibility to address these issues. They believed that the guidance counselor should address all issues pertaining to homosexuality or sexual orientation.

Deanna suggested the guidance counselor was "more prepared to deal with that issue [homosexuality]," and was unsure as to whether she wanted to take any professional development courses that pertained to homosexuality. She explained:

I don't know, because you know how I feel about my values. I don't know if I want to take it. I am serious. I don't know if I want to take it, because I am trying not to deal with the issue. Let the counselor who is more prepared deal with that issue. I don't want to deal with that issue, not in the classroom.

She articulated that any discourse related to sexual orientation was against her belief system and although she professed to "want no parts of it," Deanna admitted that she would like to learn more about it for her students' sake. However, she was adamant in her feelings about sexual orientation being excluded from the curriculum and responded "that's a thing where the parents should be the one to talk to their children." Deanna posited that as a parent of three boys, she wanted to be the one to discuss any issues related to sexual orientation with her children, and did not feel that the school had the right or place to engage in any dialogue that related to the topic.

I really do try to tell my children how I feel and I really

try to mold them my way, but if they go the other way, it

wouldn't be because of me. I would not hate my children.

I would be like that mom that has a daughter pregnant. I

would be mad for a minute, and I might come around.

Martin acknowledged that he would not attend professional

development courses that addressed sexual orientation or

homosexuality voluntarily. He explained:

I just know that if I had a choice as to whether I could do

this professional development or something else, I think I

would take another one that pertains to more of what I do

on a day-to-day basis. If it was mandated I would go. I

wouldn't picket or anything. I just don't think it would

be well received.

Martin was not convinced that professional development would not

prepare him to deal with problems or concerns related to

homosexuality or sexual orientation. He noted:

I don't think I would be prepared for that even if we did

have professional development, because I know the first

thing I would do, even with some situations that don't have

anything to do with that, is go to a counselor. I would

advise those kids to see a counselor, because I wouldn't

feel comfortable if a child came to me in that kind of

predicament.

As far as sexual orientation being incorporated into the

curriculum, Martin described himself as being "totally against

that." He said that engaging in a discussion about

homosexuality was not the school's place.

Simone also believed that any discourse pertaining to

homosexuality or sexual orientation was not the responsibility

of classroom teachers. According to her, some teachers are

probably afraid to broach the subject because they know it is

not their job, but the job of counselors or parents instead.

She affirmed:

> I guess the reason why I think they would be afraid is
>
> because they would be thinking that this may be the job for
>
> the counselor, maybe this is for the mother. This needs to
>
> be kept in the Christian home. This needs to be addressed
>
> by the counselor, by the church. Maybe I shouldn't be the
>
> one addressing this issue with the student.

As far as her personally participating in a professional

development course on sexual orientation, Simone admitted that

she would not participate unless mandated:

> I get so offended when I see inappropriate things on the
>
> television, and I don't know whether I would want to take a
>
> course on that, because I want to try to not have it. I
>
> just don't want to think about it. So, if I take a course
>
> that means I am thinking about it more than what I normally

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think about it. To be honest with you, I would rather have

the information where I can read it if I need to read it

and find out what I need to do. I would rather read the

information rather than being in a room with professionals,

discussing how we would handle the situation, because

sometimes I don't want to think about it, unless I really

need to. I see it so much on TV and out in the street. I

just don't want to expose myself to it anymore.

Mandatory Continuing Professional Development

The teachers all acknowledged that professional development

addressing sexual orientation or homosexuality would have to be

mandatory, or teachers would not fully participate. Several

participants acknowledged that there would be initial

resistance, but there was a consensus that this resistance would

eventually fade over time. According to Majorie, teachers would

feel "a little pressured because it was mandated," but would

eventually become accepting of the courses once they "looked at

the reasons, because it's something that is going to help you

understand how to deal with the children."

The comments of the heterosexual teachers indicated that

they anticipated a majority of teachers would initially resist.

According to Lorrie, "there would be some people who would

resist and probably refuse to go." For her, "that would be

okay." She posited, "I think there are always populations of people, for whatever reason, of resistance." The teachers perceived that the resistance would eventually fade. Karrie explained, "If it was mandated, I think we would have a lot of upset people at first, but then I think after it blows over, just like with anything that is new, you have to get a feel for it." She believed that once "people really see what is happening" the resistance would face. Vivienne believed that much of the resistance was coming from a lot of "old fashioned teachers". Similar to Karrie, she commented that if sexual orientation professional development was the norm as the "waves of new teachers" entered the profession, "after a while it would be normal, and I don't think that there would be anything against it."

The Value of Continuing Professional Development

Many heterosexual teachers viewed the professional development as being valuable and welcomed the knowledge that they perceived the courses could provide. Lorrie admitted, "I feel like I am not an authority, and I think I would benefit and be able to better answer student's questions if they had any." Fannie compared the development courses to the exceptional children courses that are now mandated by most state departments. Those classes were created to prepare teachers to

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be better equipped to meet the needs of special education students. She believed that she would benefit from professional development courses and shared, "I would really have to change my attitude and go ahead and take a class about this, because I would need the knowledge, especially if I am going to teach another twenty years." Karrie also believed that the classes would be beneficial. She disclosed, "I would want to know more about it, because you never know what type of students we get. As teachers we have to roll with the tide. We have to get with it."

Vivienne regarded the classes as being potentially "helpful," because she wanted to "know how to handle it [homosexuality]"; however, she admitted that "the more sheltered part of me is saying no because in fourth grade, I am not going to encounter those problems. It's hard for me to convince myself into believing that in fourth grade we have issues like that." Ironically, contrary to Vivienne's assumptions, Simone shared one of "those problems" that she encountered in her first grade classroom:

> I have had a couple of incidences. It hurt me deeply.
> About a couple of years ago, I had four little girls who
> were in the bathroom humping each other. This startled me
> and hurt me deeply. I was screaming and yelling, because I
> have never witnessed anything like that. My teaching

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assistant, she didn't know what was going on. I talked

with the girls and asked them, 'Were you doing this?' and

they didn't deny it. I told them, I said, 'This is wrong.

We don't do anything like this.' So, immediately I took the

girls down and called their parents. Their parents seemed

like they were not too shocked about the situation. They

said, 'yes, I will take care of it. I will talk to my

child about this,' but they were not stunned. I was

expecting them to be upset, to be hollering and screaming

in the phone.

Simone reluctantly agreed that professional development could be

beneficial from the standpoint of preparing teachers to be able

to properly address difficult situations, such as the one she

encountered.

One common underlying point made by the teachers was the

fact that sexual orientation is an issue that the district would

have to address soon. The teachers voiced that homosexuality

clearly existed and was becoming more prevalent and visible in

the school system. There was agreement among the participants

that continuing professional development was needed to enable

professionals to better understand and respond to critical

incidences in schools that are related to homosexuality and/or

sexual orientation.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to better understand the attitudes and interpersonal dynamics of heterosexual teachers toward sexual minority educators. Questions that drive this study are: 1) What are the attitudes of heterosexual educators toward sexual minority (LGBTQ) educators? 2) What factors lead to the attitudes that heterosexual educators hold toward homosexuality and sexual minority educators? And, 3) What value is placed on continuing professional education for learning about homosexuality and sexual orientation? A qualitative design was employed to gain insights into these research questions.

This chapter is a discussion and summarization of the findings that emerged as a result of my research study. It is a reflection on the relevance to adult education and continuing professional development and looks at several significant implications.

Summary of Results and Discussions

There were four themes identified in response to the first research question: What are the attitudes of heterosexual

educators toward sexual minority educators? These themes were:

1. Homosexuality is immoral and unnatural

2. Homosexuality is a personal choice

3. Sexual minorities do not conform to gender role expectations

4. Homosexuality adversely affects children

Homosexuality is Immoral and Unnatural

Societal attitudes toward homosexuality have been affected by the recent visibility and political power of sexual minorities (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). For the past three decades, overall attitudes toward homosexuality have become more favorable. There has been a decrease in moral condemnation, and an increase in opposition to anti-gay discrimination (Herek, 2000). Despite these advances, "few aspects of human behavior [still] evoke the intensity of opposition that homosexuality arouses in some circles" (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003, p.3.); one such circle is educational institutions. The persistence of institutional and personal hostility toward sexual minorities has been well documented, along with the mental health consequences of hate crimes, victimization, and verbal abuse (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). According to Ragins (2004):

Reports of heterosexism in the workplace reveal that it is relatively widespread; between 25 and 66% of LGB employees

report that they experienced discrimination based on their

sexual orientation (see review by Croteau, 1996). A

national study of 534 gay and lesbian professionals

indicated that over a third had faced verbal or physical

harassment in prior positions because of their sexual

orientation, 37% faced discrimination because others

suspected or assumed they were gay, and 12% left their last

job because of discrimination (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001b).

(p. 42)

Thus, it was troubling, but not surprising to find that 75% of

the heterosexual educators in my study were sexually prejudiced,

as defined by Herek (2000).

According to Herek (2000), "most adults in the United

States hold negative attitudes toward homosexual behavior,

regarding it as wrong and unnatural" (p.2). Ninety percent of

the elementary heterosexual participants described homosexuality

as being *unnatural*, *wrong*, or a phenomenon that they were

against. Tameka, a 25 year old elementary teacher, without

hesitation declared, "I believe that homosexuality is immoral;

that we should not participate or engage in homosexual

tendencies. I just don't think it's right." Several of her

colleagues echoed the same sentiments, and the overall

perception was that homosexuality should be painted negatively,

especially in elementary settings.

Only one elementary teacher, Majorie, a 46 year old elementary educator, had exclusively positive views toward homosexuality. Interestingly, none of the middle school teachers viewed homosexuality as being immoral or unnatural. Lori explained:

> I have relied on the premise that it is not for me to judge anyone's sexuality and I love them as an individual, for who they are, and not for what their sexual preference is. Does it make any difference to me? No. It really does not, not at all.

> This pattern of acceptance was prevalent among the middle school teachers. Was it a coincidence that I observed the middle school teachers as being more open, or is there a correlation between the openness of the middle school youth, for which I have anecdotal evidence, and the teachers' more positive attitudes? Although this was not a question posed in my study, it is an important implication that requires further research. I point this out to readers of this study, so that if they are middle school teachers, they can see whether this holds true.

Homosexuality is a Personal Choice

Findings indicated that heterosexual teachers viewed homosexuality as being a choice. According to John, "I think

it's a choice and preference they choose." Opinions differed as

to whether sexual minorities had a control over the decision to

choose what was described as a lifestyle choice or sexual

preference (Ragins, 2004). It is important to note that

thinking of homosexuality as a *lifestyle choice* ultimately means

that sexual minorities are denied a *life*; depicting it as a

lifestyle suggests that sexual minorities live a life that

differs from their heterosexual counterparts. This belief has

critical implications on how heterosexual educators may behave

toward their sexual minority counterparts. The belief that

sexual minorities can elect to be otherwise (heterosexual),

stigmatizes sexual minority educators.

"According to stigma theory, individuals who are seen as

having a control over or being responsible for their stigma will

face more negative reactions than those who are viewed as not

being responsible for their stigma" (Ragins, 2004). Horvath and

Ryan (2003) found in their study of 236 undergraduates, that

individual beliefs about controllability of sexual orientation

had a significant influence on negative attitudes toward

homosexuality. Individuals who believe that homosexuality is a

natural variation in human sexuality and not a choice are less

likely to be sexually prejudiced (Lamden & Innala, 2002).

Janice, Lori, Karrie (middle school teachers), and Majorie (an

elementary teacher) all believed that homosexuality was a

condition that sexual minorities probably had little control over, and each held primarily favorable views toward homosexuality. These participants described homosexuality as being an "uncontrollable choice" and believed that a person's genetic makeup was influential in their decision to live a homosexual lifestyle.

Lori acknowledged, "I didn't use to believe that, but I believe now. There is a lot of irrefutable evidence about x y chromosomes and all that." Lori believed that there was a possibility that some sexual minorities may have been predisposed to a "homosexual lifestyle." Janice, another middle school teacher described sexual minorities as being "born with those intentions," and suggested they "really might not be able to help that they have those tendencies." Majorie, the only heterosexual elementary teacher to possess exclusively favorable attitudes toward homosexuality also suggested that homosexuality may be a result of genetics. She acknowledged having several friends and relatives that were sexual minorities and proclaimed, "I have been around them all of my life." According to her, "They feel it is not their choice of the way they are. That's just how they are."

John, an elementary teacher, also believed that homosexuality was a lifestyle choice; however, there appeared to be a conflict between what John once believed that individuals

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were not "created that way," and the questions he now had as to the role of genetics in the lifestyle choice process:

> When you get into how humans are created, then there is more that I may not know of in terms of, I think we're all one sex at one point and then at a certain time in gestation, we go one way or the other.

To make sense of the contradictions he now faced, John rationalized that there was a possibility that the *choice* may be an uncontrollable one.

In spite of the sexual prejudices that existed because of the perception that sexual minorities had willingly chosen to embrace homosexuality as a life style choice, there was accord among the group that sexual minorities had the right to make this choice which was interesting, because historically fundamentalist have stated that homosexuality was wrong, end of discussion. Although not seismic, the data indicate that a small crack in education is emerging as it relates to shifting attitudes toward sexual minorities.

For example, Rachel, an elementary teacher who earlier described homosexuality as being wrong, stated, "Personally, for myself I don't believe its right; however, I don't have an attitude toward anyone that chooses to do differently. I am non judgmental." One would probably question, is it possible to believe someone is doing something wrong or is ontologically

broken and not be able to judge them; however, as Rachel
explained it appears the possibility does exist:

    It doesn't affect our friendship or work relationship or
    anything like that. I would not choose, but I wouldn't
    choose to do a lot of things that people do. I am sure the
    same would be… people wouldn't do things that I do that are
    considered off the beaten path.

    Vivienne was another elementary teacher that had somewhat
conflicting beliefs. She described sexual minorities as being
"not so much different," and admitted, "I got used to it
[homosexuality] and a little bit more accepting of it."
Vivienne even posited that "people are free to choose whatever
they want to"; however, despite all of these attitudes that
appeared favorable, she believed that homosexuality should be
portrayed negatively in an elementary setting:

    I think most people, and maybe I too a little bit, would
    kind of frown upon it in a school like this, because we are
    very protective of our children and supposed innocence that
    we don't want to expose them to things that might be taboo
    or outside the range of what we consider normal. So, I
    think it may be frowned upon or some people might overlook
    it. Others might be very verbal, or do something that
    shows their disapproval.

In spite of their contradictory beliefs, there still appears to be the possibility that people are now willing to say, "Homosexuality is wrong, but I do not have a problem with it." Whereas in the past the overwhelming attitude has been, "It is wrong and I find it problematic."

The heterosexual teachers, discussed earlier, that viewed homosexuality as an "uncontrolled" choice discussed in detail the notions of sexual minorities having basic civil liberties, including the right to reveal their sexual orientation within educational institutions. According to Lori, a middle school teacher, she did not see out sexual minority educators as being problematical. She posited that sexual minorities had the right to "be who they are, and not [be judged] for what their sexual preference is." She believed that if others felt uncomfortable with being in an environment were sexual minorities existed, they could "go somewhere else and get a job. If it were openly offensive to another teacher, at this day and time, I believe that it is their problem and not the openly gay teacher's problem."

Karrie, also a middle school teacher, posited, "What you do behind closed doors is your business." She believed that sexual minorities had the right to "live whatever lifestyle he or she desired" regardless of what others thought, and didn't feel the school climate would be affected in any way by an out sexual

minority educator. Janice, another middle school teacher described the plight of sexual minority educators as being unfair. She acknowledged, "It's not fair that they have to walk around not being their true person, who they are."

These findings are significant in that they capture a snapshot of the change of attitudes in educational institutions, at least with some educators. Whether or not this applies to administrators, who are more accountable to elected Boards, is potentially a different story was not explored in this study. Further research should focus on this.

Sexual minorities do not conform to gender role expectations

According to Herek (1986), there is a more rigid definition of gender associated norms for men than for women. Society encourages men to endorse these more traditional views about gender roles; thus, there appears to be differing responses to male and female gender-role nonconformity. Research revealed that heterosexual men tend to be more negative toward sexual minority males and heterosexual females tend to be more negative toward sexual minority females (Herek, 1984; Herek & Capitanio, 1995, 1999; Raja & Stokes, 1998; Kite & Whitley, 1996). Kite and Whitley (1996) proposed that these heterosexual evaluations are influenced by generalized gender belief systems which essentially encourage men to be more negative toward homosexuality.

This study found that seventy-five percent of the elementary participants held stereotypical beliefs about sexual minority educators. These participants discussed the possibility of sexual minority male educators not conforming to gender-role expectations; female non-conformity was not discussed, which could be attributed to the fact that more sanctions are placed on men that do not conform than women (Archer, 1989). There was a belief that sexual minority male educators would openly parade their sexuality by displaying feminine mannerisms. According to Simone, "It's a certain way as to how open you can be. You can dress that way, and we will know it." That way was described as "a ridiculous way to let us know that they are really out there."

Simone also believed that younger children would immediately notice non gender conformity:

The older ones automatically know. They know what's going on, so, I don't think they are going to too much question it. The little ones, I think the little ones are going to start asking their parents, and they're going to start asking the teachers what's going on. Why is this person acting this way?

Numerous references were made to the detrimental effects this perceived gender-role violation would have on younger males. This implication has critical consequences for sexual minority

youth who can also be seen as the "problem" of disruptive school behavior by teachers who hold these beliefs.

Tameka, a heterosexual elementary teacher, readily admitted that she would be biased if a sexual minority male educator entered the classroom; she did not find female non-conformity a problem. Her major concern was the "confusion" non conformity would cause for boys. She explained, "When you are regularly around this type person, and they do these type things, then maybe the boys will feel that it is okay to be like that, and it is not okay." The belief that it is not okay for boys to be confused, but it is okay for girls, confirms the direct link between sexism and homophobia.

Deanna, another heterosexual elementary teacher, revealed that if she could "determine by their mannerisms" that an educator was a sexual minority, she would also have a problem. "If I know, it's a problem," she shared. Like her counterpart, her major concern was the influence of sexual minority male educators behaving in a feminine manner. This aspect was so troubling to her that she admitted she would ban her son from entering a classroom taught by a teacher she deemed to be a sexual minority.

Gender-associated norms are more rigidly defined for men (Herek 1986; Fagot, Leinbach, Hort, & Strayer, 1997); the elementary educators believed it was extremely important for men

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to adhere to the gender role expectations that have been set by society, and found it troubling if they did not. Sexual minorities include not just gay males and lesbians, but also those whose non-conforming gender identity or non conforming gender expression are perhaps intentionally obvious. Thus, being mandated to conform to traditional gender roles would be problematic for "gender expression," that is sexual minorities who fall into the categories of transgender and Queer.

Gender-role conformity appeared to be such an important concern that there was a consensus that as long as sexual minorities followed traditional gender roles, there would not be a problem with them entering the educational environment. Simone, an elementary heterosexual teacher, stated, "Teachers would more than likely continue to go on like they normally go on, as long as that person doesn't make it prevailing in a way that he or she let's everybody know what his or her sexuality might be." This sentiment was reiterated by other elementary educators. Deanna acknowledged, "I feel it's like the military; you have to keep it in." Could it be that educators, like the military, also have a *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* policy? A policy that requires as long as sexual minority educators hide their sexual orientation, school personnel will ignore the fact that they are a sexual minority. The ramifications of this policy

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could be far reaching for sexual minority educators and students.

Another gender belief stereotype that emerged was the perception that sexual minority educators, male and female, would approach or "hit on" their heterosexual counterparts. How the sexes view contact with sexual minorities has received relatively little attention (Lamar and Kite, 1998). Kite and Whitley (1996) found that heterosexual men and women were averse to contact with sexual minority individuals; however, only the men's reactions were correlated with fear of advances from sexual minorities. Following Kite and Whitley (1996), Lamar and Kite (1998) examined sex differences in attitudes toward gay men and lesbians and found that both sexes reported negative attitudes toward contact with sexual minorities of the same sex.

As expected, the male participants acknowledged a fear of approach or being "hit on." John, an elementary teacher, was quite concerned about being approached. Although, he admitted that his once extremely negative attitudes condemning homosexuality had shifted toward tolerance after becoming acquainted with sexual minorities, John was still quite apprehensive about being "hit on":

I wouldn't go out and gay bash or beat somebody down because of their preference, unless I felt offended. Then I would kind of confront the situation. If they were

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approaching me, or harassing a friend of mine, or doing

something in a sense that was over the line, then I may

have to react to it.

The fear of being "hit on" evoked such homophobic feelings in John that he contemplated committing a violent act toward a sexual minority male.

Martin, the other elementary heterosexual male teacher, was so apprehensive about being approached by a sexual minority that he was not certain he could befriend one; however, he acquiesced that he was agreeable to working with one "as long as they didn't express or say that they like me, or made me feel uncomfortable." This finding raises the question, why is the blame placed on the sexual minority if someone doesn't feel comfortable around them? To paraphrase, Eleanor Roosevelt, No one can make a person feel inferior without his or her consent.

Only three of the female participants (two elementary and one middle school) discussed the fear of approach. Vivienne, an elementary teacher, expressed the need for "a line drawn" for her to be able to say "yes, I can be your friend, or I can be on friendly terms, but that is where that line is going to stop." Surprisingly, Karrie, a middle school teacher who held primarily favorable attitudes toward homosexuality and described sexual minorities as "good to have as friends," also had a line drawn.

She shared, "I don't look at them like that, and I think they know me well enough to know that I am not about that."

Homosexuality Has a Negative Impact on Children

Fifty percent of the participants believed that homosexuality adversely affected children. These participants suggested sexual minority educators would impose their homosexual values on children and/or recruit children to live a homosexual lifestyle. According to Lipkin (1999), "Such sentiments and accusations are not new. Public opposition to homosexual teachers, provoked in part by fear that they will molest or unduly influence children, has fueled a number of campaigns since the 1970's." Sexual minorities are pedophiles is a myth that is held to stigmatize gay men; however, the facts do not bear this out. For more than two decades, numerous studies have shown that there is no significant relationship between homosexuality and child molestation (see for example, Freund & Wilson, 1992; Groth & Gary, 1982; Jenny, Roesler, & Poyer, 1994).

The results uncovered a genuine concern pertaining to the interactions between sexual minority educators and their students. Fannie, an elementary teacher, labeled herself with the conflicting descriptors as being "for but against homosexuality." According to her, she was against "children

being raised up by two homosexuals." Fannie acknowledged that studies probably indicated children of sexual minorities would "be fine," but she believed that being raised by sexual minorities "might really be hard on the children," causing them to "not know their choice in life." Numerous studies have determined that there are no significant differences in overall mental health, or approaches to child care, between gay men and their heterosexual counterparts (Barret & Robinson, 1990; Bigner & Bozett, 1990; Ricketts, 1991).

This concept of knowing their choice appeared to be a troubling notion for heterosexual elementary teachers who viewed elementary students as being susceptible to being influenced by a sexual minority educator. As discussed earlier, Deanna feared this perceived influence so much that she admitted she would not let an educator that she knew was a sexual minority teach her elementary aged son. She explained, "I wouldn't put him in that class, because I don't want anything [homosexuality] to affect him." This implication was quite significant, because it brings into question Deanna's tolerance to work with a sexual minority educator. If she did not want a sexual minority educator teaching her son, would she truly want to work with one who is teaching someone else's son? Again, the findings show conflicting personal values and beliefs.

Tameka also believed that elementary aged children should not be placed in classes taught by sexual minority educators. Like her counterpart, she speculated that elementary students were not mature enough to understand homosexuality, and could possibly desire to engage in a homosexual lifestyle to emulate their teacher.

Research Question 2: Contributing Factors

There were three themes identified in response to research question two which asked: What learning has fostered the attitudes that adult heterosexual educators hold toward homosexuality? There were three major themes that emerged:

1. Religion

2. Sexual Minority Acquaintances

3. Aging

Religion

More than anything else, religious knowledge and experiences were found to have fostered the negative attitudes that many of the heterosexual educators held toward homosexuality. In previous research studies, religion was found to be related to attitudes toward homosexuality (Herek, 1987; Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman and Johnston, 1994; and Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992). Typically, religious

fundamentalist self described in the study as heterosexuals were found to be more negative toward sexual minorities (Hunsberger, 1995) than heterosexuals that were either non religious or members of liberal denominations (Herek & Capitanio, 1996).

Seven of twelve participants acknowledged that religion was a contributing factor to the negative attitudes they held toward homosexuality and referenced Biblical principles as they discussed their perception of homosexuality as being an immoral unnatural sin. Three elementary teachers, Simone (Baptist), Deanna (Baptist) and Tameka (Non-Denominational), were found to be the most prejudiced toward sexual minorities. Each was adamant that their Bible deemed homosexuality was wrong, and anything beyond these teachings was viewed as unnatural. Deanna shared, "The Bible says we should be heterosexual. That's how God made us, and that's how we should be." According to Simone, "God didn't place us on this earth for a man and man to be married and have children, vice versa, for a woman to be with a woman." Like her counterparts, Tameka also voiced that the scriptures "clearly stated that God made Adam and Eve."

Interestingly, four other participants attributed the negative views that they once held toward homosexuality to religious beliefs, as opposed to religious dogma. Although they still firmly respected their religion and experiences, contact with sexual minorities had caused them to question the religious

principles that they had been taught and embraced for a long time. For example, Lori, once a Baptist, but now a Non-Denominational, described herself as believing in the Bible in its "entire word, in its entirety, nothing added, and nothing taken away." She believed Biblical scripture clearly defined "the destinations of those individuals who are not of the traditional family sexual orientation," but admitted that she now questioned these principles as she has gotten older, had more contact with sexual minorities, and examined the relationship between homosexuality and biology.

Sexual Minority Acquaintances

An acquaintance with sexual minority individuals was also determined to be a factor affecting attitudes. As explored above, religious fundamentalists in this study admitted that the negative attitudes they once held toward homosexuality had shifted after contact with sexual minority acquaintances. These encounters appeared to have been instrumental in changing the once negative feelings that they held toward homosexuality. This finding is consistent with prior research which reported favorable attitudes were more likely among heterosexuals that interacted with multiple sexual minorities (Herek & Capitanio, 1996).

Majorie was the only heterosexual teacher that had several close personal relationships, including family members, with several sexual minority individuals. Her views were clearly found to be the more favorable toward homosexuality than the other teachers' beliefs. Majorie clearly had "no problem with it [homosexuality]." There were also four other participants that held favorable attitudes toward homosexuality who also described being acquainted with sexual minorities. Knowing a sexual minority appeared lessened prejudice and garner support for LGBTQ issues.

John admitted, "Before I became acquainted and knew these individuals, I had very strong opinions against people that were gay." Since becoming acquainted with sexual minority co-workers, he believed that he was more understanding and had become more tolerant of homosexuality. This has serious implications for sexual minority educators, especially those that are closeted. Coming out is the quintessential political act that is fundamental to acceptance and reducing fear; coming out provides a sense of gradual acceptance and makes the work environment better. If sexual minority educators were out and visible, heterosexual educators would be afforded opportunities to get to know them which could ameliorate negative attitudes, because people generally do not fear what they come to know.

Contrary to prior research which contends older persons tend to have higher levels of prejudice toward homosexuality (Herek, 1994); in this study two older participants attributed their change in attitudes to aging.   Karrie shared:

I feel that people have the right to be with whomever they want to be with. I really do. Whatever makes you happy, that's your business. Over the years, I have learned to realize that you have to go with whatever makes you happy.

Interestingly, Karrie posited that many of the negative beliefs that older self identified-heterosexual individuals may hold stem from a lack of knowledge about issues pertaining to sexual minorities. "I think a lot of people in my age category may feel like that because it was never talked about. I've never heard of this." This implication is significant in that people commonly fear things that are unknown.

Lori also attributed a change in her attitudes to aging:

Well, as I have gotten older, I have changed a little bit. I believe in the Bible in its entire word, in its entirety, nothing added and nothing taken away. In scripture, there is no ambiguity; it is clearly pointed out as to the destinations of those individuals who are not of the traditional family sexual orientation. However, as I have gotten older, and I won't say wiser, I am going to say as I

have gotten older, I am maybe of more gentle spirit; I have

relied on the premise that it is not for me to judge

anyone's sexuality and I love them as an individual, for

who they are, and not for what their sexual preference is.

Does it make any difference to me? No. It really does

not, not at all.

Question 3: Professional Development

Question 3 posed the question: What value is placed on

continuing professional education for learning about

homosexuality and sexual orientation?   According to Hill

(2006a), "Challenging homophobia and heterosexism is about

examining and improving adult and continuing education practice

within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ)

discourses (p.1)." Ironically, although people in professional

settings, such as schools, colleges and universities, wrestle

with issues surrounding sexual minorities (Hill, 2006a);

virtually no continuing professional development opportunities

exist to help professionals better understand the lived

experiences of sexual minorities.

All of the participants noted the absence of any

assistance, information, or continuing professional development

to address the issues of homosexuality and sexual orientation.

According to Rachel, "We are interacting with students; you

would think it would be here first. I think it should be

taught. In most job settings, professional settings it is

taught." No one had ever participated in any continuing

professional development courses that addressed homosexuality or

sexual orientation. The silence of the system and the lack of

continuing professional development addressing sexual

orientation were not surprising. Despite the need for quality

teacher learning, deficiencies clearly exist when it comes to

continuing professional development offerings. It has been well

documented that American school systems fail to provide

sufficient staff development opportunities for their teachers

(Sparks, 2002). Sparks (2002) describes the professional

learning opportunities for teachers as being "woefully

inadequate to meet the demands of today's classrooms" (p. 1).

> The typical school district currently allocates only about
> one percent of its budget for improving the abilities of
> its staff. Fewer than half of teachers reported receiving
> released time to attend professional development (47
> percent) and nearly a quarter (23 percent) said they were
> given no support, time, or credit for professional
> development. (Sparks & Hirsch, n.d.)

There was a consensus that homosexuality was becoming more

prevalent in the system among students, and the teachers felt

that this increased visibility warranted the demand for

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continuing professional development courses that specifically

addressed sexual orientation. Many of the teachers admitted

that they had limited knowledge and understanding of LBGTQ

persons and issues which is problematic in that it prohibits

them from being "there for all students." Grace and Wells

(2006) posit:

> If we consider teaching to be a vocation, then we must be
> there for all students. This is not an easy task since
> teachers and other educational interest groups are expected
> to uphold tradition and be transmitters of culture and
> preservers of the status quo. Sadly, elements of the
> dominant culture desiring to maintain the status quo
> variously exclude others on the basis of differences they
> find unacceptable. Perhaps the most morally and
> politically marginalized differences are sexual minority
> differences that lie outside male-female and heterosexual
> psychosocial norms. Teachers, called to engage in an
> ethical, respective, and just educational practice, cannot
> ignore these differences. In this light, teachers need to
> know about and understand the parameters of sexual
> orientation and gender identity and expression.

Continuing professional development could address the gaps in

teacher's knowledge. As a result, professionals would be able

to "better respond to critical incidents of antigay behavior and

construct social, public, and organizational policies to create inclusive and safe work and learning environments" (Hill, 2006a, p. 1).

The teachers all agreed that professional development would have to be mandatory to ensure the full cooperation of all teachers. They acknowledged that resistance would occur, but believed the benefits far outweighed any resistance that appeared. Karrie explained, "If it was mandated, I think we would have upset people at first, but then I think after it blows over, just like with anything that is new, you have to get a feel for it." According to Grace and Wells (2006):

> Queer inclusive cultural ethics is often impeded by a
> politics of fear and caution in which educational
> interest groups placate conservative parents, religious
> leaders, politicians, and community groups that would
> eradicate everything queer from schools in an effort to
> maintain heteronormative tradition and status quo. (p. 55)

Conclusions of the Study

Sexual orientation is an issue that is challenging in educational settings. Traditionally, the dominant culture has been one in which heterosexism prevailed and the voices of sexual minorities were silenced. Recent years has witnessed teachers and students across the nation coming out. As a

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result, some administrators and teachers are being challenged to ensure that educational environments are inclusive for all. Others are resisting change.

There is a need to recognize the negative effects of heterosexism on the world of academe. Current social structure and practices tend to reinforce heterosexist discourse which assumes that all educators are heterosexual. This leads to those educators that are heterosexual, or pretend to be, benefiting socially, culturally, politically, and economically at the expense of homosexuality being suppressed. The resulting construct is one in which heterosexual teachers are viewed as ordinary (Hill, 2003).

Results of this study are significant for administrators and teachers in that they provide evidence that negative attitudes toward homosexuality and sexual minority educators are still prevalent; however, some educators are opening to the possibility of holding negative attitudes while acknowledging the rights of homosexual educators. Examining these attitudes is the first step towards changing them. Administrators should be there for all teachers, and teachers should be there for all students. No longer is it acceptable to maintain the status quo and exclude others based on differences that are deemed unacceptable. Thus, it is imperative that continued transformative adult learning opportunities are available to

provide knowledge, accurate information, and strategies which can equip heterosexual teachers when dealing with issues related to sexual minorities.

This study documented that there appears to be a shift in attitudes toward homosexuality for some educators. The impetus behind this shift is the visibility of sexual minorities in schools across the nation. Results showed that the attitudes of heterosexuals were often ameliorated after becoming acquainted with sexual minorities. This is significant in that it shows that despite heterosexist discourses and other factors that may contribute to negative attitudes, such as religion, heterosexuals frequently develop supportive attitudes toward LGBTQ, individuals once they get know them; further evidence of the importance of creating safe inclusive environments that welcome and value diversity.

A significant finding is the cognitive dissonance of many teachers. Educators in the study frequently held mutually exclusive and conflicting notions simultaneously. Some felt that while homosexuality was morally wrong, the homosexual had a right to exist—-and idea usually based on the belief that homosexuality was biological/genetic. In terms of interpersonal dynamics, some educators expressed that while they would not want a homosexual teacher educating *their* child, they would be "ok" working with a gay or lesbian co-teacher. The

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contradiction seemed to never occur to them that the homosexual co-teacher would be teaching *someone's* child. At no time did the participants express discomfort holding conflicting thoughts at the same time—-or engaging in behavior (working with a homosexual teacher) that conflicted with their beliefs (that homosexuality is wrong). Further studies could illuminate how teachers negotiate these incompatibilities in the workplace. It was not determined whether this dissonance would eventually compel the teachers to engage in some form of transformational learning.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this research raised a number of practical implications. First, the results indicate that negative attitudes toward homosexuality exist. There appears to be an overall attitude of, "Don't confront me with the truth of who you are. I don't want to know" which is unacceptable because teacher's attitudes must reflect the needs of all students. It is their responsibility to create educational spaces that are inclusive for all, including sexual minorities. When it comes to creating a framework for safe educational work and learning environments, negative attitudes by heterosexual educators become problematic, especially when the negativity is translated into practice. The negative beliefs and attitudes that

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heterosexual teachers hold toward sexual minorities can create an environment in which GLBTQ persons, both co-teachers and students, suffer discrimination, threats to safety, and denial of rights.

This study found that increased contact with sexual minorities appeared to be the greatest factor in fostering less homophobic and heterosexist attitudes. The implications of this finding are significant in that it appears that the visibility of sexual minority educators inside the walls of educational institutions may be beneficial. If between 10 and 14 percent of the workforce is comprised of sexual minorities (Munoz & Thomas, 2006), then there are approximately two hundred thirty thousand sexual minority teachers in public schools across the nation of which a majority are primarily closeted.

These sexual minority teachers could be instrumental in educating their colleagues about LGBTQ issues by successfully negotiating their outings and identities in a manner, for those desiring this, which enhances the learning environment. For example, contact with sexual minority educators could easily dispel many of the inaccurate stereotypes uncovered in this study. Collaboration with Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) could be another method of initiating contact between the two groups. Historically, these alliances have been found to provide information, offer support, and reduce sexual prejudice.

The findings of this study also indicate that school systems are reproducing the status quo and remaining silent as it pertains to sexual orientation as witnessed by the lack of continuing professional development opportunities that relate to sexual orientation. "If we consider teaching to be a vocation, then we must be there for every student" (Grace & Wells, 2006, p. 58). According to Grace and Wells (2006), "This is not an easy task since teachers and other educational interest groups are expected to uphold tradition and be transmitters of culture and preservers of the status quo" (p.58) which typically silence the voices of sexual minorities. Thus, it is important that teachers are provided continuing professional development opportunities in which they are challenged to reflect on their values, beliefs and attitudes in relation to sexual orientation.

The ultimate goal should be for teachers to acknowledge and accommodate sexual orientation differences in educational practices and policies regardless of their personal beliefs. All teachers are required by law or a code of professional conduct to ensure that schools are safe learning environments. Heterosexual teachers, willing to work with sexual minority co-educators, would mentor the belief that schools must be safe and accepting places for instruction and learning. This premise may also account for the heterosexual teachers' mind-set that the increased visibility of sexual minority students warrants their

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putting aside their personal feelings in order to meet the needs of these students.

This study can be helpful in planning and designing continuing professional development courses for teachers. The results showed that teachers viewed continuing professional development classes as being vital in helping them gain knowledge and understanding of issues related to homosexuality and sexual orientation despite their personal beliefs. Hill (2006) posits sustained professional development opportunities are crucial to creating an inclusive culture in which all voices are heard; meaning the opportunity for adult learning should include continuous contact with LGBTQ content.

Continuing professional development should also focus on helping teachers create inclusive educational environments for sexual minorities by building knowledge and understanding of the parameters of sexual orientation, including, but not limited to, differentiating between sexual orientation versus gender identity, straight privilege, and the everyday lived experiences and safety and health concerns that sexual minorities face on a daily basis in their classrooms and communities (Grace & Wells, 2006). No longer should heterosexist dominant discourses be allowed to disenfranchise sexual minority teachers and students.

Effective organizational education is a process that must be "sustained over the long haul rather than an infrequent

event" (Hill, 2006b, p. 12) and should provide adult learning opportunities that are transformative in nature. According to Sparks and Hirsch (2007), the "one-shot workshops and school wide presentations of new methods that lack connections to the challenges teachers face in the classroom" are inadequate in improving teacher learning and performance. "One-way information" giving should be avoided (Lipkin, 1999, p. 232), because most individuals are reluctant to entertain information that is dissonant with their beliefs (Aronson, 1992). Results of the findings also indicate that all continuing professional development pertaining to homosexuality and sexual orientation would have to be mandated. The participants all agreed that this requirement was necessary to ensure full participation.

In addition to continuing professional development, organizational cultures within K-12 settings must change as well. According to Hill (2006), "missing in most organizational formulations is the notion that organizations are places where human sexuality also intersects with technologies, culture, and society" (p. 7). As a result, work spaces are assumed to be heteronormative which results in the isolation of sexual minorities (Rocco & Gallagher, 2006). Hill (2006) explains:

> While organizations on the landscape react and respond to
> environments differently, the challenge of dealing with
> sexual minorities, that is, LGBTQ people, in organizational

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settings is formidable. LGBTQ individuals have

traditionally joined organizations where the dominant

organizational culture has been silence regarding sexual

orientation and gender identity, with the concomitant

expectation of invisibility, to which sexual minorities

have often complied. (p. 8)

Between 10 and 14 percent of the work force is composed of

sexual minorities. "To help put these numbers in perspective,

other minority groups such as racial and ethnic minorities often

make up lower proportions of the American workforce, for

example, Asian Americans (4 percent) and Hispanic Americans (10

percent)" (Munoz & Thomas, 2006). As it relates specifically to

education, Herek (1997) estimates that approximately 230,000

educators can be classified as sexual minorities. "Furthermore,

when consideration is given that a sexual minority could also be

a member of a racial minority, a woman, disabled, or

economically or educationally disenfranchised, the importance of

understanding this marginalized population is magnified" (Munoz

& Thomas, 2006, p. 85). This means that it is vital for

organizations, specifically educational institutions, to

recognize heterosexism and its negative effects on the workplace

(Rocco & Gallagher, 2006) and sexual minority educator.

Organizations in K-12 settings should strive for change.

There needs to be an impetus to create safe and hospitable work

environments for all educators; values should explicitly reflect inclusion and diversity; and antidiscrimination and harassment policies should include sexual orientation (Munoz & Thomas, 2006). The decision to be out as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) person in the classroom should not be a dilemma for sexual minority educators.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was limited to elementary (K-5) and middle (6-8) school teachers. As such, the findings are limited to the perceptions of twelve individuals, and cannot be used to draw conclusions about the perceptions of high school (7-12) teachers, or higher education instructors. Because of the vast differences among the attitudes of the elementary and middle school teachers (the elementary teachers held far more negative attitudes), it is recommended that this study be replicated utilizing a larger sample from each of group: elementary, middle school, high school, and higher education.

Some teachers in this study believed that critical incidences related to homosexuality and sexual orientation should be handled by the counselor; thus, it is recommended that this study be replicated for counselors.

The participants in this study noted the lack of continuing professional development opportunities as it relates to sexual

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minorities. It is not known whether or not the administration is aware of these concerns or whether continuing professional development opportunities exist for administrators. Therefore, it is recommended that this study be replicated among school administrators.

Additionally, it can not be concluded that the findings are representative of the views of teachers from other regions of the country. Historically, the South has been known to harbor negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Herek, 1984); thus, it can not be concluded that sexual orientation discourses are seen as problematic in other places. Therefore, it is recommended that studies be conducted in other regions or states to determine adult professional attitudes toward homosexuality and sexual orientation and the continued professional development opportunities offered in these regions.

Lastly, the results of this study can not be generalized beyond the participants of this study. It is however offered that teachers compare and contrast their experiences to determine if similar of dissimilar patterns emerge.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

<div align="center">**CONSENT FORM**</div>

I, _____, agree to participate in a research project entitled **Development of Professionals and Their Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Their Sexual Minority Counterparts,** which is being conducted by Marilyn Mitchell McCluskey, Doctoral Candidate, Adult Education, the University of Georgia, (706) 7920-8081, email: mcclusky@bellsouth.net under the direction of Dr. Robert Hill, (706) 542-4016. My participation in this study is voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without any prejudice or penalty and have the results of my participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following information has been explained to me:
· The reason for this study is to examine the attitudes of heterosexual educators toward their sexual minority counterparts. Research such as this is needed because adult educators have paid inadequate attention to issues pertaining to sexual orientation.

· The benefits I may expect are the insights I may receive by reflecting on my attitudes toward sexual minority educators. I may become aware of factors that contribute to my attitudes toward sexual minority educators.

The procedures are as follows:

   1.   I will participate in an interview that will last approximately 60 minutes about my attitudes toward sexual minority educators. Also I will offer my beliefs about issues pertaining to sexual orientation. The interview will be conducted at a time and place mutually agreeable to both of us.
   2.   I will select one of the following ways to have this interview documented:

▢**Tape recording** (audio only) with provisions for confidentiality

▢**Tape recording** (audio only) waiving confidentiality.   By checking this box I understand that my identity and the results of this participation will be made public

   3.   The results of this research will be made public; however, the results of my participation will be confidential if I have requested confidentiality, unless required by law. A pseudonym will be used on all tapes, transcripts and reports if I have requested confidentiality.

·The only discomfort or stress that I may experience during the study might be anxiety I may feel about reflecting on or discussing my own experiences pertaining to sexual orientation.
·No risks due to participation are foreseen.
·I will not receive any compensation.
The researcher, Marilyn S. Mitchell-McCluskey, will answer any questions about the research, either now or during the course of the project. She can be reached by e-mail at: mcclusky@bellsouth.net or by phone at (706) 792-8081.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date   Signature of Participant   Date
Email: mcclusky@bellsouth.net
Phone: 706-792-8081

<div align="center">**PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM. KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE RESEARCHER.**</div>
For questions or concerns about your rights please call or write: The IRB Chairperson, Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

I would first like to thank you for participating in my study. The questions you will answer will be about sexual orientation. This is because the purpose of my study is attitudes toward sexual minority educators. The data will be analyzed to determine what these attitudes are. I will begin this interview by asking a few demographic questions.

1. How old are you?

2. Do you identify as male, female, or other?

3. What is your marital status?

4. What is your ethnicity?

5. What is your religious affiliation and how often do you attend service?

6. What grade do you teach and how long have you been teaching?

Thank you. Now I will ask you questions that relate to my study.

7. How do you define or describe sexual orientation?

8. How do you self identify, e.g. What is your sexual orientation?

9. Do you know any sexual minority individuals (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or self-identified Queer)?

10. Describe your relationship with these individual(s)?

11. Can you describe your attitudes, beliefs, and values toward homosexuality?

12. What things do you feel have influenced your beliefs and attitudes about homosexuality?

13. Do you know any openly gay or lesbian, bisexual, or transgender teachers? How has their being out affected the school climate?

14. What is the climate toward gay and lesbian teachers in your school? School system? Cite some examples.

15. How do you feel about sexual orientation becoming a part of the school curriculum?

16. Are you aware of any professional development courses in the district on sexual minorities and/or homosexuality? How do you feel about that?

17. If the district made available a continuing professional development opportunity that looked at concerns of sexual minorities, would you take it? Why or why not?

18. What do you feel the response would be to a school mandated staff development on sexual orientation and/or homosexuality?

19. Is there anything you think I should know that you expected me to ask, but didn't?

Thanks for participating. If anything else comes to mind,

please contact me at the address, number or email address

provided on this card.