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A Grounded Theory Study to Describe Approaches Gay K-8 Teachers Take to Living Openly at Work

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A Grounded Theory Study to Describe Approaches Gay K-8 Teachers Take to Living Openly at Work

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Administration

by

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Dedication

To my parents, none of this would have been possible without you. I love you very, very much.

And, to my Grandpa Ward... You did not get to see much of this journey, but whenever my will to finish this journey wavered, I thought of you. You would have never stopped working until the job was done; I hope I made you proud.

To my best friends, Lauren McBride and Cristina Mancini, thank you for being there through the lows and celebrating with me through the highs.

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To my advisor, Dr. Beabout, thank you for pushing me to be my best. I leave this journey a stronger student, a stronger researcher, and a stronger person because of you.

Finally, to the participants of this study, thank you. Your courage to live openly at work and your willingness to share your story with me made this paper possible.

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Abstract

Even though living openly is associated with better health, gay teachers are in an ambiguous position legally and socially when it comes to finding safe and successful ways to living openly while at work in K-8 schools. The purpose of this grounded theory study is to describe approaches gay teachers have found and employed to living openly in K-8 schools. From the interview data collected from eleven gay teachers, an identity development model was produced, which the researcher entitled *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model*. No existing identity development models focus solely on the approaches gay teachers take to living openly in the K-8 school. *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model* consists of four stages: becoming visible to administrators and other teachers, becoming visible to students, becoming visible to students' parent, and identity maintenance. It is hoped that this study will ultimately prompt more gay teachers to live openly as the model is intended to serve as a guide for future or current gay K-8 teachers who wish to live openly at work. This study also has implications for administrators and teachers, the first people gay teachers come out to. Administrators and other teachers can support gay teachers in becoming fully visible at work safely and successfully through their actions and words, which could potentially lead to more accepting school environments for everyone through the fostering of a culture of inclusivity.

Keywords: gay teachers, teacher identity, K-8 schools, sexual identity model

Chapter One: Introduction

Homosexuality can be a polarizing topic in America. It is a topic that can be considered political, religious, and even personal. Thus, the topic of homosexuality in public K-8 schools can be quite controversial. For public K-8 teachers who are gay, homosexuality is not just a topic; it is an identity that is a part of everyday life. Unlike straight teachers who can simply *live* their sexuality in K-8 schools, gay teachers must *navigate* their identity while at work in K-8 schools.

This is a grounded theory study to describe the approaches gay teachers take to living openly while at work in K-8 schools. This first chapter is an explanation of the problem this study explores, the purpose of the study, and the significance of this study. Chapter two presents an explanation of the conceptual framework that guided this study and a review of the related literature. Chapter three includes a description of the research methodology and data collection and analysis procedures.

Problem Statement

Living openly is associated with better mental and physical health (Hunter, 2007; Wilchins, 2004), but gay teachers can be in an ambiguous position legally and socially when it comes to living openly while at work in K-8 schools. To illustrate, a gay K-8 teacher who lives openly while at work could potentially have his or her teaching contract legally terminated based on immoral conduct, which is defined as conduct or speech that is "contrary to the moral code of the community" (Dayton, 2012; National Educational Association, 2013; Schimmel, Eckes, & Militello, 2010), or, on the social level, the openly gay K-8 teacher could possibly face complaints from students' parents (Hunter, Shannon, Knox, & Martin, 1998; Newton, 2009; The Williams Institute, 2011). Despite the pressure some gay teachers might face to remain closeted

or pass as heterosexual, research has shown that the presence of openly gay teachers in schools can have positive impacts on the overall school climate and on students, especially gay students or students questioning their sexual identity (Chang, 2007; Khayatt, 1992; Marcus, 2005; McInnes & Davies, 2008; Ruffolo, 2007; Whitlock, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). Additionally, no difference has been found in the instructional effectiveness of gay teachers when compared to straight teachers (Sherblom, & Bahr, 2008). Thus, there is no rational basis for the marginalization of gay teachers in public K-8 schools.

Unfortunately, historical discrimination against homosexuals, the present legal climate, and the traditions of the teaching profession are factors that can contribute to the difficulty gay teachers can face when living openly in K-8 schools. It is important for gay teachers to live openly, and thus there is a need to describe the typically safe and successful approaches gay teachers have taken to living openly in K-8 schools. The elements that can contribute to the difficulty gay teachers can face when living openly in K-8 schools, like the historical discrimination against homosexuals, the present legal climate and the traditions of the teaching profession, will be described and lead to a discussion on the significance of this study.

Historical Discrimination against Homosexuals

K-8 schools are essentially like a microcosm of the nation reflecting popular views that have become institutionalized over time (Graves, 2009). The same diversity of views on social issues that exists in society at large is likely to exist in our schools. Incidentally, the United States has had a long, complicated, and often ugly relationship with homosexuality. For example, a 1950's Senate report, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex perverts in Government,* argued that homosexuals were unfit for government service due to their weak character and the danger they posed to national security (Biegel, 2010; Blount, 2005; Graves, 2009). In addition,

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 made it legal for people to be denied entry into the United States based on their status as homosexuals (National Educational Association, 2013). Between 1952 and 1973 homosexuality was classified as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association (Biegel, 2010; Lehr, 2007; Serwatka, 2010). The AIDS epidemic and the accompanying backlash which developed because of it in the 1980's also catalyzed fears relating to homosexuals that reverberate today (Phelan, 1997). These and other past judgments have led to the development of myths which suggest homosexuals are inherently dangerous, sick, or are trying to recruit others and/or propagate a connection between homosexuality and pedophilia (Biegel, 2010; Graves, 2009; Lehr, 2007; Serwatka, 2010).

Because of historical fears connecting homosexuality with recruitment and pedophilia and since teachers work directly with children, the teaching profession has long been especially vulnerable to antigay discrimination. As evidence of this, some states have tried to make it illegal for a gay person to teach in schools (Graves, 2009; Kissen, 1996; National Educational Association, 2013; Rimmerman, 2002). For example, in 1978, California's Proposition 6, perhaps more commonly known as the Briggs Initiative, sought to bar homosexuals from teaching in public schools (Biegel 2010; Blount, 2005; National Educational Association, 2013). The initiative failed to be approved. More than thirty-five years have passed since then, but a 2007 Pew Research Center poll found that 28% of Americans would still vote in favor of the Briggs Initiative if it were reintroduced (Biegel, 2010). Needless to say, given such levels of opposition, bigotry, and discrimination, navigating the living openly process safely and successfully in K-8 schools can be particularly difficult for gay teachers even today.

Present Legal Climate

Currently, some states have laws that make it unclear what would happen if a gay teacher began living openly while at work in a K-8 school. For example, a law enacted in 1992 in Alabama that still stands today states that any sex education program in a school must assert that "homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state" (Alabama State Legislature, 2013). In Tennessee, House Bill 229, or Senate Bill 49, makes it illegal for a teacher to mention any "sexual orientation other than heterosexuality" (Tennessee General Assembly, 2013). Anti-gay policies like these inevitably impact the perceptions of and health of gay teachers and gay students, but what exactly do these policies mean for gay teachers who live openly while at work in their K-8 schools?

Legal precedents directly concerning openly gay teachers in schools are contradictory. Several cases have rejected the notion that a teacher can be fired simply for his or her homosexual orientation like the 1969 California Supreme Court Case *Morrison v. State Board of Education,* the 1998 Ohio court case *Glover v. Williamsburg Local School District,* the 1999 Utah court case *Weaver v. Nebo School District*, and the 2000 California court case *Murray v. Oceanside Unified School District* (Biegel, 2010; Schimmel, Eckes, & Militello, 2010). In contrast, a number of cases have affirmed the notion that gay teachers can be fired or harassed just for being a homosexual like the 1967 California court case *Sarac v. State Board of Education,* the 1973 California court case *Board of Education v. Calderon,* the 1977 Washington Supreme Court Case *Gaylord v. Tacoma School District No. 10*, and the 2002 Wisconsin court case *Schroeder v. Hamilton School District* (Biegel, 2010; National Educational Association, 2013). In one case the court specifically held that, "school boards need to shield children of tender years from the possible detrimental influence of teachers who commit homosexual acts"

(*Board of Education v. Calderon,* 1973, p. 496-497). For this reason, the age of students, gay

primary and middle school teachers might face an even less lenient legal climate concerning

living openly while at work than gay secondary teachers.

Congress declared it illegal to discriminate in the workplace based on marital or parental

status under the Equal Protection Clause (Dayton, 2012). This might help protect a gay teacher

living openly while at work in a K-8 school that is legally married or has children with a partner.

However, the Equal Protection Clause only explicitly covers race, national origin, gender, age,

socioeconomic status, disability, and religion (Dayton, 2012), but "absent legitimate and

sufficient reason for differential treatment, federal, state, and local governments must treat all

persons equally under the laws" (Dayton, 2012, p. 269-270). So, the Equal Protection Clause

could protect against workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation unless legitimate and

sufficient reason could be given for the differential treatment. The school, in states where a

person is not protected from workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation, could

ultimately argue that there is a legitimate and sufficient reason (e.g. community standards) for

differential treatment and subsequently fire a gay teacher without violating the Equal Protection

Clause.

In the end, a teacher can be legally fired for immoral conduct if it can be established that

the teacher engaged in unprofessional behavior or moral misconduct (Dayton, 2012; National

Educational Association, 2013; Schimmel, Eckes, & Militello, 2010). What constitutes immoral

conduct is subjective though, which can complicate matters for gay teachers living openly while

at work in K-8 schools. In 1998 in *Harry v. Marion City Board of Education,* the court defined

immorality as conduct or speech that is "contrary to the moral code of the community"

(Schimmel, Eckes, & Militello, 2010, p. 129). So, in a community that is heavily conservative

and/or religious, homosexuality might be considered immoral under this definition. In this case, openly gay teachers could be fired with no direct legal recourse.

In an ideal world, the gay community and their allies might agree that it should be illegal to terminate an employee based on sexual orientation alone. Therefore, a gay teacher could live openly while working in a K-8 school without fear of losing his or her job. In the most ideal world, we might concur that it would be as normal for a gay teacher to live openly as it is for a straight teacher. In this hypothetical world, gay teachers would live openly because there was no expectation that they would or should not. However, in reality, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission does not protect workers from discrimination based on sexual orientation alone (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2013). According to the Human Rights Campaign, twenty-one states and the District of Columbia have passed laws that prohibit discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation (2013). Therefore, in twenty-nine states it remains legal to discriminate in the workplace based on sexual orientation. Consequently, gay employees are subjected to workplace discrimination at disproportionately higher rates than their heterosexual colleagues (Newton, 2009; The Williams Institute, 2011). This discrimination has been documented to include actions ranging from the denial of a promotion or job advancement, being fired or forced to resign, or having a partner excluded from workplace functions (Newton, 2009). In 2008, a Harris Interactive Inc. poll revealed that 65% of gay employees had been subjected to some form of discrimination (Newton, 2009).

Because it is not clear whether or not an openly gay teacher can be fired simply for being a homosexual in states where a person is not protected from workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation, gay teachers cannot reveal details about their private lives in K-8 schools with as much security as straight teachers can. If this continues to be a reality, gay teachers will either

have to suffer living in the closet or potentially risk their careers to live openly. This is not a new trend though. Throughout history, many teachers have been pushed to yield to pressures that eroded their self-expression (Graves, 2009).

Traditions of the Teaching Profession

Schools have often tried to regulate the sexual expression of teachers since teachers were and are seen as role models for their students (Blount, 2005; Evans, 2002; Graves, 2009; Whitlock, 2007). For example, in the 1800's it was common for a female teacher to be fired or dismissed for marrying a man (Northern Illinois University Blackwell Museum College of Education, 2013). In the 1900's, some schools would not allow a female teacher to ride in a car with a man who was not her father or brother (Apps, 1996). Consequently, teaching has developed a reputation as a conservative occupation. The historical regulation of teachers' sexualities has also meant gay teachers were and are commonly and systematically ignored or made invisible in K-8 schools (National Educational Association, 2013; Petrovic & Rosiek, 2007). The traditional policing of heterosexual identities in the teaching profession left no room for the mere consideration of homosexual identities within the public school.

Thus, the teacher has come to be commonly viewed as a heterosexual being that would not engage in homosexual activities. This is in part because some politicians, educational leaders, and parents believe that school discussions on homosexuality, which would likely arise if a gay teacher were living openly at school, would cause children to become homosexuals (Marcus, 2005; Rasmussen, Mitchell, & Harwood, 2007). The result of this thinking has been a purposeful purge of material relating to homosexuality from the school curriculum and the school library (Biegel, 2010; Evans, 2002; Marcus, 2005; Meyer, 2007; Rimmerman, 2002; Serwatka, 2010). Subsequently, most gay students are bereft of resources about healthy gay lifestyles (Biegel,

2010). This might be ameliorated if more gay teachers could be prompted to live openly while at work in K-8 schools. It is hoped that the identity development model generated from this study can serve as a guide and catalyst for gay teachers who wish to live openly at work.

Purpose of the Study

While research on gay youths in schools has grown in the last twenty years (Edwards, 1997; Eisen and Hall, 1996; Griffin, 1992; Mayo, 2008; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Rofes, 1994; Taylor, 2000; Unks, 1994), there is much less research on gay teachers (Capper, 1999; Evans, 2002; Mayo, 2008). Specifically, policy related to gay educators has not been explored or developed to the same degree that it has for the gay student population (Swan, 2004). Within the limited literature on gay teachers exists a particular gap regarding those teachers who choose to live openly and not hide their sexuality by remaining in the closet or passing as heterosexual while at work in K-8 schools.

Existing theories and identity development models address how people who identify as gay live openly in general (Cass, 1979, 1984; Troiden, 1979, 1988) and at work (Fassinger, 1991). While a small number of accounts exist detailing the coming out stories of gay teachers (Capper, 1999; Evans, 2002; Jennings, 1994; Mayo, 2008), many of these stories are situated in secondary schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, 1998; Haywood, 1996; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Hey, 1997; Redman, 1996; Renold, 2000) and also highlight stories of closeted gay teachers or gay teachers who passed as straight (Griffin, 1992). There is no identity development model detailing how gay teachers live openly without hiding or passing while at work in K-8 schools where concerns relating to homosexuality might be heightened because of the age of students. An identity development model that could highlight those approaches that have generally been safe and successful could serve as a springboard for further research on this topic.

It also might prompt more gay teachers to live openly in K-8 schools, which could lead to more accepting school environments.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study then was to describe the safe and successful approaches gay teachers have found and employed to living openly in K-8 schools through the generation of an identity development model grounded in the data. In this study, living openly does not have to involve a formal coming out statement, though that may be a piece of a person's approach. For the purpose of this study, living openly will be defined as *any action or statement made by a teacher while in a K-8 school that subtly or overtly confirms a homosexual identity or denies a heterosexual identity.* Specifically, to be eligible for this study, there cannot be a situation where the gay teacher would deny his or her sexual identity while in a work context.

Living openly can be thought of in the context of how straight teachers commonly express their sexuality in K-8 schools. In general, it is not considered unusual for teachers to "come out" as straight to their students through the course of teaching in response to personal questions posed by students or by mentioning their spouse or weekend activities (McKay, 2009; Nelson, 2009). So, if a straight teacher can, for instance, affirm the existence of a partner in response to a student question or bring a partner to a school event, then this should be an acceptable approach for a gay teacher to take to living openly while at work in a K-8 school. Unfortunately, this may not be the case for gay teachers who could face scrutiny for the same behaviors that would likely be considered appropriate or normal for straight teachers.

Living openly in school is a process that can be approached in different ways by gay K-8 teachers, just like it is approached in different ways by straight teachers. These approaches may be influenced by many factors like the age of students (e.g. primary versus middle school students), the demographics of the school community (e.g. the racial makeup of the community

served by the school or the socioeconomic status of the students' parents), or the geographical location of the school (e.g. rural versus urban schools or a school in the North versus a school in the South). For example, gay (or straight) teachers might discuss issues relating to family with primary age students, whereas gay (or straight) teachers might bring a partner to a school football game in a context with middle school students.

<div align="center">**Significance**</div>

Because of the stigma surrounding sexual orientation and labels like gay or lesbian, it is impossible to know with complete accuracy how many people in the United States actually identify as gay. Recent research though shows that 3.8% of the adult population in the United States identifies as gay (Williams Institute, 2011). Within the workforce there are 3.7 million teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). If 3.8% is applied to the number of teachers in the workforce then 140,600 teachers identify as gay. However, it is important to note that more people likely engage in homosexual behavior than identify as homosexuals. So, it is likely that more than 140,600 teachers are gay in the United States. Ultimately, whether or not gay teachers are able to live openly safely and successfully while at work in their K-8 schools matters as it impacts thousands of gay teachers and can impact their schools and their students. In the end, there can be distinct benefits for the overall school community, for the gay teacher, as well as for students when gay teachers live openly while at work in K-8 schools.

Benefits to School

While gay teachers can face difficulties in living openly at work, increased visibility of gay identities in schools can have a positive impact on the overall climate experienced by all students and staff in K-8 schools. For example, when gay teachers become visible to administrators and other teachers, if those administrators and teachers can show support through

their actions and words gay teachers are likely to feel safe becoming fully visible, like with students. This could foster an overall culture of inclusivity within the school.

Additionally, one study showed that, at the local level, higher levels of gay visibility in work settings increases the likelihood that local government will adopt LGBT- friendly policies (Haider-Markel, 2010). Thus, visibly gay teachers could help progress policy change too in the long run. Ultimately, research has shown that when Americans learn relatives, coworkers, or friends are gay, they are more likely to accept and respect issues relating to sexual orientation (Chang, 2007; Gust, 2007; Mucciaroni, 2008; Rofes, 2000; Ruffolo, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). Openly gay teachers, thus, can stand to make schools a safer, more inclusive place.

Benefits to Teachers

While societal standards generally make it "normal" for straight students and teachers to express their heterosexuality (McKay, 2009; Nelson, 2009), it is often considered abnormal for gay teachers or students to openly express their homosexuality in school (Kissen, 1996). So, as gay teachers are pressured to keep their sexual identities invisible, the topic of homosexuality is systematically silenced within the public K-8 school setting. However, gay teachers can use the same approaches as straight teachers to express their sexuality (e.g. mentioning a partner in casual conversation) with general safety and success.

Many people who identify as gay report feeling stronger and healthier after coming out in the workplace (Biegel, 2010; Mayo, 2011). Openly gay teachers also often specifically detail feeling more connected to students once their full identity is disclosed (Kissen, 1996; Mayo, 2011). So, in addition to a practical benefit for the school, there can be a personal benefit for the gay teacher who lives openly.

Benefits to Students

Students can also benefit from gay teachers living openly in K-8 schools. Openly gay teachers in K-8 schools can serve as role models to gay and questioning students through the lived embodiment of a healthy sexual identity. This is important because Rosario, Scrimshaw, and Hunter (2009) found that difficulties in developing an integrated gay identity in childhood and adolescence led to poor psychological adjustment and sexual risk taking in early adulthood, like having multiple unprotected sexual partners. Gary Remafedi, a medical scholar who has studied gay youth extensively, also contends that two factors help youth develop self-acceptance as gay: "first, meeting other young lesbians and gay men, and second, beginning to recognize that they are a part of a larger gay [...] community" (Button, Rienzo, & Wald, 1997, p. 144). Visibly gay teachers can help gay students realize they are a part of a larger community and serve as a source of support on the students' paths to developing healthy sexual identities. Furthermore, gay teachers living openly at work is appropriate in K-8 schools because many medical researchers agree that children and adolescents do have a sexuality and that key adults in a student's life are important in supporting children and adolescents reach healthy outcomes in areas of identity development and sexuality (Bannerman & Burton, 1974; Delamater & Friedrich, 2002; Erickson, 1968; Meschke, Peter, & Bartholomae, 2011).

Alongside these aforementioned benefits, increasing the number of gay teachers living openly in K-8 schools might help solve persistent problems for gay youth (Anderson, 1994; Fetner & Kush, 2002; Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, & Rosario, 1994; Russell, 2003; Toomey, Diaz, & Russell, 2011; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Office of Adolescent Health, 2013). Ultimately, there is an urgent need to address homosexuality in positive ways in K-8 educational environments. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported from a 2009 survey that 80% of gay youths have been verbally abused at school, 40% have been physically

harassed at school, and 20% have been physically assaulted at school (2013). Though statistics vary, primary and middle school gay students are estimated to be twice as likely to commit suicide as students who identify as straight (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). School experiences leave most gay youth unsupported without healthy role models and confidants (Button, Rienzo, & Wald, 1997). Through the identification and description of the safe and successful approaches gay teachers have employed to living openly while at work in K-8 schools, more gay teachers might begin to live openly and could then have the potential to serve as mentors for gay students.

Conclusion

In the end, gay visibility is not just about making schools safer for the gay individuals who come through the school doors, it is about making schools a safer place for everyone. Overall, openly gay teachers can play a part in making schools more welcoming places for everyone. Research has found that the simple recognition of gay identities tends to disrupt unquestioning heteronormative and homophobic practices (Chang, 2007; Ruffolo, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). All students and staff can benefit from a school environment that is welcoming of differences. At the very least, schools should be safe spaces for children regardless of their identity. Visibly gay teachers can contribute to fostering safe school environments.

<div align="center">

Research Question

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The researcher focused this study on the actions or process gay teachers take to living openly while at work in their K-8 schools. Since the nature of this study required a focus on an action or a process, a grounded theory approach was the most appropriate method for this study. The intent of a grounded theory study is to move beyond description in order to generate a theory (Creswell, 2013). A grounded theory study is also appropriate though when the purpose of the

research is to develop an identity development model (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). The identity development model developed from this study was grounded in data from gay teacher participants who are currently living openly in the K-8 schools they work in. The research protocol was intended to explore what the gay teacher said or did to show he or she was living openly at work.

A central research question framed this study: *"How do gay teachers in K-8 schools describe approaches to living openly at work?"* In a grounded theory study, interviews are open-ended and searching (McMillan, 2008). Thus, interviews began with a grand tour question, or a broad question, so that the participants could describe their approach or approaches to living openly in their own terms (Brenner, 2006). A variety of questions followed to probe into the consequences that resulted. This aided the researcher in identifying those approaches that generally resulted in safe and successful outcomes at work for the openly gay K-8 teacher. These approaches are discussed in both chapters four and five. The identification of such approaches and the ultimate generation of the identity development model are intended to potentially serve as a guide for future or current gay K-8 teachers who wish to live openly at work.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

For gay teachers the ramifications of living openly while at work in K-8 schools can be difficult to predict. According to a branch of the Pew Research Center, majority opinion on homosexuals has grown more favorable each year since 1996 (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010). In spite of this, in the United States, there is still no federal law prohibiting discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2013). Furthermore, on a state level, an employer can legally fire an employee for his or her sexual orientation in twenty-nine states (DeMitchell, Eckes, & Fossey, 2007; Human Rights Campaign, 2013). This makes the status of a gay teacher who lives openly while at work in a K-8 school ambiguous. Thus, there is a privilege to being a heterosexual teacher that can be as simple as placing a picture of one's spouse on the desk without a second thought. This is a privilege that is often denied to gay teachers. Quite simply, straight teachers can live their sexuality while at work in K-8 schools with less risk than gay teachers can.

So, while the military ban on gay service members may be gone, Don't Ask Don't Tell is a policy informally enforced upon gay teachers in many public K-8 schools today (Blount, 2005). Yet, research has shown that silence surrounding homosexuality in K-8 schools can help foster school climates that are anti-gay or heteronormative (Sullivan, 1993). Openly gay teachers can be beneficial for the overall school community if only the gay teachers can find ways to live openly without losing their jobs. Consequently, there is a need to describe the approaches gay teachers have employed to living openly while at work in K-8 schools so that those approaches that have generally been safe and successful can be identified and highlighted and the process gay teachers take to become visible described through the generation of an identity development

model. This study, which resulted in an identity development model for openly gay K-8 teachers, was framed by a conceptual framework and informed by a review of the related literature.

Conceptual Framework

This grounded theory study was guided by two theories, critical theory and queer theory, and a concept, normative sexuality development. Critical theory provides a lens to explore the problem of gay identities being underrepresented and/or marginalized in K-8 schools. Queer theory provides a framework for understanding the general significance of living openly. Finally, the concept of normative sexuality development situates the appropriateness of gay teachers living openly at work among students in K-8 schools. A description of critical theory, queer theory, and the concept of normative sexuality development is provided first. How the theories and concept guided this study is explicated upon second.

Critical Theory

Critical theory derives from the scholarship of Karl Marx (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). The critical paradigm is rooted in history and acknowledges that past events influence present situations (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). So, followers of this theory criticize past and present acts of domination and oppression (Kaplan, 2003). Through acts of domination and oppression, which serve to marginalize certain groups in a population, leaders ensure the status quo is maintained. An imbalance of power then keeps certain groups, who are underrepresented or marginalized, from disrupting the existing distribution of power. Thus, critical theorists often believe leaders should be viewed with suspicion (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). A need exists for leaders who do not think in traditional ways though.

Critical theorists call for leaders who are informed by a theory of liberation rather than maintenance of the status quo (Kaplan, 2003). A critical framework can be used to question the oppressive nature of power and to support the demand for social justice through liberating acts. In K-8 schools, and in the context of this study, this could entail gay teachers who merely live openly, and therefore, inherently challenge dominant beliefs about sexuality because they are living openly in a work environment that could be described as heteronormative. Heteronormativity is the assumption or expectation that everyone is heterosexual (Biegel, 2010). Heteronormative practices create dilemmas in everyday life for a person who identifies as gay. These dilemmas range from whether to hold hands in public with one's partner or not to what kind of careers can openly be had. As long as heteronormative practices exist, non-heterosexuals will be forced to choose whether or not they live their sexual identity openly (Harry, 1993; Moorhead, 1999, Mosher, 2001; Segal, 2000). So, institutionalized heteronormative practices in K-8 schools force teachers to either live openly or to, by default, pass as heterosexual or hide in the closet. How did the K-8 school become a heteronormative environment though?

Over time, individuals and the society in which they are embedded create and institutionalize societal norms. Critical theorists frequently explore what organizational control does to the oppressed (Marion, 2002). When groups or individuals do not fit societal norms they can experience latent and/or overt oppression both on an individual and collective level. Incidentally, as was described earlier, only a small percent of the adult population in the United States identifies as gay (Williams Institute, 2011). While more people likely engage in homosexual behavior than identify as gay, it is nevertheless easy to understand how heterosexuality is socially and culturally the dominant sexual identity. This combined with historical discrimination against homosexuals and some religious teachings that are disparaging

of the homosexual lifestyle have led to the development of myths which suggest homosexuals

are by nature dangerous, sick, or trying to recruit others (Biegel, 2010; Graves, 2009; Lehr, 2007;

Serwatka, 2010). Because K-8 schools serve young children, the fears or concerns related to

these myths are often amplified in primary and middle school educational environments.

Consequently, it is easy to understand how heteronormative beliefs have become

institutionalized in places like K-8 schools. This is particularly dangerous because of the cyclical

nature of schooling in which some of the educated will eventually become some of the educators

who can then pass down the beliefs they learned from those who educated them. American

educational institutions have in the past certainly been the conduit used to advance majority

views, like racial segregation, through the education of the future adult citizenry. So, viewed

through a critical lens, the school system generally mirrors the dominant views, perspectives, and

values of the broader society.

Schools teach children through direct and indirect means, like a curriculum that

highlights some types of people while ignoring others. For instance, middle school students

might learn about the Jewish people liberated after the Holocaust, but they might not learn about

the many homosexuals who were kept imprisoned after the liberation of the concentration camps.

As a specific instance in the primary grades, young students are often taught about the family

unit. While some schools do highlight alternative family structures, like single parent homes, the

vast majority of schools do not teach about families with two parents of the same sex (Biegel,

2010). Such examples illustrate how heterosexual identities are often reinforced in the K-8

school while homosexual identities are made invisible. Thus, from a critical perspective, the

school serves as a form of social control. However, if the school can serve as a form of social

control then it can also have the potential to serve as a vehicle of societal change as homosexual identities do not have to stay relegated to the margins in K-8 schools.

From a critical standpoint, an act or acts of resistance can transform an oppressed person into a leader (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Through the resistance of cultural norms and/or institutionalized practices, people from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities can ultimately avoid victimization by serving as activists for change. The critical paradigm then positions gay teachers as potential leaders through the mere act of living openly while at work in K-8 schools. A critical framework recognizes that "identity is partly shaped by the recognition of significant others, and that nonrecognition or misrecognition can significantly harm, demean, and oppress individuals and groups by consigning people to false or distorted characterizations" (Kaplan, 2003, p. 156). In this sense, living openly could serve as a form of resistance equated with leadership. In essence then, living openly at work is one way gay teachers can regain some of the power heteronormative practices in K-8 schools take away. In this study, through the description of how gay teachers live openly while at work in K-8 schools, it is shown that gay teachers can and do live openly safely and successfully while at work in K-8 schools despite the potential negative consequences. The actions of these openly gay teachers could lead to the fostering of more inclusive K-8 cultures while also allowing the gay teachers, rather than societal norms, to write or rewrite their own discourses about being gay teachers in K-8 schools.

Queer Theory

Queer theory emerged during the 1990's out of critical theory, feminism, and lesbian and gay studies (Capper, 1999; Talburt & Steinberg, 2000; Wilchins, 2004). Queer theory explores any sexual identity that is not considered "normal" by society's dominant standard (Wilchins,

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2004). Since the percent of the population that identifies as homosexual is so small, making

homosexuality not the dominant standard or "norm" in terms of sexual identity, gay identities

can be explored through a queer theoretical lens.

In queer theory the ability to acknowledge one's sexuality is tantamount to the ability to

live life to its fullest capacity (Whitlock, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). Queer theorists generally

believe that the fundamental nature of a human and their membership in a community is

comprised of various factors relating to identity (Marinucci, 2010). A society or institution, like

the K-8 school, that covertly or overtly encourages a person to suppress an aspect of his or her

identity displays an unequal balance of power that will inevitably serve to marginalize some

subsection of the population. For example, in the K-8 school, researchers have found that

children, even at young ages, produce and regulate their sexuality based on the messages they

have received through the school about, for instance, gender norms (Blaise 2005, 2009, 2010;

Blaise & Andrew, 2005; Boldt, 1997; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Renold, 2005, 2006;

Robinson & Davies, 2007; Skattebol, 2006; Taylor & Blaise, 2007; Taylor & Richardson, 2005).

So, a male kindergarten student might want to pretend to be the "husband" of another boy while

playing house by imagining he is cooking dinner for the "family." If other students make fun of

him for this behavior, since some people might discourage boys from play acting in submissive

(or traditionally female) roles, the boy might internalize that he should not be another boy's

"husband," even though it is just play, and regulate his behavior in the future. For students who

are gay, the internalized message that certain behaviors should be regulated or hidden can have

negative consequences including an increased risk of substance abuse and/or self-harming

behaviors (Anderson, 1994; Fetner & Kush, 2002; Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, & Rosario, 1994;

Russell, 2003; Toomey, Diaz, & Russell, 2011; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Office of Adolescent Health, 2013).

Queer theorists ultimately assert that secrecy regarding one's sexual orientation is viewed in gay communities as a central cause of continued social oppression (Hunter, Shannon, Knox, & Martin, 1998; Meyer, 2007). Without the right to live openly, gay individuals are essentially denied the right to full personhood. Thus, queer theory allows for the issue of sexuality to be central to identity. It is a theoretical perspective in which the right to inclusion is championed (Kirsch, 2000). The assumption or belief that there is a right to inclusion removes the idea that there should be a question as to whether or not a gay teacher can or should live openly while at work in a K-8 school.

Therefore, queer theory does not seek inclusion in just the name of tolerance. It suggests that the places where identities are constructed, like the workplace and K-8 schools, should be viewed critically (Phelan, 1997; Tierney, 1997). It allows the question of living openly as a gay individual in the workplace to shift from how might the gay worker fit into the culture of the organization to how might the organization need to change its culture so that the gay worker can fit into it. In this sense, living openly in the workplace is not so much about protection as it is about equality. It is about the acceptance of diversity rather than just the tolerance of it.

In the end, queer theorists seek to challenge heteronormative assumptions (Marinucci, 2010). If more people who identify as gay live openly, then heteronormative beliefs can be challenged naturally as more people who do not identify as gay would realize they actually know someone who is not straight. Research has repeatedly shown that when individuals learn that relatives, coworkers, or friends are gay, they generally become more accepting of people who identify as gay (Chang, 2007; Gust, 2007; Mucciaroni, 2008; Rofes, 2000; Ruffolo, 2007;

Wilchins, 2004). One study has even shown that higher levels of gay representation in public professional settings, like schools, increases the chance that governmental agencies will enact gay friendly policies, like anti-discrimination policies (Haider-Markel, 2010). So, queer theory provides a call to action, like through living openly, which holds the potential to challenge societal and cultural norms that serve to suppress gay voices in places like the K-8 school. It is possible then that gay teachers can play a part in making schools safer and more inclusive for everyone just by living openly while at work in K-8 schools.

Normative Sexuality Development

The concept of normative sexuality development hinges on the belief that having a sexuality and coming to recognize and accept one's sexuality is a normal part of healthy childhood and adolescent development (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). It is critical that students are able to explore their sexual identity in a safe and welcoming environment, which the K-8 school should be. Similar to what queer theorists believe, the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (2004) found that sexuality is a central part of being human, which children and adolescents must explore. Key adults in a student's life, like a teacher, are important in supporting children and adolescents reach healthy outcomes in areas of identity development and sexuality (Bannerman & Burton, 1974; Delamater & Friedrich, 2002; Erickson, 1968; Meschke, Peter, & Bartholomae, 2011). When gay teachers feel that they cannot live openly, they may not feel able to support a gay student without risking their job. In this sense, gay students might be robbed of a key adult who could have been an important source of support.

Some politicians, educational leaders, and parents have erroneously assumed that the mere mention of homosexuality in schools, which would inevitably occur if a gay teacher lived

openly at work, would cause children to become homosexuals (Marcus, 2005; Rasmussen, Mitchell, & Harwood, 2007). However, people cannot catch homosexuality. Furthermore, a mass of empirical studies published in the last decade supports the notion that childhood and adolescent sexuality is a perfectly normal part of childhood and adolescent development (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Diamond, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2005; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). The concept of normative sexuality development then assumes that children and adolescents have a sexuality that they can and should come to know on the path to healthy adult development. It assumes that children are born with a sexuality that cannot be changed even though children's' behavior around their sexuality might be influenced by things like societal norms.

Schools have a responsibility to prepare students for the world they will face. All students, gay or straight, should be prepared to engage in healthy adult relationships and to deal with emotions related to sexuality in a positive way. Neither a gay teacher nor a straight teacher can cause a child or adolescent to develop a sexuality as it is now well recognized by researchers that children and adolescents already have a sexuality. So, there should be no problem with a gay teacher living openly in the same way that a heterosexual teacher might. After all, an adult, like a teacher, who shares certain community characteristics with a student has the potential to serve as a powerful role model or mentor for that student.

Why these Theories and Concept?

Critical theory, queer theory, and the concept of normative sexuality development provided a framework for explaining the rationale behind this grounded theory study. The theories and concept also provided a guide for enacting this grounded theory study. The research was designed, conducted, and analyzed with these theories and concept as the filtering lens.

For a study to be researchable there must be a problem. Because of historical discrimination against homosexuals, because of some religious teachings that are disparaging of the homosexual lifestyle, and because the majority of the population identifies as heterosexual, heteronormative beliefs have taken hold in some American institutions including many K-8 schools. The typical heteronormative nature of schools is compounded by the conservative traditions of the teaching profession and present legal climate. So, gay teachers face potentially negative consequences, legally and/or socially, when they live openly in K-8 schools. Consequently, there is a freedom to heterosexuality; a freedom gay teachers cannot exercise with as much security. However, if the approaches gay teachers have employed to living openly in K-8 schools can be described and those approaches that were typically safe and successful can be identified, more gay teachers might begin to live openly while at work in K-8 schools.

Ultimately, critical theory allows for the recognition that past and present imbalances in power cause groups to become and remain underrepresented and marginalized. This can potentially be ameliorated through acts of resistance, like living openly, which can lead to some kind of liberation for the oppressed. This creates the potential for victims to be transformed into leaders. Critical theory, therefore, provides a lens for viewing the problem that is researched in this study. It also provides a rationale for the selection of participants in this study who are living openly and not hiding or passing as heterosexual while teaching in their K-8 schools. The creation of an identity development model related to gay K-8 teachers living openly at work might have some positive benefits. For example, the creation of such an identity development model might prompt more gay teachers to live openly while at work, which could challenge the status quo that perpetuates heteronormative practices in K-8 schools. This could possibly make K-8 schools more inclusive places.

To be researchable, a study must also be significant. Queer theory situates sexuality as a core component of identity. Queer theorists recognize that the denial of one's sexual identity can have negative consequences. These consequences could take the form, for example, of a gay teacher experiencing anxiety when a student asks a question of a personal nature. In general, it is not unusual for teachers to "come out" as straight to their students through the course of teaching by mentioning their spouse or weekend activities or by responding to personal questions asked by students (McKay, 2009; Nelson, 2009). The effects can be deleterious when gay teachers do not practice this same freedom or do not feel they have this same freedom. One can imagine that it would be exhausting to constantly monitor or regulate one's behavior so as not to accidentally out oneself.

So, whether or not gay teachers can openly display their identity in the K-8 school can have a real impact, like on the gay teachers' senses of self. Therefore, the problem this study addresses places the identities, and thus health, of gay teachers at stake. Queer theory then serves to highlight the significance of this study. It provides the justification for focusing on the process of gay teachers living openly in K-8 schools by both recognizing the importance of this process and by establishing the inherent right to this process.

Finally, a study must be appropriate for it to be researchable. The concept of normative sexuality development simply acknowledges that there is a growing trend of researchers and health organizations reporting that children and adolescents have a sexuality, which can and should be directed for their healthy development. Essentially there is no harm in students encountering openly gay teachers because, regardless of the teacher and his or her sexuality, students already have an established sexuality that cannot be altered by a gay (or straight) teacher.

Through the healthy embodiment of a lived sexuality, gay teachers might even benefit students who are gay or questioning their sexuality. The gay teacher could potentially show the gay or questioning child that it is possible to live a fulfilled, happy, successful, and/or healthy gay lifestyle as an adult. It is important that gay students see that being gay does not have to mean living a disadvantaged life. The concept of normative sexuality development suggests that children and adolescents, especially gay children and adolescents, need these models and/or messages about healthy adult lifestyles concerning sexuality and identity.

In the end, the concept of normative sexuality development justifies the appropriateness of this study. It allows for the assumption that there is no inherent harm posed to students in a teacher living his or her sexuality openly in a K-8 school. Because of this assumption, the concept of normative sexuality development, in addition to critical theory and queer theory, guided the selection of the material referenced in the following literature review that pertained to sexuality and K-8 schools, how teachers, gay or straight, live their sexuality in schools, and gay identity development models.

Literature Review

Most scholarly work on sexual diversity in schools has focused on the vulnerability of gay students and the importance of creating safe classrooms and schools for gay students (Kissen, 2002). This research has not explored what role gay teachers can play in making schools safer. Ultimately, studies on gay students' experiences in schools, their coming out stories in schools, and the challenges they face in schools has grown immensely in the last twenty years (Edwards, 1997; Eisen and Hall, 1996; Griffin, 1992; Mayo, 2008; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Rofes, 1994; Taylor, 2000; Unks, 1994), but there is much less research on gay teachers (Capper, 1999; Evans, 2002; Mayo, 2008).

What research has shown is that gay teachers, like gay students, are more likely to experience victimization than their straight counterparts with 60% of gay teachers reporting that they have experienced some form of harassment in schools just because of their sexual orientation (Teachers Support Network, 2007). Despite this, policy related to gay teachers has not been explored or developed to the same extent that it has for gay students (Swan, 2004). This contributes to the uncertainty many gay teachers face when they begin to live openly while at work in K-8 schools. However, sexuality is present in K-8 schools in more ways than just what is displayed by teachers and students through their actions. Thus, this review of the related literature began with an exploration of sexuality and the K-8 school. A look at teachers, sexuality, and the K-8 school followed this. Finally, this review of literature concluded with an overview of existing gay identity development models.

Sexuality and the K-8 School

There are widespread but misguided beliefs that children either do not know or should not know about sexuality and that attempts to engage children surrounding issues of sexuality is problematic in the school environment (Blaise, 2010; Epstein 1999; Renold, 2005; Robinson, 2005; Sears, 2009; Tobin 1997). This relates back to a historical depiction of children that has come to institutionalize how many adults view children in today's society. Discourse about the presumed innocence of children has, in large part, led to this belief that children should not be "subjected" to sexuality (Cullen & Sandy, 2009; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). However, children are already "subjected" to sexuality on a daily basis in the K-8 school, and the sexuality they are typically "subjected" to is heterosexuality.

A mass of research supports the notion that the school is a social and cultural arena for the production (or reproduction) of sexual identities (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, 1998; Haywood,

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1996; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Hey, 1997; Redman, 1996; Renold, 2000). This is problematic when there are dominant societal norms, which are reinforced through schooling, concerning heterosexuality that can lead to the denigration of homosexuality. Most of these studies regarding the performance or production of sexuality in schools have focused on secondary schools and not primary or middle schools though.

Yet, researchers acknowledge that students experience the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality through learned behaviors regarding gender relations beginning in the primary grades (Best, 1983; Clarricoates, 1987; Epstein, 1997; Francis, 1997; Jordan, 1995; Renold, 2000; Skelton, 1996, 1997; Thorne, 1993). Children use their knowledge of gender norms and heterosexuality early as studies show young primary age students police and regulate their behaviors and relationships based on this knowledge (Bhana, 2007; Blaise, 2005, 2009, 2010; Blaise & Andrew, 2005; Davies, 2003; Francis, 1997; Grieshaber, 2004; Reay 2001; Renold, 2005; Skattebol, 2006; Taylor & Richardson, 2005; Tobin 1997). Essentially, students learn at a very young age that certain behaviors are generally considered appropriate, and these behaviors are heterosexual and gender conforming in nature. In contrast then, students learn early that certain other behaviors are generally considered inappropriate, and these behaviors are homosexual and/or gender non-conforming in nature. While this knowledge will not cause a child to become heterosexual or homosexual, it can influence their behavior. For instance, a young female child might express that she wants to marry her female best friend. This is not necessarily a proclamation about the student's sexuality because she is so young, but it might still be met with negative reactions from other students, students' parents, and/or the teacher, which could lead the girl to regulate her behavior in the future. Of course, if this student does turn out to be gay, the "message" about the need to regulate her behavior becomes all the more negative.

In the later primary grades, a growing number of studies highlight the prevalence of heterosexuality in schools through "girlfriends and boyfriends" (Adler & Adler, 1998; Redman, 1996; Renold, 2000; Thorne, 1993; Thorne and Luria, 1986). In fact, researchers have found that students begin "dating" in school as early as age four (Connolly, 1998; Epstein, 1997; Renold, 2000; Walkerdine, 1990). The children in these studies did not express what an adult would recognize as sexual attraction to their boyfriend or girlfriend, rather these students engaged in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships as a means of establishing their status as "normal" girls or boys. Not having a boyfriend or girlfriend could be considered weird and lead to teasing, so the students in these studies engaged in these heterosexual "relationships" mainly as a performance. It is this type of phenomenon that might be what pressures students into compulsory heterosexuality.

So, students are exposed to sexuality in K-8 schools, and the type of sexuality they are typically exposed to in K-8 schools is strictly heterosexual. While heterosexual identities are often present in the K-8 school, homosexual identities are frequently made invisible. Incidentally, because gay teachers are often directly or indirectly pressured to keep their identities secret, gay youths are potentially left to forge their own identity with little to no social support (Mosher, 2001; Segal, 2000; Underwood & Black, 1998). K-8 schools cannot continue to fail gay students in this way because without support systems gay students are more likely than straight students to drop out of school, live on the streets, use alcohol and/or drugs, and/or self harm (Anderson, 1994; Fetner & Kush, 2002; Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, & Rosario, 1994; Russell, 2003; Toomey, Diaz, & Russell, 2011; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Office of Adolescent Health, 2013).

Teachers, Sexuality, and the K-8 School

Since identity is not something one can simply shed, the imbalance of power between heterosexual and homosexual identities in K-8 schools means straight and gay teachers might live their sexual identity in different ways or with different emotions while at work. It is not typically considered unusual for teachers to "come out" as straight to their students through the course of teaching in response to personal questions posed by students (McKay, 2009; Nelson, 2009). This could happen through the casual reference to weekend activities. For example, a teacher might reference going with her husband to watch her son's baseball game in the context of a K-8 school.

Generally, it is also not considered inappropriate for straight teachers to mention their spouse (McKay, 2009; Nelson, 2009). So, if a straight teacher can, for instance, affirm the existence of a partner in response to a student question or bring a partner to a school event, then this should be an acceptable approach for a gay teacher to take to living openly while at work in a K-8 school. There is no rational reason for expecting a gay teacher to behave differently than a straight teacher. When gay teachers do not have the same freedoms or do not perceive that they have the same freedoms as straight teachers, the K-8 school becomes a place where the gay teacher may not know where he or she fits. This could result in a number of consequences that might even extend beyond the gay K-8 teacher.

There can be adverse effects when gay teachers feel the need to hide their identity. Researchers have found that gay teachers who are not living openly often purposefully distance themselves from students and other faculty to avoid being inadvertently "outed" (Khayatt, 1992; Kissen, 1996; Mayo, 2011). This avoidance could even manifest itself in the gay teacher ignoring or refusing to address homophobic behavior by students or other educators in order to avoid any possible association with homosexuality. Additionally, gay teachers may feel

compelled to omit information, like what they did on the weekend, or lie, like by swapping a partner's name that would indicate he or she was of the same sex for a name that would suggest the teacher's partner was of the opposite sex, in order to "pass" as heterosexual. Higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation have been found in studies researching homosexuals who were passing or confused about their identity (Mosher, 2001; Underwood & Black, 1998). This is certainly not the ideal way for a gay K-8 teacher to live and work.

Some gay teachers who are not living openly professionally also describe how hiding their sexuality negatively impacts their ability to teach by diminishing their confidence and restricting their style (Khayatt, 1992; Kissen, 1996). For example, a gay male teacher may feel the need to manage his behavior so as not to appear effeminate as such behaviors could be associated with homosexuality. It is only logical that restricting one's behavior in this manner could diminish one's sense of self-efficacy. A diminished sense of self-efficacy could negatively impact one's professional practice.

Although there can be negative consequences to living openly as a gay teacher, there can also be some advantages to living openly. In the end, the decision on whether or not to disclose one's gay identity as a teacher while at work in a K-8 school can cause discomfort in and of itself. On the other hand, deciding whether or not to live openly as a gay teacher while at work in a K-8 school can also have ramifications well beyond just the educator.

Living openly in career settings can hold great potential for true liberation for the professional who identifies as gay (Kissen, 1996). While rarely does one make the disclosure of being gay without dealing with some kind of permeation of stereotypes, prejudices, hostility, and discrimination (Hunter, Shannon, Knox, & Martin, 1998; Newton, 2009; The Williams Institute, 2011), for gay people living openly is still correlated with better mental and physical health

(Hunter, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). In fact, many people who identify as gay report feeling stronger professionally as well as personally after beginning to live openly in the work environment (Biegel, 2010; Mayo, 2011).

Furthermore, openly gay K-8 teachers often describe feeling more connected to students, especially gay students, once their full identity is revealed at school (Kissen, 1996; Mayo, 2011). The fact is most gay students are bereft of resources about positive gay lifestyles (Biegel, 2010; Dempsey 1994; Mosher, 2001). Students who do not identify as gay can find ample positive examples of straight coupledom and adult heterosexual lifestyles in just the storybooks or texts found in the average school. For example, fairytales, which may be referenced or read in K-8 schools, almost exclusively highlight heterosexual relationships with princes and princesses or kings and queens who often fall in love or marry throughout the course of the story. Heterosexuality has been normalized through the content taught and the structures found in many public K-8 schools as homosexuality has traditionally been marginalized through the K-8 school curriculum. This is amplified by the presence of heterosexual teachers and by the often "absence" of homosexual teachers.

Conservative political groups tend to suggest that teaching about families with two mothers or two fathers would somehow undermine the successful longevity of the "traditional" family unit that contains a husband and wife (Blount, 2005). The result of this thinking has been a purposeful censorship of material relating to homosexuality from the school curriculum and the school library (Biegel, 2010; Evans, 2002; Marcus, 2005; Meyer, 2007; Rimmerman, 2002; Serwatka, 2010). But, excluding homosexual leaders, like Harvey Milk, from the history books or removing books discussing homosexuality from the library, like *Tango Makes Three,* does not keep teachers or students from identifying as gay. These measures simply serve to hurt those

with alternative identities or with alternative families through the silence they command regarding homosexuality. The lack of gay visibility in educational environments means many gay students are deprived of road maps in their journey towards becoming adults who identify as gay. Gay teachers who make themselves "visible" can change this.

The openly gay teacher can potentially serve as a role model, mentor, or guide for gay students (Chang, 2007; Khayatt, 1992; Marcus, 2005; Whitlock, 2007). Having an openly gay teacher might allow a student to feel safe enough to come out to that teacher. Indeed, research has shown that gay youths are more likely to come out to another gay person, like a gay teacher, and that coming out to another gay person helps gay youths maintain a positive sense of identity and feel like they are a part of a larger community (Evans & Broido, 1999; Moorhead, 1999; Mosher, 2001; Oswald, 2000; Yeung & Stombler, 2000). It is important then that the K-8 school support gay teachers in living openly if only for the benefit of gay students.

Research has also found that the openly gay teacher can have a positive impact on more than just gay students as students with gay relatives can often times feel a greater sense of community in a classroom with an openly gay teacher (Kissen, 1996; Serwatka, 2010). For instance, if a child has two mothers, it is understandable how that child might feel ashamed, bad, or somehow wrong when a teacher leads the class in making a father's day craft or when the school holds a father-daughter dance. Just as heteronormative school structures impact gay teachers and gay students, they also impact students with gay relatives.

Even students who are not receptive to homosexual individuals can benefit from having an openly gay teacher. If a student has antigay feelings but likes his or her teacher, finding out the teacher is gay can challenge the student's homophobic feelings (Blinick, 1994; Gust, 2007). In fact, one study showed that children who knew they had a gay teacher were more likely than

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children who did not know they had a gay teacher to grow up to be less homophobic and less xenophobic (Rofes, 2000). The openly gay K-8 educator can show students that the classroom is a safe place for identity exploration and development (McInnes & Davies, 2008; Rensenbrink, 1996), and, in the end, all students deserve a safe environment for such exploration and development.

Gay Identity Development Models

The literature on gay teachers though reveals a specific gap regarding those gay teachers who live openly in K-8 schools. Only a few narratives have been written describing the coming out experiences of gay teachers, like *One Teacher in Ten: Gay and Lesbian Educators Tell their Stories* (Jennings, 1994), but these narratives did not focus solely on teachers in K-8 schools. These narratives centered around a common theme of gay teachers, mainly in high school settings, struggling with hiding in the closet or passing as straight before coming out at work to an often times limited audience, like coworkers but not students. Ultimately, there are no studies detailing the safest and most successful approaches gay teachers have found and employed to living openly and not hiding or passing in K-8 schools.

The seminal six stage Cass (1979, 1984) sexual identity development model is widely cited in studies dealing with coming out or living openly as a gay person. Most existing gay identity development models are similar to Cass' (1979, 1984) model. The first stage in Cass' (1979) model is identity confusion, which is characterized by the internalized questioning of sexuality by the gay person. In stage two, identity comparison, the homosexual shifts away from the internalized questioning of his or her sexuality to the internalized stating of his or her homosexuality (Cass, 1979). Stage three involves identity tolerance and is characterized by the homosexual seeking the gay subculture. By the end of stage three the homosexual can outwardly

say he or she is gay and thereby transition into stage four, which is identity acceptance (Cass, 1979). In stage five, identity acceptance becomes identity pride. According to Cass (1979, 1984), it is typical for homosexuals in this stage to dichotomize the world into homosexuals and heterosexuals. This stage also has the homosexual preferring his or her identity to a heterosexual identity. In the sixth and final stage, known as identity synthesis, the homosexual's professional and personal identities become fully synthesized (Cass, 1979, 1984). In this stage, the homosexual still feels pride about his or her gay identity but also recognizes the similarities between gay and straight identities (Cass, 1979, 1984).

Several other models, which share similar characteristics to Cass' model, also exist describing the approaches gay people take to living openly or coming out. These models, like Fassinger's (1991), Savin-Williams' (1988, 1990), and Troiden's (1979, 1988), focus on the resolution of internal conflict related to identifying as gay through the coming out process. Furthermore, many sexual identity development models theorize that coming out results in full identity formation and integration (Carrion & Locke, 1997; Eliason, 1996; Mosher, 2001). Because of heterosexist underpinnings in the predominant culture of our society though, gay people have to come out over and over again throughout the course of their life.

A gay person's identity is not likely to be fully integrated and formed even after he or she comes out because he or she will still have to come out to many different people and in many different situations. Subsequently, a need exists for a gay identity development model that largely focuses on the period of identity formation and integration after coming out since most existing gay identity development models focus largely on the period of identity formation and integration prior to coming out. This study focused on gay teachers who were already out in their personal lives and who are also living openly in their professional lives.

Similar in nature to the existing gay identity models already mentioned, a sexual identity model exists specifically for gay teachers. An identity management model that places gay teachers on a continuum between being open without restriction in PreK-12 schools and being closeted while at work has been developed; this is known as the *Lesbian and Gay Educators Identity Management Strategies Model* (Griffin, 1992). There is no identity development model though that currently exists for gay K-8 teachers who are living openly and not hiding or passing at work (Rothblum & Bond, 1996). Further research is needed in this area as the *Lesbian and Gay Educators Identity Management Strategies Model* is about identity management and not development.

Ultimately, the *Lesbian and Gay Educators Identity Management Strategies Model* depicts how closeted gay teachers, openly gay teachers, and gay teachers who are passing as straight manage their identity in preK-12 schools. The critical aspect of this study demands a focus just on gay teachers who are living openly though, which is why the *Lesbian and Gay Educators Identity Management Strategies Model* is excluded from the conceptual framework that guided this study. This is specifically because openly gay teachers who are not hiding or passing as straight are the ones best poised to challenge dominant beliefs about homosexuality in K-8 schools through the act or process of living openly.

This study filled gaps in the literature. Most identity development models largely focus on a gay person's identity development prior to living openly, and no identity development models currently exist that focus solely on the approaches gay teachers take to living openly and not hiding or passing in the K-8 school. Therefore, this study highlighted those typically safe and successful approaches gay teachers take to living openly in the K-8 school through an identity development model that largely focused on identity formation and integration once the gay K-8

teacher was living openly at work. This study then contributes to closing two current gaps in the existing literature surrounding gay identity development models.

Literature Summary

The issue of gay teachers living openly in K-8 schools might be controversial socially and culturally because of, for example, traditional beliefs. However, the research clearly shows that students are already confronted with sexuality in K-8 schools. The typical "absence" of homosexual identities in K-8 schools leads to, in part, students being pressured into compulsory heterosexuality. While this is not inherently harmful for most of the population who will someday identify as heterosexual, as only a small subsection of the population identities as homosexual, for students who are gay the effects could be negative.

School leaders should be concerned with the psychological or medical factors associated with gay youths, and these factors can be positively or negatively impacted by the climate surrounding gay identities in a given context, like the K-8 school (Anderson, 1998; Dempsey 1994; Edwards, 1996; Floyd, Stein, Harter, Allison, & Nye, 1999; Hollander, 2000; Lock & Steiner, 1999; Mosher, 20001; Segal, 2000; Vincke & Bolton, 1994). The openly gay K-8 teacher could contribute to a more inclusive climate surrounding homosexuality in primary and middle school environments. Schools need to be places where diversity is protected so that students feel safe regardless of their identity.

As the literature showed and the conceptual framework emphasizes, at its core, living openly and gay visibility within the public K-8 school is essentially about survival because sexuality is that central to identity (Chang, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). Gay teachers who live openly in K-8 schools can help show that the school is a safe place, even for people from historically underrepresented and marginalized communities. This can benefit the gay teacher who can

experience the advantages and freedom of living openly. This can benefit the gay student who might be able to envision him or her self as a healthy gay adult, like the gay teacher, where once he or she had no adult role model to personify such a vision. This can also benefit straight students who will inevitably interact with gay people in the increasingly diverse world they will face outside of the school doors.

Currently, a gap in the literature exists though regarding those gay teachers who live openly in K-8 schools without hiding or passing as heterosexual. Existing gay identity development or formation models present staged models that focus more on the gay person's identity formation and development before coming out rather than after coming out. An identity management model specifically exists for gay teachers in PreK-12 schools, but this model does not concentrate just on teachers in primary or middle schools where concerns relating to homosexuality and children, however unfounded, are perhaps more prevalent than in high school settings. The identity management model specifically for teachers also concentrated on openly gay teachers, gay teachers who passed as heterosexual, and closeted gay teachers.

The conceptual framework of this study provides the impetus for the focus on gay K-8 teachers who are living openly and not passing or hiding while at work in K-8 schools. This study shed light on the identity formation and integration process that occurs after a gay teacher is living openly in a K-8 school. Grounding the findings from this study in the data, those approaches to living openly that were typically safe and successful for the gay K-8 teacher were highlighted in chapters four and five. The gay identity development model generated from this study has the potential to serve as a guide or resource for gay K-8 teachers, which might prompt more gay teachers to live openly in K-8 schools. At the very least, the gay identity development

model that was produced from this study could prompt more discussion about homosexual identities in K-8 schools.

Conclusion

Every year it becomes safer legally to be a gay teacher who lives and works openly (Blount, 2005; Kissen, 1996). Whether or not it is culturally and socially safer to live openly as a gay teacher largely depends on the location of the school. However, there are gay students committing suicide, self mutilating, struggling with depression, entering into a state of cognitive dissonance, and/or dealing with substance abuse all over America from the north to the south and in big cities and small towns. This is happening at disproportionate rates to gay students when compared to straight students (Anderson, 1994; Fetner & Kush, 2002; Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, & Rosario, 1994; Russell, 2003; Toomey, Diaz, & Russell, 2011; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Office of Adolescent Health, 2013). These gay students need to know they are not alone, and "visibly" gay teachers can potentially show these students that there are others like them.

In the end, heteronormative and homophobic practices hurt the overall school community as it impedes the ability for schools to recognize and celebrate diversity (Wilchins, 2004). Too many young adults have either grown up in agony over their homosexuality or have experienced complete surprise when homosexual inclinations were acknowledged in part because gay role models have historically been made invisible in K-8 schools (Pollak, 1994). Indeed, a child's identity is largely formed when they are a student through what is and what is not learned (Serwatka, 2010). The next generation of gay students does not have to grow up in the dark though.

Teachers who make themselves "visibly" gay by living openly at work can be the agents of change who catalyze broad cultural shifts within the traditionally heteronormative public K-8 school. The fact is "norms" change the minute an individual engages the topic at hand (Meyer, 2007). The minute students know a teacher is gay the school cannot retroactively make the gay teacher invisible. The gay teacher can be fired, he or she can be harassed, but the knowledge that he or she exists cannot be erased from students' minds. Openly gay teachers in K-8 schools have the potential to alter what has been the prevailing and dominant discourse on homosexuality for the next generation; the potential implications of this are enormous.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to describe approaches gay teachers have used to living openly while at work in K-8 schools. The central research question guiding this study was, "How do gay teachers in K-8 schools describe approaches to living openly at work?" Research questions were designed to provoke detailed responses from gay teachers about how they approached and experienced the process of living openly while at work in K-8 schools. The researcher explored what the gay teachers specifically said or did to show they were living openly while at work in K-8 schools through an opening grand tour question. Follow up questions were then asked to ascertain consequences that have occurred since the gay teachers began living openly at work. This helped the researcher in identifying and highlighting those approaches to living openly that were typically safe and successful for the gay teachers. From the findings that emerged from this study, the researcher generated a gay identity development model.

Assumptions underlying the study

This study was designed with the assumption that gay teachers living openly while at work in K-8 schools is appropriate. Key shifts since 2000 in childhood and adolescent sexuality research have led to an overarching reconceptualization of childhood and adolescent sexuality as a normal part of childhood and adolescent development (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). So, a positive or normal perception of childhood and adolescent sexuality should be integrated with approaches to teaching children and young adults about risk management behaviors concerning sexuality. Incidentally, a growing body of researchers have recognized that children and adolescents are naturally sexual beings who should come to know their sexual identity in supportive environments, like K-8 schools, and with the help of key adults, like teachers, in order

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to develop into healthy adults (Bannerman & Burton, 1974; Delamater & Friedrich, 2002; Erickson, 1968; Meschke, Peter, & Bartholomae, 2011; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Openly gay K-8 teachers have the potential to serve as guides or resources for gay students who might lack a living embodiment of their sexual identity in an adult.

This study was also designed with the assumption that living openly in K-8 schools as a gay teacher can have consequences. There is certainly the potential for negative consequences as neither the federal government nor twenty-nine of the fifty states, including Louisiana, offer protection for employees from workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation (DeMitchell, Eckes, & Fossey, 2007; Human Rights Campaign, 2013; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2013). Though it might be more difficult to fire a teacher simply for being gay today, the courts have in the past and recently upheld the dismissal of some teachers for their sexual orientation (Biegel, 2010; Schimmel, Eckes, & Militello, 2010). Indeed, the topic of gay visibility in K-8 schools is often contentious. This leaves straight teachers able to reveal details about their personal lives at work with more security than gay teachers. Teachers who are openly gay may be faced with hostility, prejudice, and stereotyping from coworkers, administrators, students, and/or students' parents (Hunter, Shannon, Knox, & Martin, 1998; Newton, 2009; The Williams Institute, 2011).

However, positive consequences can also result from a gay teacher living openly in a K-8 school. For instance, living openly for gay people in general is correlated with better health both mentally and physically (Hunter, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). In addition, increased gay visibility tends to challenge heteronormative and/or homophobic practices (Chang, 2007; Mucciaroni, 2008; Ruffolo, 2007; Wilchins; 2004), which would make it easier for schools to foster healthy

and safe environments for diverse students and staff. In the end, it is important that gay teachers are able to live openly safely and successfully while at work in their K-8 schools.

Rationale for Study Design

This study is qualitative because the research questions were designed to provoke detailed descriptions from gay teachers about their approach or approaches to living openly while at work in K-8 schools. Since the nature of the study demands a focus on the action or process of living openly in K-8 schools by gay teachers, a grounded theory approach was the research method that best fits this study. The purpose of a grounded theory study is to move beyond description to generate a theory based in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A grounded theory study is also appropriate when the intent of the research is to develop an identity development model (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). The context of the phenomenon being studied, which in this case was the process of gay teachers living openly in K-8 schools, provides the basis for a grounded theory study (McMillan, 2008). Consequently, the intent of this research was to produce an identity development model about the approaches gay teachers employ to living openly while at work within the K-8 school. The researcher specifically illuminated those approaches that were typically safe and successful.

Additionally, grounded theory is an appropriate design to use when the literature has theoretical models available, but the models were tested on populations other than those of interest to the qualitative researcher (Creswell, 2013). Existing models on the living openly process, like Cass's (1979) seminal six stage sexual identity development model, both fail to address the unique variables openly gay K-8 teachers face and fail to largely focus on the gay person's identity development process after living openly. Griffin's (1992) *Lesbian and Gay*

Educators Identity Management Strategies Model, though specific to teachers, focused on openly gay teachers, closeted gay teachers, and gay teachers who were passing as straight while at work in PreK-12 schools. No gay identity development models exist that focus largely on identity development after living openly, and no sexual identity development models exist that focus on the approaches gay teachers take to living openly and not hiding or passing in K-8 schools. Thus, this study was intended to fill gaps in the existing literature with the generation of a gay identity development model that described the process gay teachers take to living openly or becoming visible and not hiding or passing in the K-8 school. This model focuses on the identity development of gay K-8 teachers after they are living openly at work.

Study Population

Gay teachers who have specifically said or done something to show they are living openly in K-8 schools either through the affirmation of a homosexual identity or the denial of a heterosexual identity and who would not deny their sexual identity in any situation in the context of work form the study population. Prior to interviewing participants, the researcher described the purpose of this study and sought the participants' written consent to participate in the study. During this time, the researcher also explicitly described the parameters for being eligible to participate in this study with the gay teacher. The gay teacher was then asked to self disclose whether or not he or she felt he or she met the definition of living openly as outlined in this study. If the participant felt he or she was eligible for this study, the researcher interviewed the participant at a later date. If during the interview, the researcher realized though through the gay teacher's answers to the research questions that he or she was not actually living openly in his or her K-8 school as defined by this study then the researcher did not use that interview to inform her findings.

The researcher used two methods for participant selection. The researcher first used a theoretical sampling method in which participants were consciously selected to help best contribute to the formation of a theory (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, as previously stated, a gay teacher who would not deny his or her sexuality under any circumstance in the context of work and who has specifically said or done something to show he or she is living openly within the K-8 school would be eligible for this study. A gay teacher who did not meet these selection criteria would not be eligible for this study. For instance, if a student asked a female teacher a question like *do you have a husband?* and the teacher responded with *no I have a partner, girlfriend, or wife*, then this teacher would be eligible for the study. The researcher did not interview those teachers who identified as gay but were not living openly in their K-8 schools. For example, if the female teacher from before had responded to the student question, do you have a husband, with no, even though she had a partner, wife, or girlfriend at home, then she would not be eligible for this study. A gay teacher who was allowing him or her self to pass as heterosexual by, for example, omitting pronouns that would signify gender when talking about his or her partner to a coworker is not explicitly closeted, but he or she is also not living openly as defined in this study and thus would also be excluded from the study.

The researcher also used Miles and Huberman's (1994) network sampling method. Network or snowball sampling relies on existing participants to help identify further subjects for study (Bogdan & Bicklin, 2003). Since there can be negative consequences for gay teachers who choose to live openly in K-8 schools, it might be difficult to recruit openly gay teachers as participants for this study. The act of living openly can also be wrought with emotion and thus quite personal. So, it could also be hard to find participants who are willing to share their story with someone not previously known to them. An advantage of using network sampling is that it

lends itself well to the fostering of trust between participants and the researcher because the participants will either directly know the researcher, a researcher's colleague or friend, or another participant who was involved with the study. Since the researcher is both gay and in the education field, the researcher's colleagues, classmates, and friends and their acquaintances served as gatekeepers who recommended participants for involvement with this research. These gatekeepers were the first people the researcher contacted to ask for their help in identifying teachers who are gay and living openly at work in a K-8 school. The researcher asked the gatekeepers to give her e-mail address to the teachers they identified so that the teachers could then make the choice on whether or not to contact the researcher.

Eleven participants were selected for this study. There was a mix of ages, races, gender, and relationship statuses represented among the participants. While the researcher hoped to find diversity among participants, beyond using the participant selection techniques mentioned above, the researcher did nothing additional to ensure diversity among participants. The participants for this study were recruited from the Greater New Orleans area. The researcher's personal and professional network is largely situated in this area so this aided in sampling. In addition, Louisiana is one of the twenty-nine states that has no law prohibiting discrimination against an employee for his or her sexual orientation (DeMitchell, Eckes, & Fossey, 2007; Human Rights Campaign, 2013). If too few participants had been located, the search for participants would have been expanded beyond the Greater New Orleans area to Louisiana in general or even to other states where an employer is also not prohibited from firing an employee based on his or her sexual orientation, like Mississippi. However, this did not prove necessary. All participants lived openly while at work in a public K-8 school in the Greater New Orleans area.

The researcher sought participants who taught in different types of public schools, which included charter schools, traditional public schools, and alternative public schools. The researcher selected not to include gay teachers who are living openly in private K-8 schools. From a legal standpoint, private schools are different than public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Thus, the present legal climate that has been described concerning whether or not a gay employee can be fired for his or her sexual orientation is not applicable in private school settings. In the future the researcher would like to conduct a study on gay teachers living openly in private K-8 schools, but those teachers were not eligible for this study as the context of their employment is different than gay teachers who are living openly in public K-8 schools. Thus, the identity development process for openly gay private K-8 teachers would likely differ from the identity development process for openly gay public K-8 teachers since they face different variables.

Additionally, the researcher located participants who teach in K-8 schools, which included primary and middle schools. The researcher focused on K-8 schools because most of the research on homosexuality in schools has focused on secondary schools and not primary or middle schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, 1998; Haywood, 1996; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Hey, 1997; Redman, 1996; Renold, 2000). However, students are met with implicit and explicit messages about heterosexuality beginning early in the primary grades (Best, 1983; Clarricoates, 1987; Epstein, 1997; Francis, 1997; Jordan, 1995; Renold, 2000; Skelton, 1996, 1997; Thorne, 1993). Thus, it was important to expand the body of knowledge about homosexual identities in K-8 schools.

Data Collection

The main source of data collection in grounded theory studies is interviewing (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, interviews with openly gay teachers about their actions and interactions while at work in K-8 schools served as the primary source of data for this study. In a grounded theory study, interviews are open-ended and searching (McMillan, 2008). Interviews began with a grand tour, or general, question so that the participants could describe their approach or approaches to living openly in their own terms (Brenner, 2006). A variety of questions followed to probe into the consequences that resulted from the approach or approaches the gay K-8 teacher took. Participants were interviewed until saturation of the data was reached. Saturation occurs when the researcher no longer hears or sees new information (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Interviews took place in person whenever possible at a location determined by the participant for their convenience and comfort. When an in person interview was not possible, the interview took place over the phone. Nine of eleven interviews took place in person. Two interviews took place over the phone. Prior to all interviews, participants e-mailed their signed consent form to the researcher. All participants also granted permission for interviews to be audio-recorded. The length of interviews varied depending on participants' answers, but each interview lasted between about thirty and sixty minutes.

Data Analysis

The researched collected and analyzed data from May to December of 2014. The researcher spent approximately eight months recruiting participants, interviewing participants, transcribing interviews and analyzing the data. Following the initial collection of data, a need could have existed to return to interviewees for clarification (Egen, 2002), but it did not. If it had

proven necessary the researcher would have conducted follow up interviews, transcribed those

interviews, and performed further data analysis.

Coding

The researcher used the three phase grounded theory coding method described by Strauss

and Corbin (1990). Data analysis began with open coding once the transcription of interviews

was completed. The researcher categorized information into segments during open coding

(Creswell, 2013). As the researcher immersed herself in the data, through listening to the

interview recordings repeatedly, transcribing the interviews, and reading and rereading the

transcripts, the researcher made notes of possible codes to be used later in the data analysis

process. One category, initially titled "process," formed the focus of the emerging gay identity

development model. Other categories simply informed the emerging gay identity development

model. To explain further, while initially analyzing the transcripts, the researcher began to color

code the parts of the interview that related to the various people the teacher could come out to:

administrators (coded in blue), other teachers (coded in green), students (coded in pink), and

students' parents (coded in yellow). Through this coding process, the researcher noted that

without exception participants came out first to administrators and other teachers, then to

students, and finally, either directly or indirectly, to students' parents. Then, the teacher engaged

in an identity maintenance process. So, once the categories had been identified the information

was subcategorized and dimensionalized with one phenomenon forming the focus of the

emerging identity development model, and that focus was the idea that becoming visible at work

as a gay K-8 teacher is a staged process.

Data analysis then continued with axial coding, which is the intermediary phase of

coding. The categories that informed the identity development model are identified during axial

coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this stage entry points, how information spread, and the actual approaches the teachers used to become visible at work to the various groups were identified.

Data analysis finally concluded with selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which resulted in the generation of the gay identity development model. The identification of the central phenomenon (becoming visible as a gay teacher at work is a staged process), the exploration of causal conditions (like relationship status), the specification of strategies (like mentioning a significant other in response to a question versus giving a formal coming out statement), the identification of context and intervening conditions (like the age of the participants' students), and the delineation of consequences (like the positive, negative, and/or neutral responses of the people the teacher made him or her self visible to at work) that were related to this phenomenon were identified through coding and analysis. After selective coding, a substantive level theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was developed in the form of a gay identity development model. The researcher entitled the model *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model*, and Figure 4-1 shows the process a gay K-8 teacher takes to become visible in the workplace as a gay person through this model.

Throughout the data analysis process the researcher practiced memoing in which information and ideas related to the evolving gay identity development model were jotted down (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). Data collection, coding, analysis, memoing, and identifying and refining the emerging gay identity development model were processes that were repeated. This repetition was concluded once saturation had occurred. The repetition allowed for constant comparison, in which information that was obtained through interviews was constantly compared to the emerging themes (McMillan, 2008). The researcher used the constant comparison

procedure described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) where incidents were compared that are applicable to each category, which had been gleaned during the initial phases of coding, in order to integrate categories, delimit the gay identity development model, and write the gay identity development model. The researcher's final code book is included in appendix a.

Verification Procedures

The researched used multiple methods to verify the data that emerged from the research. First, the researcher clarified her bias, which is important since, as previously stated, the researcher was a former teacher who was open about her homosexuality while at work in her K-8 school. It is necessary for a researcher to acknowledge and attend to his or her potential sources of bias throughout the research process and not just at the beginning or end of a study to help ensure the researcher's findings are not influenced by his or her predispositions (Peshkin, 1988), which this researcher did through various other verification procedures.

So, secondly, the researcher practiced bracketing herself throughout the study to attempt to mitigate the amount of bias that bled into the research. Bracketing involves the suspension of the researcher's understandings in a reflective move that cultivates curiosity (LeVasseur, 2003). Bracketing is one way a researcher can address his or her subjectivities as it involves the conscious setting aside of preconceived ideas in order to look at the data from the study in an objective manner (Creswell, 2013). The researcher did this by frequently writing in a journal throughout the dissertation process.

Additionally, the researcher asked colleagues to debrief and peer review her work. A peer with a fresh perspective helped to highlight where she saw the researcher's subjectivities or sources of bias bleeding into the study. Since the researcher was not always even aware of when

her subjectivities were influencing the research, the researcher felt and feels that the use of a peer to debrief and review the work was a significant verification procedure engaged in.

Finally, the researcher used member checking to help verify the results by asking research participants their views on the accuracy of the transcript from their interview (Creswell & Miller, 2000). After reviewing the transcript from their interview, the participants had the opportunity to clarify their story or aspects of their story. No participant opted to clarify his or her story. All of the findings from this grounded theory study, including the gay identity development model generated from this study, were presented to participants. All participants agreed with the findings. Each of the verification procedures described helped the researcher attend to her subjectivities. They also served as validation methods lending to the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

Ethical Considerations

With regards to the participants in this study, the researcher followed all the guidelines for conducting a study involving human subjects as outlined by the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board (2013). Participants were referred to in this study by pseudonyms to protect their identities. Details that could reveal where the participants worked were masked, and all data from the study was stored on a password-protected computer. The researcher also disclosed the purpose and findings of the study to participants prior to their participation. The researcher disclosed the findings of the study to participants too. The researcher ensured the teachers who participated in this study signed consent forms that stated the anticipated time commitment involved in participating in this study and made it clear that participants could drop out of this study at anytime as well. Consent forms were sent to participants prior to their interviews so they could review the form and make a decision about participating in this study on

their own time and in private. Participants then e-mailed a signed copy of their consent form back to the researcher. Each of these measures was intended to serve as ethical considerations to help ensure the study was conducted with care and integrity. All forms submitted to the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board and/or received from the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board are included in appendix b through g.

Researcher Identity

Within any researcher's identity lies subjectivity; subjectivity is "the quality of an investigator that affects the results of observational investigation" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). A researcher's subjectivities are often impacted by his or her values and how those values relate to the research topic under investigation (Peshkin, 1988). Thus, it is important to note that the researcher is an openly gay woman. She was also a sixth grade teacher, and, when she was teaching, she did live openly at the primary school where she was employed.

While the approach she took to living openly as a gay K-8 teacher was not included in the data analysis, the researcher will briefly share her approach in order to establish her transparency as a researcher. Her approach to living openly involved responding honestly to personal questions posed by her students about her relationship status. Straight teachers commonly answer such questions without it generally being considered inappropriate (McKay, 2009; Nelson, 2009). While living openly the researcher did not experience any negative consequences at work. Most parents, students, and coworkers were neutral, or non-reactive, to her living openly. Some parents, students, and coworkers had positive reactions to her living openly. By naming the researcher's potential sources of bias, where her identity could potentially meet the identities explored in this study, she felt better poised to identify when her subjectivities had been engaged.

The researcher, in part, attended to these particular aspects of her identity so that they did not unduly influence the research though limitations to this study do still exist.

Limitations

Ultimately, there are a number of possible limitations to this study. One potential limitation of this study included the researcher's interpretation of the interviews. Since she was a gay teacher who lived openly at work there is a potential for her bias to mar the interpretation of the data, but the researcher mitigated this through various verification procedures including member checking and peer debrief. However, the participants' interpretations and articulation of their own experiences could also limit the study as the researcher was relying on the honesty of the participants since they were self reporting on their approaches to living openly while at work in K-8 schools. Additionally, the peer the researcher debriefed with brought her own interpretation to the study, which could possibly limit the study further.

Another potential limitation of the study could be the transferability of the results. Since the researcher focused on participants in the Greater New Orleans area, the results may not hold true for gay K-8 teachers who are living openly in schools in other areas. Thus, the researcher was cautious of making generalizations. However, the gay identity development model that was generated through this study is not intended to be prescriptive. Rather the gay identity development model that was grounded in the data from this study was intended to serve as a potential guide or simply a source of support for other gay K-8 teachers who might wish to live openly. In this sense, the findings from this study could still be applicable or helpful for gay K-8 teachers living beyond the Greater New Orleans area.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe the approaches gay K-8 teachers take to living openly at work in a state where an employer is not barred from discriminating against an employee for his or her sexual orientation. This chapter presents the findings of this grounded theory study. The chapter is broken into three main sections. First, the participant's profile information and a more in depth description of each person's process of becoming visible as a gay person at work are provided. This is followed by a visual of the identity development model that was generated from the findings of this study. A deep explanation of this identity development model is also provided in section two. Finally, a section on additional findings stands as the concluding section of this chapter.

Participant Demographics

Throughout the course of interviewing, demographic information and other profile information was either noted and recorded through observation by the researcher or verbally revealed by the participant and later transcribed by the researcher. This demographic and other profile information included the gender of the participant, the general age of the participant, the grade the participant taught/teaches, the race of the participant, and the relationship status of the participant. The information is provided in table one, which also includes the participant ID, or how the participant was referred to in the study. Participants were referred to by pseudonyms to protect their identities. As additional context, all participants except Jess, teach and/or taught in Title 1 schools serving a majority low-income, African American student population. Jess works in a school serving a majority middle-class, white student population.

Table 4-1. Participant Demographics and Other Profile Information

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Grade	Race	Relationship Status
Matthew	Male	Mid 20's	2nd	White	Single
Megan	Female	Late 30's	Kinder, 8th	Hispanic	Married
Allison	Female	Early 20's	5th	White	Coupled
Meka	Female	Late 20's	4th	White	Coupled
Jess	Female	Mid 30's	Kinder	White	Married
Mark	Male	Mid 40's	2nd, 6-8th	African American	Coupled
Anna	Female	Early 30's	6th	Hispanic	Coupled
Jesus	Male	Late 20's	6th, 3rd	Hispanic	Single
Mac	Male	Late 20's	5-8th	White	Single
Rosie	Female	Early 30's	6-8th	White	Engaged
Stephen	Male	Early 20's	4-5th	African American	Single

Matthew- Second Grade Teacher

Matthew was open about his sexuality at work beginning with his first teaching job. He perceived the work environment to be safe and welcoming in part because he knew of another gay staff member already open at the school. He initially came out in response to other teachers' questions and through casual conversations with those teachers. These were teachers he felt particularly close to, and then the news spread to other teachers and administrators. Later, Matthew came out to his students as a class in response to a direct question. The news then spread to other students not in his class. Matthew assumes that the parents of his students know because he has told his students, but no parents have directly brought up having knowledge of

Matthew's sexuality to him. He has experienced no negative consequences since living openly at work, but he did describe a positive consequence in that he formed what he believed was an extra close bond with his students.

Megan- Kindergarten Teacher and then Eighth Grade Teacher

Megan was open about her sexuality beginning with her first teaching job. At that time she worked in a state where an employer cannot discriminate against an employee based on his or her sexual orientation. Megan has continued living openly since moving to Louisiana where an employer is not barred from discriminating against an employee based on his or her sexual orientation. Megan was used to living openly in her previous state of employment where she could do so safely because of legal protections, and it did not occur to her to not live openly once she moved to a state without those legal protections. Megan first came out to an administrator in casual conversation and later to teachers in the same fashion. Word gradually spread to those other faculty members she had not directly told. Megan eventually moved next door to some students and their parents with her spouse, which prompted her to tell her class before her neighbors became aware of her sexuality and rumors spread. Megan assumes the students in her class told subsequent students and their parents.

Megan has experienced a few negative consequences since living openly. For example, every year eighth grade students at her school participate in a career day. There is a tradition in which teachers' spouses speak in their classes about their career. Megan's principal changed this tradition so that teachers' spouses spoke in other teachers' rooms. According to Megan, her principal did this in order to avoid potential questions from students' parents about the nature of Megan's relationship with her partner. Megan was also denied the ability to start a Gay Straight Alliance, but she does not know if this was directly related to her sexuality or not. In spite of

these instances, Megan still described some positive consequences of her living openly at work, like being able to provide support to her gay students and their families who were sometimes struggling with their children's sexuality.

Allison- Fifth Grade Teacher; Meka- Fourth Grade Teacher

Allison and Meka are in a relationship together, and they also work at the same school. Allison and Meka were prompted to live openly by a potential change in Allison's teaching placement, which would have occurred in both of their second years working at the school. The change would have put Allison on the same instructional team as Meka. This prompted Meka to formally come out to her administrators by revealing the nature of her relationship with Allison. Because Meka was slated to be the instructional team leader, and therefore would have informally supervised Allison, she felt obligated to inform her administrators of her relationship with Allison. A few administrators were not initially supportive, which resulted in Allison having to teach in a grade not in Meka's instructional team. Whether it was or not, Allison and Meka perceived that as a negative consequence related to their homosexual relationship. Though they still do not teach on the same instructional team, those administrators have changed their mindsets since getting to know Allison and Meka more, which has ultimately been a positive consequence of their decision to live openly at work.

After becoming visible to their administrators, Allison and Meka then began to live openly with co-workers through casual conversation, and word soon spread to teachers they had not directly told. Later, both Allison and Meka came out to students in separate times in response to direct questions posed by students. The news of their sexual orientation and relationship with each other then spread to other students outside of their classes and, assumingly, to students' parents without consequence.

Jess- Kindergarten Teacher

Jess was prompted to live openly by her breakup, which occurred not far into her first year of teaching. She first came out to a teacher she was close with right after the breakup in order to explain why her behavior might seem different. News of her sexuality soon spread to other teachers and administrators. Later, Jess got engaged, and she then told students and immediately thereafter students' parents about her sexuality. Allison has experienced no negative consequences. She has experienced numerous positive consequences including starting conversations about sexuality among her students and their families and having her students participate in her wedding and their families attend her wedding in lieu of her own family who would not attend the wedding because of their disapproval of her sexual orientation.

Mark- Second Grade Teacher and then Sixth through Eighth Grade Teacher

Mark was open about his sexuality at work beginning with his first teaching job. Having grown up in a very open and accepting family, it did not occur to Mark to not live openly at work. Mark first told co-workers in casual conversation, and then the news spread to other teachers and administrators. Mark then told his students in casual conversation. His students told other students not in his class and their parents, or so Mark assumes.

Mark did not experience any negative consequences in his first role as a second grade teacher, but he did experience a negative consequence later when he was working as a middle school teacher in an alternative school. In his second role, Mark was not allowed to tutor students alone because of his sexual orientation. Mark felt there were many positive consequences to him living openly though including winning the trust of his students in the alternative school because of his honesty and having the ability to serve as a point person for other gay teachers.

Anna- Sixth Grade Teacher

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Anna was open about her sexuality at work beginning with her second teaching job. She first came out to an administrator in her interview for that second job. She then came out through casual conversation to other teachers, and word eventually spread to those teachers she had not directly told. She later came out to students in response to a direct question during a history lesson that included gay people. Word then spread to other students and to students' parents she assumes. Anna experienced no negative consequences after living openly at work. Anna reported a positive consequence of her living openly at work that involved maintaining a classroom where she felt all students could be safe in being themselves.

Jesus- Sixth Grade Teacher and then Third Grade Teacher

Jesus was open about his sexuality since the beginning of his second teaching job. He first came out to a coworker in passing, and then word spread to those teachers and administrators he had not yet told. He then came out to his students in response to direct questions about his perceived sexuality. He told some students' parents he was close to directly, and he assumed the rest of his students' parents found out either from their children or other students' parents. Jesus experienced a negative consequence in the form of unkind words from a coworker after beginning to live openly at work. As a result of his living openly though, he feels a positive consequence has been that his students and he are able to have open and honest conversations about a number of topics that he feels other adults in the school are unwilling to talk about with students, like contraceptive use.

Mac- Fifth through Eighth Grade Teacher

Mac was open about his sexuality at work beginning with his first teaching job. He first came out to an administrator in his interview. He then came out to his co-workers in casual conversation, and word eventually spread to other teachers he had not directly told from the

onset. Mac came out to administrators and other teachers in his first year of teaching, but he did not come out to his students until his third year of teaching. Mac came out first privately to a gay student and later to the class in a bullying unit, and the news then spread to other students he did not teach and to students' parents he assumed. Mac experienced a negative consequence after beginning to live openly at work in the form of unkind words from a student. Otherwise, Mac feels some positive consequences of his living openly have been students breaking gender stereotypes, like male students choosing to take his drama class over physical education, and students opening their mindsets.

Rosie- Sixth through Eighth Grade Teacher

Rosie was open about her sexuality at work beginning with her second teaching job. She first came out to an administrator in her interview stating that the ability to live openly was a central purpose in her seeking a new job at a different school. Rosie then came out to her coworkers and let word spread to those she had not directly told. Rosie has come out to students in response to direct questions and in response to bullying situations. She has let word spread to other students, and she assumes her students have also spread the news of her sexuality to their parents. She has not experienced any negative consequences since living openly at work. In terms of positive consequences, Rosie has seen her students be more conscientious of their words and become more interested in gay civil rights issues, like marriage equality.

Stephen- Fourth Through Fifth Grade Teacher

Stephen was open about his sexuality at work beginning with his first teaching job. He first told the coworkers and administrator he was closest to. Word then spread to other teachers and administrators he was not as close with. Stephen later told his students about his sexual orientation in a social justice unit. He assumes word has spread to other students around the

school and to students' parents. He has experienced no direct negative consequences yet. As a positive consequence, he feels his students have learned a lot about people who are different from them and, therefore, are able to more securely be themselves, at least while in his classroom.

The Identity Development Model

During the final stage of coding, in the selective phase, after the coding paradigm had been created an identity development model was generated that was grounded in the data. In this study, the researcher established a core concept, which was living openly as a teacher in a K-8 school is a staged process. Each participant had distinct groups they came out to in a set order though each participant moved from stage to stage on their own timeline, a point that will be discussed more later. As the information related to this model was identified, the researcher noted four sequential stages the teachers went through in the process to become visibly gay in the workplace. These findings have been organized into a visual model to show the process the gay K-8 teacher goes through to become visible at work; the process involves four distinct and ordered stages.

The Visual of the Model

The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model

Stage One: Becoming Visible to Administrators and Other Teachers

Spread of News to Other Administrators and Teachers

Stage Two: Becoming Visible to Students

Spread of News to Other Students and Students' Parents

Stage Three: Becoming Visible to Students' Parents

Spread of News to Other Students' Parents

Stage Four: Identity Maintenance
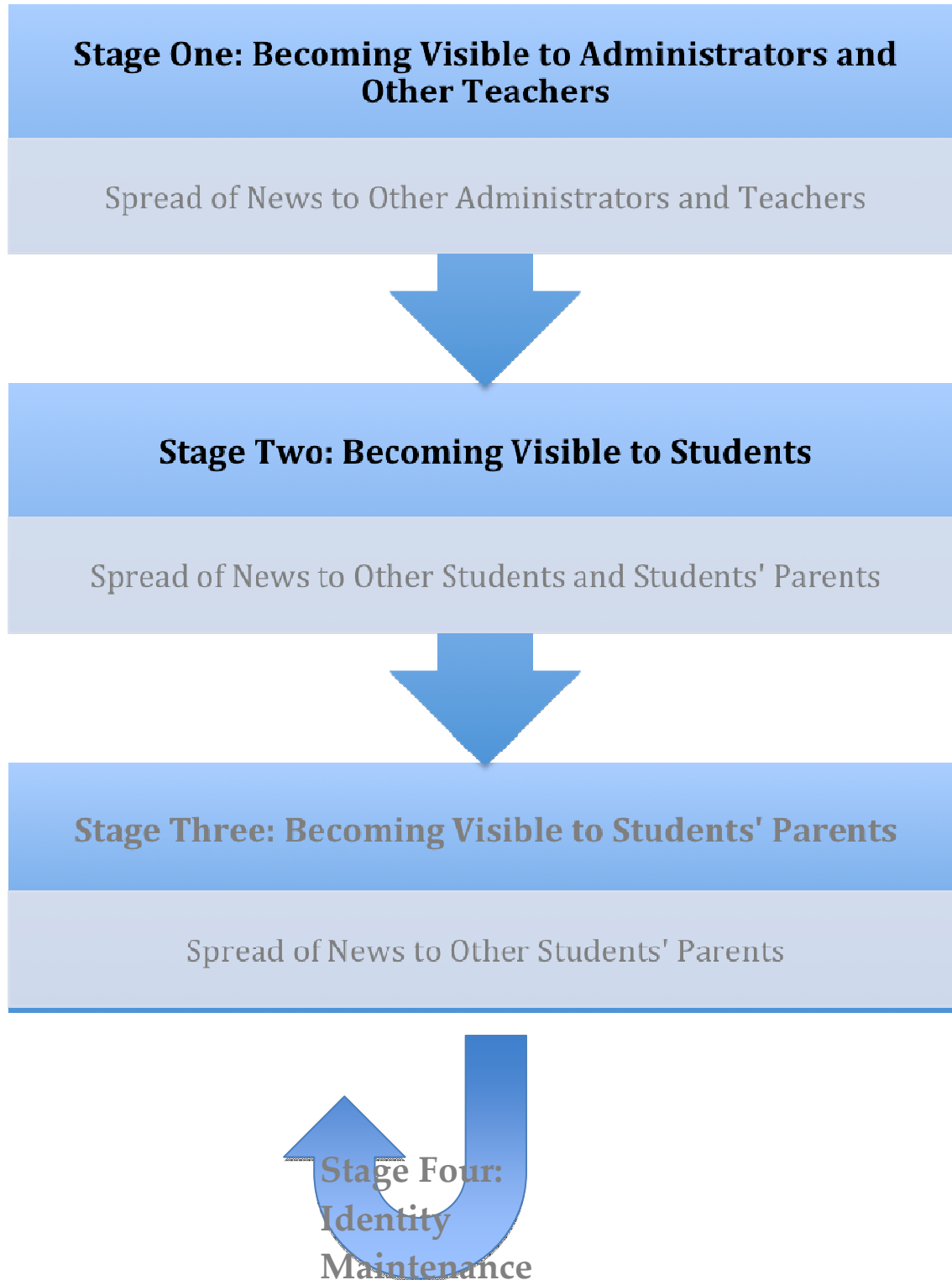
Figure 4-1. The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model.

The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model

The theoretical model, generated from the findings of this study, shows the gay teacher going through the process of becoming visible as a gay person while at work in a K-8 school. The model consists of four sequential stages: becoming visible to administrators and other teachers, becoming visible to students, becoming visible to students' parents, and identity maintenance. Because the foundation of this model lies in the becoming visible or coming out part of the typical identity development model, a part which is generally only in the final stage or two of most existing identity development models (Cass,1979, 1984; Fassinger, 1991; Savin-Williams, 1988, 1990; Troiden, 1979, 1988), the researcher entitled her model *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model* to emphasize the focus of this identity development model.

The researcher did not entitle her identity development model as a living openly or coming out model but as a visibility model in part to show that gay teachers are in schools whether or not they say it or show it. For those gay teachers who do make their sexual orientation visible at work, the process they take is depicted in *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model*. Thus, the title of this model also speaks to the problem this study explores, which is gay teachers must *navigate* an identity through a visibility process rather than simply *live* it. The word visibility in the title of the model also gives credence to those teachers who were never in the closet but because of heterosexism had to say or do something in order to not even inadvertently pass as straight.

Stage one: Becoming visible to administrators and other teachers.

Stage one begins when a gay teacher becomes visible as a gay person to administrators and other teachers. Some teachers (six of eleven participants) came out to administrators first, others (five of eleven participants) came out to teachers first, but all participants came out to administrators and other teachers before coming out to students and students' parents. While not all administrators and/or other faculty were supportive of the participants living openly while at work, the majority were with seven of eleven participants experiencing no unsupportive comments or behaviors from administrators or other teachers. For the participants in supportive environments, the decision to initially begin living openly seemed less anxiety inducing than for those who had some administrators and/or other faculty members who were not supportive. Matthew described how he knew he had nothing to fear about living openly at his school despite the legal ambiguity around a teacher's right to live openly while at work, a point which has been discussed in previous chapters:

> I did get some advice that legally I could be, you know, fired. I don't have any
> protective rights as a gay man in the workplace. I wasn't really concerned about that
> because my principal, or supervisor, was so supportive.

Jess described a similar situation for how she knew she had nothing to fear about living openly while at work, though her conversation was with another teacher rather than an administrator:

> I just know that as I got to know my co-teacher, who actually has a very similar
> background to me, which is growing up in a very conservative Catholic family, as I got to
> know her, I just sort of realized that it was okay, and I could just proceed forward
> honestly.

Of the participants who did not come out right away in an interview, seven of the eleven, described signs from people in the workplace, like a person saying supportive words or a person

having a similar background to the participant's, which let the participant know he or she could live openly at work with a likelihood of safety and success.

So, participants either came out from the onset of their career at a given school through the interview process, or they came out later to an administrator or other teacher, generally (but not always) one they were especially close with. As mentioned, it seemed to be a common theme among those participants who did not come out during the interview process to assess the climate of their teaching environment. Once those participants had determined it was safe, they then proceeded through the process of living openly while at work in their K-8 schools.

Among administrators and especially among teachers, for those participants who did not come out during the interview process, participants described situations in which they told some people, often people they were close to, and then the news of their sexual orientation spread. Meka explained why she never had to tell the whole team of teachers at her school about her sexuality after she revealed it to her grade level team, "Most people know already. I think because [when] a big [enough] group knows it sort of spreads." The spread of the news of the teacher's sexuality was a theme that carried across the stages of *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model.*

The model of *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model* shown in Figure 4-1 depicts this spread of the news of the participant's sexuality to other administrators and teachers. The spread of news across all stages and stage three and stage four are all depicted in gray rather than in black like the other parts of the model. Things depicted in gray on the model show that there is generally some level of presumption and/or implicit rather than explicit action on the participant's part to show they are living openly, and thus this part of the model is not as concrete as the parts in black. To expand, participants, for example, believed news of their

sexuality spread from one teacher to another but they did not always know for sure if the teacher had been told by another teacher, had actually inferred it from the participant's mannerisms and/or dress, or were actually unaware of the participant's sexuality.

The black parts of the model represent times when the teacher largely did things to explicitly live openly and/or to show that there is not generally a level of presumption on the participant's part. For example, when a participant tells someone about their sexuality in response to a direct question, the teacher then has concrete knowledge that others at work know they are gay, and thus these parts of the model are depicted in black to show they are not as abstract as the gray parts. So, the parts of the model in gray represent times when the teacher did not largely have to do things to explicitly live openly, like relying on the spread of news to inform others the teacher did not directly reveal his or her sexuality to. These parts of the model show when the teacher has less concrete knowledge that others at work know they are gay because they may not have directly done or said something to show them this, which is different from the black parts of the model where the teacher does have concrete knowledge that others at work know they are gay because they have directly done or said something to show them this.

Reactions and consequences during stage one.

For the most part, the participants described administrators and other faculty members who were either supportive or neutral of their living openly at work. Participants felt their living openly at work resulted in several positive consequences. For example, Meka explained how once her coworkers knew of her sexual orientation, she was able to form closer bonds with them than she had been able to form with her coworkers in her previous job where she was not living openly at work:

I think there's an effort to be more inclusive. I do think it's made... It's allowed me to be

closer with my... the people that I work with because I think I had this distance at my old

job cause I was hiding part of who I was.

A few administrators and/or other faculty members did or said something to make a

couple of the participants feel unsupported after they began to live openly. However, this was a

minority response happening to four of eleven participants. Among participants who described

situations in which the reaction of their administrator or coworker made them feel unsupported,

it was not usually that the administrator or other teacher was completely unsupportive. Rather, it

was typical for there to be limits to the support the administrator or other teacher was willing to

give. For example, Megan described a situation in which she discovered the limit of her

administrator's support when planning for career day for her eighth grade students:

Normally a lot of teachers have you know whoever they're with come in to career day. I

thought my partner would be good because she has sort of a non-college-y career, and a

lot of our kids are going to have non-college careers. So, I thought she'd be really good,

especially because she had a learning disability, and it never occurred to me that it would

be a problem because she was my partner, and my principal came to me and said I

couldn't bring her in because she didn't want any questions from parents.

As illustrated in that situation Megan described, the limits of the support administrators and other

teachers were willing to give some participants seemed to stop at the point that the teacher's

living openly would become concretely apparent to students' parents and/or the larger

community. Similarly, Mac described a situation in which his principal perhaps more subtly

established the likely limit of his support for Mac being an openly gay teacher at work:

My admin said that, "Obviously whatever you choose, we'll support you, but I'd advise

you not to come out. [...] Being gay is taboo in black culture."

Again the situation Mac described showed that his administrator's support for his living openly at

work would likely cease at the point the larger community would have become concretely aware

of his sexuality. From the situations described by participants, their administrators' levels of

support seems based in personal regard and in fear of parents and/or the community questioning

the principal or school for having a gay teacher. This is a passive form of support at best that

does little in the way of moral activism, which is important to note. To truly support gay teachers

in living openly fully, administrators have to be willing to stand behind their teachers in living

their identities just as they likely stand behind their straight teachers who probably bring their

full selves to work.

Fortunately, many of the participants discussed how an initial negative or unsupportive

response or consequence eventually turned out positively, or at least turned out more positively.

Allison described one such turnaround where some of her administrators who were initially not

understanding of her sexual orientation grew to become more understanding over time as they

got to know Allison better:

So, on the leadership team, there are a couple of members who are, who grew up   in [this

city] and are very religious, and I think, not that they necessarily feel uncomfortable, I

mean at first I think some people don't understand, like how could you do this, that's not

God's way, but I think because they've grown to know us, I think that was their first

reaction like no, that's not allowed blah, blah, blah, but now I think they've grown more

open to it. [...] So, I think mindsets have grown.

The theme of an initially poor response to the teacher's coming out transforming into a better response over time was a theme that also arose in stage two, a point which will be discussed more later.

Once the participants began living openly amongst their administrators and the other teachers working in their schools, the participants could then transition into stage two, becoming visible as a gay person to students. This transition happened on varying timelines though depending on the participant. Living openly among administrators and other teachers was a precursor for all participants becoming visible to students as a gay person. For at least some of the participants, based on their interviews, telling administrators and other teachers and gauging their reactions was what told the teachers it was safe to take the next step to living openly at work, which was coming out to students. For other participants, the researcher inferred that coming out to administrators and other teachers first was a way of asking permission to come out to students next. Some participants knew going into their job that they would live openly among students, and so the reaction of their administrators and other teachers was not a factor they contributed in their step towards entering the next stage of this identity development model. The participants who always knew they would live openly among students progressed through *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model* quicker than the teachers who did not necessarily initially plan on living openly with students.

Stage two: Becoming visible to students.

The participants becoming visible as gay people to students marks the second stage in *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model*. As mentioned, all participants first came out to their administrators and coworkers before living openly among students. The way the

lower elementary teachers told their students about their sexual orientation as opposed to how the

upper elementary teachers told their students about their sexual orientation was slightly different.

The lower elementary teachers' significant others often came to class for some reason

(e.g. to bring snacks) and met the students as the teachers' husband, wife, girlfriend, boyfriend, or

partner. If the significant other did not come to the class, the teacher would reference him or her.

When the term used was not initially husband or wife, the gay teachers would explain to the

children that this person was like their husband or wife. Megan said:

> So, my first classroom my kids were really young, but every kid had seen my partner,
>
> every kid knew who she was, knew she was my partner, but she is much older than me.
>
> So, the first experience I had with that was the kids thought she was my mother when she
>
> brought something to me one day at work [laughing]. I said she wasn't, and they wanted
>
> to know who she was, and I didn't really know how to answer that. So, I just said, you
>
> know, that's not my mom, she's my partner, which is like a wife.

The participants either directly said or it was inferred by the researcher that the lower elementary

participants had used familial relationship labels like husband or wife to describe their significant

other because they felt that their students would not otherwise understand that that they were in a

romantic relationship with this person as opposed to in a friendly or familial relationship with

this person. Participants seems to think students would misunderstand terms like boyfriend or

girlfriend or partner because of their age and/or limited or non-existent exposure to the concept

of homosexuality. The above quote illustrated this point, and Allison also highlighted this point:

> I don't know if they're at the capacity to really understand what it means that Meka is my
>
> girlfriend just because it is a little bit different from how they grew up. [...] I guess that I
>
> think kids that are pre-puberty, they don't have the capacity to understand big concepts

like sexuality, but they understand family so I talk about it like that, you know? Ms. Meka is my partner; she's like my wife.

Perhaps because upper elementary students have a bit more context for all types of relationships, the upper elementary teachers often responded to direct questions from students about their sexual orientation using a range of terms from husband or wife to partner to boyfriend or girlfriend. So, the theme of using familial terms to describe the teachers' same sex relationships was largely absent among the upper elementary teachers' approaches to living openly unless those terms actually described the teachers' relationship status, a theme which differed from the lower elementary teachers' approaches to living openly among their students. Because of the direct nature of the questions the upper elementary students frequently posed, the upper elementary teachers generally felt the students had already at least suspected they were gay, which is a feeling the lower elementary teachers did not report experiencing. Jesus described how he knew his students were cognizant of his sexual orientation before he directly told them; he said, "You know my sixth graders were like your pants are really tight, you do your hair, you have weird glasses, and you're a guy. Wait, you're gay."

The spread of the news was also a factor that was prevalent in the upper elementary teachers' answers about students but not as abundant in the lower elementary teachers' answers about students. This theme of spread is a theme that was also present in stage one when participants were beginning to live openly among their administrators and among other teachers in their schools. Allison described how news spread from the students she had directly told to students she had not yet directly told. She explained, "My experience with students is more like some kids figured it out and asked, and then word spread, and more kids asked." Adding to this, Rosie explained how she assumed students outside of her class knew of her sexual orientation.

She said, "I assume more kids know because they call it gossip tea, and it is some tea that your teacher is a lesbian, and I expected that." Across participants, there was an expectation that once one person knew, whether that be a student, another teacher, an administrator, or a student's parent, the news would spread to other people outside of who the participant had directly told. This spread is again depicted in gray in stage two though because most teachers did not have concrete knowledge of the spread of this news.

Reactions and consequences during stage two.

Interestingly, a few participants' students offered to keep their teachers' sexuality a secret. In each instance the teacher had to explain to the student that their sexuality was not in fact a secret. This speaks to the idea that students were already somehow aware that there was a societal norm to keep homosexual lifestyles on the margins, which perhaps illustrates why it is important for gay teachers to live openly lest this message become permanent and/or harmful, like to a student who might grow up to be gay. There is a widespread belief that children should not be "subjected" to sexuality (Cullen & Sandy, 2009; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998), but children in K-8 schools are already aware, to varying degrees, of sexual identities and "norms" as evident in an interaction between Matthew and one of his students in which Matthew had to explain to the student that his sexuality was and is not something that must remain unspoken despite what the student believes:

> The student who had first asked me specifically said, "You know Mr. Matthew, I'm going to keep your secret." And, I said, "You know, it's not a secret. It's okay. I'm gay, and I'm fine with it."

Across the board, students' reactions to their teacher becoming visible to them as a gay person was generally positive or neutral regardless of the age or gender of the student with one

exception, which will be discussed later. Every participant at one point mentioned how their students still loved them, liked them, or saw them as their teacher even after finding out that they were gay, which was surprising for some participants. Matthew said of his students:

Those kids never ever did anything malicious; they only supported me and just loved me as a teacher. [...] I didn't really notice any changes and nothing negative from any of the students, even from the students who I would think might be homophobic.

And, Mac said, "I like that kids look and see that as a part of me but then look beyond it." Because of these positive or neutral responses from students, many participants described their beginning to live openly with students as simply not a big deal. Anna said:

It was pretty non-eventful [...] just in that it was more about me being a teacher and less about me being a gay teacher although my students certainly knew that I was out at work, but I just don't think it was something that was really an issue after I initially came out. It was just kind of like "mmm okay" and then business as usual.

The only exception to students' reactions being generally positive or neutral is evident in a description one teacher provided as to how one of his middle school male students initially but not permanently reacted to his living openly. Mac described the situation, and it's context saying, "One student one time when he was upset at me was like, 'You're just a faggot anyways.'" Fortunately, like with the administrators' and other teachers' responses, the only participant who had a negative reaction from a student discussed how an initial negative response from the student eventually resulted in a positive outcome, or an at least more positive outcome. Mac referring to a later situation with the same student from before said:

Since then he's back to normal. Every once in a while at recess he will jump on the tackle, and then he'll realize and at first he would jump back off and kind of shake off the

gay, and now I see him consciously making the decision to give me a hug or give me a high five anyways. So, that's pretty cool, but it wasn't like that right away.

Notably, the only negative reactions from administrators, other teachers, and students occurred when the teacher directly told someone they were gay not in the context of a larger conversation and/or not in the context of being in a relationship. It would seem that the idea of homosexuality might be more acceptable to more people in the context of monogamous relationships. While it is a myth that gay people are likely to be pedophiles (Biegel, 2010; Graves, 2009; Lehr, 2007; Serwatka, 2010), a gay person in a relationship might seem less threatening in that way to a parent. Or, a gay person in a relationship might be more relatable as many heterosexuals engage in monogamous relationships. Finally, gay people are sometimes criticized for "flaunting their sexuality" (Herek, 1990), thus mentioning one's sexuality in the context of a larger conversation or in the context of a monogamous same sex relationship might seem less overt than talking about one's attraction to the same sex seemingly out of nowhere.

Ultimately, the positive responses from students far outweighed, in terms of frequency, the negative responses of students from the teacher becoming visible as a gay person. Many of the participants mentioned distinct positive consequences that also arose from them living openly at work, like the ability to serve as a role model of sorts for gay students. Megan explained how she is able to serve as a mentor of sorts for her lesbian students:

> But, you know, once the kids had found out I was gay I sort of became [...][laughing] the keeper of all the baby lesbians who would just show up in my room after school, which was a really funny and strange experience. They would just come, even students I don't teach. They would come in to my room randomly, and then one day I looked around and realized how important it was that I was me.

From the male side, Mac explained how he was a model of sorts for his gay male student:

> I've been teaching for three years, and last year I came out to one of my students, and it
> was along the lines of I think he is probably also questioning at least, and I wanted him to
> have someone to look up to.

Beyond serving as a role model for their gay students, many participants also mentioned as a positive consequence of their living openly that their classrooms became safe havens. Again this was an advantage that was particularly amplified for the participants' gay students. Megan described the impact having a safe space in the form of the gay teacher's classroom can have on a gay student:

> I think having that space where kids who are questioning or for kids who have already
> figured out they're gay, having that space for ninety minutes, nobody is going to say, "Oh,
> let's get this out of your hair. No homo. I'm just going to pull it out." You know, nobody
> is going to say that [in my classroom] that I think just gives kids some room to breathe
> and feel comfortable.

Nowhere was the idea that a gay teacher living openly while at work in a K-8 school can result in positive consequences more apparent than when teachers talked about the impact their living openly had on their students, particularly their gay students.

Stage three: Becoming visible to students' parents.

Each participant concretely described how they knew other teachers, administrators, and students knew they were gay. The participants could pinpoint words they said or actions they did that would have directly informed their coworkers, administrators, and students that they were gay. However, not all participants definitively knew if their students' parents were aware of their sexuality. All participants assumed students' parents knew because they had directly done or said

something to inform the parents' children who were in the gay teachers' classes. So, this stage is

depicted in gray on the model to highlight that it is not as concrete as the previous two stages.

Ultimately, some teachers had had opportunities to definitively say or do something to show

their students' parents they were living openly, like having a public wedding that involved the

school community, but other teachers had not had such opportunities, and therefore only

assumed students' parents knew of their sexuality.

All participants also believed that news of their sexuality circulated among students'

parents. The theme of the news spreading, which appeared in in stage one and in stage two also,

is presumed to exist within stage three too. However, as in stage one and two, because

participants only presumed the news spread among students' parents, the spread in this stage is

also depicted in gray in figure 4-1.

Allison illustrated the uncertainty around whether or not her students' parents knew she

was gay saying, "So, I assume [...] their parents know, but I don't know." Not all participants had

been faced with an opportunity to directly say or do something to alert their students' parents that

they were gay. Each participant, eight of the eleven, who had not had an opportunity to tell or

show students' parents they were gay did confirm that they would do or say something to

confirm their homosexual identity or deny a heterosexuality identity to their students' parents if

the opportunity arose. Thus, stage three of this identity development model commences right

after stage two with the teacher at least presumably becoming visible as a gay person to students'

parents.

One of the privileges of heterosexuality is not having to come out in order to have your

likely correct sexuality assumed (Biegel, 2010). The researcher decided not to exclude

participants from this study who had simply not had a chance to directly affirm their homosexual

identity or deny a heterosexual identity to their students' parents. These participants had directly done something to inform their coworkers, administrators, and students of their sexual identity, and they were willing to do the same with students' parents. The researcher did not feel that not having the opportunity to state or show one's sexuality to students' parents was equivalent to a teacher who was living openly with restrictions at work or was equivalent to a teacher who was not living openly at all in the workplace.

Thus, in the visual model of *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model*, the stage relating to parents is illustrated in gray and not black like the previous two stages to show that this stage is different and at least in parts relies on presumptions and to show this stage can be done explicitly (with a direct action or words that inform students' parents) or, more likely, implicitly (with a direct action or words that inform students who will likely spread this knowledge to their parents). Matthew described the usual situation most participants faced, "Currently, no parents have ever asked, and it's never come up." So, this did not preclude him from participating in the study, like it did not exclude the other participants in the same situation from participating in the study.

Reactions and consequences during stage three.

For those teachers who had had an opportunity to directly tell or do something to show students' parents they were living openly, the general reaction of the students' parents has been positive or neutral. Megan described how she is still able to be effective in her job as teacher even though she is openly gay, which may or may not align with her students' parents' beliefs. She said, "You know parents talk to me and sometimes they listen. I guess being a teacher kind of trumps the being a lesbian, you know?" So, akin to the theme found among students in stage

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two, the teacher was still seen as teacher even after their gay identity was made known to parents.

While there have been no direct negative responses from students' parents from the participants living openly at work, there have been indirect responses that were negative, which two participants experienced. These responses were not generally told straight to the teacher but told to others who eventually spread it to the teacher. Mac explained one such situation that he experienced:

I've had one parent who is also a staff member react once at a holiday party, but [...] it was more of like a sly comment towards me, and then another parent of a student kind of backed me up, but it was not directed towards me. I just kind of heard about it.

There was also one participant who was still waiting for a potential backlash from parents though he had not experienced one yet for living openly among students' parents. Stephen explained why he was waiting for a potential backlash from students' parents:

I live in a culture where you don't really know because a lot of things are being left unsaid. They'll smile in your face, but I guess they'll work against you because of that. So, I just don't know as of right now.

Despite a few negative reactions from students' parents and a few negative consequences from telling students' parents, the overall impact of the teachers living openly at work on students' parents has been arguably positive. Jess explained why she feels the impact of her living openly has been positive for students' parents and for their children:

One kid came to me, and she said, "Teacher, my mom said you and [my partner] are gay people," and I was like, "Yeah, we are gay people. Your mom is right." So, it's

cool to know that without forcing anything on them, without giving them any sort of

values, their parents are having these conversations with them.

While everyone might not agree that such an impact on students and their families is entirely

positive, the participants and the researcher felt and feel such instances were positive

consequences of the gay teachers living openly among students and students' parents.

Stage four: Identity Maintenance.

As has been mentioned, there are some privileges to heterosexuality. In a

heteronormative society, heterosexuals do not usually have to come out as straight as their

sexuality is presumed (Biegel, 2010). However, because of heterosexism, gay people generally

have to come out over and over again throughout the course of their lives in order to not even

inadvertently pass as straight. Since the mere topic of homosexuality in K-8 schools can be

controversial, gay teachers who live openly might experience some level of discomfort,

uncertainty, or even anxiety not just when they first begin to live openly but also as they

maintain that status of living openly from teaching job to teaching job. Mark explained how he

carries a level of fear and anxiety with him to each new teaching job even though he has been out

in previous teaching jobs:

> Every time I start a new job. Even at this point, after twelve years of teaching,
>
> whenever I start a new job then I feel an overwhelming amount of anxiety because, even
>
> though I've had a great run, I still don't know this group or this batch of children, and I
>
> don't know how they're going to treat me or how they're going to respond to who you are.
>
> Even though all of the experiences or almost all of the experiences that I've had have
>
> been incredibly positive, you still don't know. [...] I don't think the fear or anxiety goes
>
> away. I think the older you get the more comfortable you get with who you are... How

you respond to it changes. I'll probably never walk into a new school and not feel anxious about that and what it's going to mean.

Maintaining a status of living openly from year to year within the same school might be less stressful or anxiety inducing than maintaining a status of living openly from school to school because the reactions of administrators, other teachers, students, and students' parents might be more predictable because of their familiarity to the gay teacher. Jesus spoke to this:

> I've worked at the same school for five years now. I know ninety percent of the staff. I've worked with seventy percent of the staff for the past five years because we opened the school together, and so I feel absolutely within the last several years I feel the most comfortable at my school wherever I am, whatever degree of seriousness I am in a relationship. So, presently I feel very safe at school, I can be completely open, you know, and be myself.

After coming out to co-workers, administrators, students, and potentially students' parents in one school, the process of living openly can also become more indirect, especially if the teacher remains in the same school for some time.

Thus, stage four, identity maintenance, is not presented in the same manner that stages one through three are in figure 4-1. Rather, stage four is presented as an arrow pointing back to the previous stages. This is to depict that in order for participants to maintain their identity as a gay teacher living openly at work, they had to periodically tell or show people at each stage that they were living openly even after they had already become visible to that particular group. For example, each year almost all of the teachers received a new batch of students to instruct. While the teachers assumed most of those students had heard that they were gay from previous students, the teachers still sometimes had to answer direct questions about their sexuality. As

another instance, when new faculty members would join the participants' schools the teachers would often have to show this person they were living openly if someone else did not tell them that the participant was gay first.

The process of the gay teacher maintaining their visible status while at work did not necessarily follow the distinct, sequential stages of that first journey towards living openly at work without restriction though, which is again why stage four is not presented like the previous three stages. For example, a school might experience no staff turnover from one year to the next so the gay teacher does not have to come out to staff again, but he or she might still have to respond to the question of a new student about his or her sexuality. Ultimately, word of mouth allowed many of the teachers who had been living openly in the same school for more than a year to live openly without having to say or do much in subsequent years. Megan noted, of her experience teaching in the same school for many years, "And then, as the years passed, I realized I only had to technically come out once and then word would spread because my kids tell each other." Because the spread of news played a large role in stage four, identity maintenance, this stage is also depicted in gray like stage three since it relied on a lot of presumptions and/or implicit actions by the teacher (e.g. the participant letting news of their sexuality spread at work from year to year rather than directly coming out to new people at work). So, even in stage four, identity maintenance, that theme of *spread* that was prevalent in stages one through three is still present.

Spread.

As mentioned, within each stage there is the potential and likelihood that news of the teacher's sexuality will spread beyond the person or people he or she either explicitly or implicitly informed. Mark described this phenomenon:

I joke around that the only place that is messier or has more gossip than a school is probably a church [...]. So, it really only takes one person to ask you before the word spreads like wildfire around the earth.

Generally, the participants described situations in which they told someone they were close to in one of the stages, like another teacher, who then told others who in turn told more people the gay teacher had not directly told. While the spread of news is depicted in *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model* the teacher telling someone they are closest to first before the news spread is not explicitly depicted in the model because it does not always happen that a teacher first becomes visible to a colleague they are closest with.

Additionally, the spread of news often allowed the participants to live openly in a more implicit manner. For example, the gay teachers interviewed in this study were not having a million conversations about their sexuality. They were not having theatrical moments in which they proclaimed I am gay in a speech. Rather, the information was sometimes intentionally leaked to trusted colleagues with the understanding that it would spread and sometimes it was said to a person or group of people again with the understanding that it would spread. In subsequent years then, after the teacher had become visible to administrators, other teachers, students, and students' parents, the spread of news allowed teachers to do little to maintain their status as living openly. For example, older students told younger students of their teacher's sexuality so the students who entered the teacher's classroom the next year were already aware of their teacher's sexuality unlike the previous year's class. Thus, the teacher did not necessarily have to explicitly come out, like in a formal statement, in order to continue living openly while at work.

Entry points.

In addition to spread, another important theme that emerged from the findings related to entry points. Before each stage there was some kind of entry point in which the teacher first became visible to that group. In stage one typical entry points included participants starting a new job and telling the administrators during their interview they were gay or participants experiencing a major life event or major change in their life, like a break up, and telling a coworker about it with or without prompting.

During stage one, several participants, some of whom were not open in their previous job and others who were just entering the profession, came out when they began working at a new or their first school. This process of becoming visible as a gay person could occur during the teacher's interview or shortly thereafter in casual conversation with either other teachers or administrators. In this type of entry point, the participants began working at the school with the conscious intention of living openly from the start. Megan explained how she came out during the interview process:

> I just really want to believe that it just felt really natural, but I think actually subconsciously I purposefully did it because I don't ever want to not be open at work, and I thought well it's an interview, and, if they have a problem with it, they just won't hire me, and we'll just move on.

Likewise, Anna explained how she began living openly during her interview, and she, similarly to Megan, explained why she began to live openly in this manner:

> I know that I specifically said it in my interview. I make it a point to always say it in interviews just so that... you know, I know that a job can't ask that, but I bring it up in interviews in a way that I hope is somewhat subtle, or appropriate in the context of whatever they are asking, just so that [the school] has the option and you know it's known

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up front. So, you can either hire me as an openly gay person or not hire me. There's no

surprise later on.

Finally, Rosie also explained why she came out in the interview process rather than waiting to

begin to live openly at work:

I'm getting to the point in my life where I want to have babies with my partner, and I can't

very well get pregnant and not explain why I'm pregnant or how I'm pregnant, especially

to middle schoolers, and so every time that I talked to an administrator when I was

interviewing down here I told them that that was... that I was moving for personal and not

professional reasons, and these were the reasons that I want to be out here, and I couldn't

[be] there, and if that is a problem for you, then you should just stop interviewing me

now.

This approach, becoming visible in an interview, proved safe and successful for all the

participants who began to live openly in this manner.

A few participants tested the waters so to speak, working in their schools either in the

closet or in passing as straight for a time. Once factors like the perceived supportiveness of

administrators or other teachers was assessed, the participants would then come out in response

to a direct question by a teacher or administrator that would allow them to show they were gay.

Lastly, a few participants came out in response to a specific event, for one it was a breakup and

for two others who were coupled it was a proposed change in teaching placement.

Typical entry points in stage two included the participants responding to a direct

question, like are you gay, or outing themselves via a learning opportunity. For example, several

of the teachers came out to students who were bullying other students for being gay. Megan

described how she comes out to students in these instances, and she explained why she begins to live openly with students in this manner in these instances:

> In my classroom, when a kid says, "That's really gay." I said, "We don't say that in here. I find that personally offensive. You personally offended me," and I think that makes the shift between that's not an appropriate thing we call other people to that's a word that actually hurts other people's feelings.

A few of the teachers came out to students who said they were gay or revealed that they had gay family members. One teacher came out in the context of a social justice unit and another in a history unit. The common characteristic among entry points that involved the teacher telling one student or a group of students is that it prompted the teacher to tell the rest of their students in their class almost immediately thereafter because the teachers knew the news would spread, and they wanted at least their own students to hear it directly from them as opposed to from others.

Entry points were not as typical in stage three, which is also why this stage is represented in gray and not black to distinguish that this stage relied largely on the spread of news from students to students' parents and was therefore less concrete than previous stages in terms of direct actions taken by the gay teacher to become visible. Without an entry point, not all participants had had the direct opportunity to say or do something to explicitly reveal their sexuality to students' parents. Only some of the teachers, three of the eleven, had had an opportunity to live openly explicitly with students' parents like through a parent-initiated conversation about the teacher's sexuality or a student's sexuality or through the parent meeting the teacher's partner at an event or in the neighborhood in which the school is located. All participants had at least directly said or done something to reveal their sexuality to their students though, and therefore all participants felt they were at least implicitly out to their students'

parents as there was an assumption that students had told their parents about their teacher's

sexuality.

Additional Findings

There were a couple approaches to living openly at work that produced positive or neutral

responses for the gay teacher participants in every case. These approaches are described first.

They are followed by a description of the approach that sometimes resulted in negative

consequences or responses. A discussion on the timeline in which participants progressed

through *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model* is also discussed in this

additional findings section of chapter four.

Having a significant other whether that is a boyfriend, girlfriend, partner, fiancé,

husband, or wife that the teacher could casually reference to show they were gay resulted in no

negative consequences or responses to the participants living openly at work. As mentioned, it is

not considered out of the norm for teachers to "come out" as straight to their students in response

to questions posed by students or by mentioning their spouse or weekend activities (McKay,

2009; Nelson, 2009). When the gay teacher participants used these same strategies that straight

teachers regularly employ, the responses or consequences were always either positive or neutral.

Mac said:

> I feel like when I can casually mention that I have a boyfriend versus bringing up the fact
>
> that I like guys I feel [it] is much easier for [students] to handle. [...] The conversation is
>
> just so much easier if the conversation is about me having a boyfriend rather than me
>
> liking guys.

Many of the approaches the teachers took to living openly at work were done in a way

that the participants described as casual or subtle. It seemed that there was a desire on the part of

most participants to make their living openly at work not a big deal. Anna explained why she did

not want her sexuality to be a focal point, especially for students, while she was at work:

> I think I did it in a way that caused as little of a reaction from students as possible, cause
>
> its not about you, you know? It's about learning. It's not really about the teacher. I didn't
>
> want to give it a lot of stage time though I wanted to also acknowledge that if students
>
> had questions they could ask, and I think the way I did it made it an "Oh, okay.
>
> Whatever, let's keep going."

Echoing this, Stephen explained that he too wanted students to be the focus of his work and not

his sexuality:

> I kind of slipped it under the rug. I didn't want to make it too much about me and my
>
> sexuality or whatever cause I still wanted... at the very center, or at the very base, it's still
>
> about kids.

These subtle approaches, saying it in conversation, mentioning a partner in response to a student

question, etc. were always safe and successful strategies for the participants to take to become

visible at work. Becoming visible in an interview, proved safe and successful for all the

participants who began to live openly in this manner with administrators and other teachers too.

The approach that sometimes produced a negative response was incidentally the most

direct approach for the teacher to live openly: giving a formal coming out statement. This

generally happened with the teacher formally stating they were gay at a time that would not be

considered in casual conversation. Mac said of students' reaction to his direct method, "Last year

I had a couple students tell me, "You can't tell me that you're gay." Participants who formally

came out to administrators and/or co-workers, like Allison and Meka, also were sometimes met

with no support or a limit of support. So, the researcher concluded based on the data analysis that

a participant formally saying something like, "I'm gay," was less likely to be a safe and successful approach to living openly at work for the participant than, for example, showing one was gay through discussions around relationships or answers to direct questions in casual conversation like, *"Do you have a boyfriend?"*

In the end, all of the approaches resulted in people at the participants' schools learning they were gay, but the approaches that might be described as more indirect or perhaps more casual seemed to invite less negative responses and/or less negative consequences for the gay teacher participants than the more direct or perhaps more formal approaches. Overall, most of the things the gay teachers did to show they were living openly caused a non-response from students. Rosie expanded on this idea, and she provided an explanation for why she thinks her living openly was not a big deal to her students:

> So, it wasn't a big deal, that has been the trend that it is a non-issue for them, and part of that may be their generation, and part of that might be my delivery. If it's not a big deal to me, part of that sort of transfers to them or communicates to them that it shouldn't be a big deal to them either.

For the most part, students, regardless of age, did not seem to care that their teacher was gay. As mentioned, the teacher taking a "it is no big deal" sort of attitude in their approach to telling students seemed to help make the news not a big deal to students.

How fast or slow participants went through the identity development model that was generated from this study varied. For example, living openly among administrators and other teachers was a precursor to living openly among students and students' parents. However, some teachers began living openly with their students just days after beginning to live openly among other teachers and administrators. Other participants waited weeks, months, or years before

telling students. Participants assumed though that once out to their students, their students immediately or near immediately spread the news to their parents. So, based on participant's perceptions, going from stage two, becoming visible to students, to stage three, becoming visible to students' parents, of *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model* was almost automatic and therefore quick. The transition from stage one, becoming visible to administrators and other teachers, to stage two though was not automatic and therefore was not always as quick.

Waiting a little to tell students and/or students' parents might aid in a teacher being able to live openly more safely and successfully at work than telling students and students' parents immediately since it allows time for a relationship to be built between the gay teacher and the student and/or the students' family. Stephen believed this and therefore illustrated that he waits a little to tell students about his sexuality saying, "Coming out is something I do once students begin to know me." Having a lot of close contact with the teacher prior to students knowing the teacher is gay can be a helpful transition for students. Meeting someone introduced as gay when there is no other relationship to go on is likely different than spending time with someone daily, knowing them closely, and then finding out they are gay. In this scenario, having a gay teacher likely becomes part of a larger whole for students when thinking about that teacher. If students have no prior relationship with the teacher and do not have time to build a relationship before the teacher becomes visible to them, the teacher's sexual orientation might appear to be the front and center of the teacher's existence in the eyes of students, which could decrease the likelihood of the teacher being able to live openly at work safely and successfully.

To conclude, participants used a variety of approaches on their journeys to becoming fully visible as gay at work. Meka explained:

I think [...] when I was thinking about being out at work it was really stressful to me and really being on my mind, but when it actually sort of happened and people found out, it's really not been an issue at all. It's really been kind of inconsequential with a few exceptions I'd say.

What Meka said seemed to sum up the way almost all of the participants felt before and since living openly at work. The quote also revealed what the general outcome of the participants' living openly at work has been, inconsequential. Ultimately, all of the findings from this grounded theory study, including the visual of the identity development model generated from this study, *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model,* were presented to participants. All participants agreed with the findings established through the coding process and subsequent data analysis.

Chapter Five

Overview of Study

In chapter one the researcher laid out the problem that was the impetus for this study; because of the historical discrimination against gay people, the current legal environment, and the traditions of the teaching profession, gay teachers cannot live openly while at work with as much security as straight teachers can. This forces gay teachers to *navigate* their identity rather than simply *live* it. The researcher then established the purpose for this study, which was to identify and describe the approaches gay teachers take to living openly while at work in K-8 schools through interviewing gay teachers, analyzing the transcripts, and eventually generating an identity development model from the findings. Finally, the researcher explained the significance of the study. The identity development model generated from this study is intended to serve as a guide for other gay teachers wising to live openly at work, which could prompt and/or help more gay teachers to live openly. More gay teachers living openly at work could make schools a safer place. Research shows that once someone learns someone else they personally know is gay, they are more likely to accept homosexual lifestyles (Chang, 2007; Gust, 2007; Mucciaroni, 2008; Rofes, 2000; Ruffolo, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). Thus, this study is significant.

In chapter two, the researcher described the conceptual framework that guided this study. This study was framed by critical theory, queer theory, and the concept of normative sexuality development. Critical theory allows for the recognition that past and present imbalances in power cause groups to become and remain underrepresented and marginalized, which can potentially be ameliorated through an act of resistance (Kaplan, 2003). For gay teachers, such an act of resistance could include living openly. Queer theory serves to highlight the significance of this

study as it provided the justification for focusing on the process of teachers becoming visible as gay people in K-8 schools by both recognizing the importance of this process and by establishing the gay teacher's inherent right to live openly at work (Whitlock, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). The concept of normative sexuality development acknowledges that there is a growing trend of researchers and health organizations reporting that children and adolescents have a sexuality, which can and should be directed for their healthy development (Bannerman & Burton, 1974; Delamater & Friedrich, 2002; Erickson, 1968; Meschke, Peter, & Bartholomae, 2011; Tolman & McClelland, 2011), thus establishing the appropriateness of this study.

<div align="center">**Summary of Findings**</div>

The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model

The theoretical model generated from this study is a staged gay identity development model, which the researcher entitled *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model*. In this identity development model, gay K-8 teachers who are already open in their personal lives enter stage one when they become visible at work as a gay person with other teachers and/or administrators. Stage two begins when the K-8 teacher becomes visible as a gay person at work with students. Stage two, becoming visible to students, can happen immediately after stage one or days, weeks, months, or years later. However, stage three, becoming visible to students' parents, likely begins almost directly after the gay K-8 teacher begins to live openly with students as all participants believed their students informed their parents. Unlike in stage one and in stage two, in stage three it can be less concretely known by the teacher if all students' parents are aware of their sexuality as opportunities to directly say or show they are living openly may not naturally arise among students' parents. Entry points that would allow the teacher to say or

show they were living openly, like direct questions, more frequently appear in stage one and in stage two.

Stage four, the final stage in *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model*, involves identity maintenance. Stage four begins after the teacher is living openly at work. Because of heteronormativity, which includes assumptions that everyone is straight, gay people must come out or show they are living openly repeatedly over the course of their lives lest anyone new they meet assume they are straight (Biegel, 2010). Therefore, through explicit and implicit means, gay K-8 teachers will likely have to tell or show some people across the stages, administrators, other teachers, students, and students' parents, that they are gay no matter how long they have been living openly at work.

The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model, see figure 4-1, also depicts the spread of the news of the participant's sexuality across all stages. This is depicted in gray, just like stage three and stage four are depicted in gray. As explained in chapter four, parts of the model depicted in gray signify that there is generally some level of assumption and/or implicit action on the participant's part, and thus this part of the model is not as concrete as the parts in black. To explicate and give an example, participants believed news of their sexuality spread from one student to another student but they did not always know for sure how the student had acquired this news or even if the student really had this news. The black parts of the model then represents times when the teacher largely does things to explicitly live openly, and thus show when the teacher has concrete knowledge that others at work know he or she is gay.

Once a participant had done or said something to reveal their sexuality, the spread of this news to others the teacher had not directly told was an important theme. It was a theme that carried across the stages from administrators, to other teachers, to students, to students' parents.

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Mark detailed this phenomenon of spread among teachers, and how it impacted his identity maintenance at work when he left one job for another by removing any steps he had to directly take to become visible as a gay person in this new environment. He said, "You know because Colleague A talks to Colleague B who talks to the teacher down the road. So, even when I applied to work at a new school, people already knew." The spread of the news of the teachers' sexuality is what made stage three, becoming visible as a gay person to students' parents, and stage four, identity maintenance, almost automatic.

Table 5-1: Approaches to Living Openly at Work as a Gay K-8 Teacher

Likely safe approaches to living openly at work as a gay K-8 teacher	Potentially unsafe approaches to living openly at work as a gay K-8 teacher
- Acknowledging one's significant other in response to direct questions - Bringing one's significant other to school events - Referencing one's sexuality in casual conversation where the reference is not out of context - Coming out in an interview to administrators - Building a relationship with students before coming out	- Directly stating I'm gay - Having a formal moment in which someone is told of one's sexuality - Coming out to students right away before a relationship is built

The approaches listed in Table 5-1 represent the basic methods participants in this study took to live openly at work among administrators, other teachers, students, and/or students' parents. The approaches are classified by their likelihood of being safe or unsafe for the gay teacher in terms of outcomes involving positive, negative, and/or neutral consequences and/or responses. Almost all of the participants found that their overarching experiences living openly at work have been positive and that people in all stages of the identity development model,

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administrators, other teachers, students, and students' parents, have been supportive or neutral to the teachers living openly. Negative responses and/or consequences to the teachers living openly have been far outweighed by positive and/or neutral responses and/or consequences. Mark summed up his experience:

> I would say overall the experience has been relatively good, and, actually, I was really surprised to how receptive people have been and are, particularly teaching in the South where I'd expect people to have so much more negative perceptions about being gay. I thought it'd be more of an issue, that there'd be more of an   issue with the lifestyle than when I was living up North. Surprisingly, people have been incredibly supportive. Every now and then I hear some silly comment or something like that, but I almost never hear anything derogatory.

The experience Mark described seemed similar to the general experiences of every other participant.

Connecting the Findings to the Literature on Gay Teacher Visibility

Comparing the existing literature to the findings of this study is revealing. Many of the things participants revealed in their interviews aligned with themes found in the existing literature. Other findings that emerged from the data analysis add new insights to the existing body of literature on topics related to this study.

First, research supports the idea that the K-8 school is already a social and cultural arena for the production or reproduction of sexual identities (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, 1998; Haywood, 1996; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Hey, 1997; Redman, 1996; Renold, 2000). Because of heterosexist underpinnings in society that are also found in the K-8 school, most students learn "normal" heterosexual behaviors in the K-8 school (Chartrand, Maddux, Lakin,

2005). In this study, the researcher also found that according to the openly gay teachers interviewed, their students already had knowledge about social norms around sexuality, which had been established before the gay teachers began living openly with them as evident by the fact that a few participants' students offered to keep their teachers' sexuality a secret. These students were somehow aware that there was and is a societal norm to keep homosexual lifestyles on the margins because it is not "normal" like heterosexuality. Visibly gay teachers cannot cause children to develop sexual identities; those identities already exist. What visibly gay teachers can do though is serve as role models for how to live a sexual identity just like straight teachers already serve as models of behavior for students (Chartrand, Maddux, Lakin, 2005), which is important so that students do not consciously or unconsciously get the message that homosexual identities should be kept secret.

Another concept found in the existing research that arose in this study was that some researchers held that openly gay K-8 teachers are more connected to students, especially gay students, once their full identity is revealed at school (Kissen, 1996; Mayo, 2011). This idea was evident in almost every participants' answers, especially when participants talked about their mentor relationship with students. Matthew said:

> [Students] saw me in kind of a vulnerable moment, and those students, you know,
> I am still very, very close with a lot of them. I think if you were to talk to them today I
> think they would remember me as someone who was a real mentor because my
> relationship with them was very, very close.

The mentorship theme between gay teachers and gay students seen in this quote and in almost every other participants' answers has also been established with research (Chang, 2007; Khayatt, 1992; Marcus, 2005; Whitlock, 2007).

A final concept found in the research and supported by this study, as reported by the participants, is that psychological or medical factors associated with gay youths can be positively or negatively impacted by the climate surrounding gay identities in a given context, like the K-8 school (Anderson, 1998; Dempsey 1994; Edwards, 1996; Floyd, Stein, Harter, Allison, & Nye, 1999; Hollander, 2000; Lock & Steiner, 1999; Mosher, 20001; Segal, 2000; Vincke & Bolton, 1994). Given that, and the fact that research, including this study, shows that when people learn relatives, coworkers, or friends are gay, they are more likely to respect homosexuals (Chang, 2007; Gust, 2007; Mucciaroni, 2008; Rofes, 2000; Ruffolo, 2007; Wilchins, 2004), it is then no surprise that the participants felt some of the positive consequences around their living openly at work lay in the changed mindsets of some administrators, coworkers, and students. Some of these people had initial poor responses to the given participant living openly but their responses changed in time to become more supportive as they got to know the given participant better. It is certainly possible that their changed mindsets, especially over time, could have a larger impact on the overall school climate of the participants' schools, and thus it makes sense why the teachers perceived there to be so many positive consequences to their living openly; the research supports the idea that their perceptions are accurate.

Findings from this study contribute to new understandings that extend the existing literature. Just as it is not typically considered unusual for teachers to "come out" as straight to their students through the course of teaching in response to personal questions posed by students (McKay, 2009; Nelson, 2009), it should not be considered unusual for gay teachers to "come out" as gay to their students through the course of teaching in response to personal questions posed by students. For all but one of the participants, the teachers' experiences were that students do not seem to think it is unusual for gay teachers to come out in this manner. Most of the

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participants responded to direct student questions about their sexuality to enter phase two of the identity development model, becoming visible with students. Thus, this research supports the idea that coming out in response to personal questions posed by students is normal for gay teachers like it is normal for straight teachers.

Lastly, the results from this study could contribute to the body of literature on gay identity development models. Existing gay identity development models like Cass' (1979, 1984), Fassinger's (1991), Savin-Williams' (1988, 1990), and Troiden's (1979, 1988) focus on the resolution of internal conflict related to identifying as gay through the coming out process. The identity development model generated through this study focuses on the navigation of external factors related to becoming visible in a K-8 school as a gay teacher. This is truly a visibility *process* for the gay teacher as it involves finding entry points to appropriately and/or subtly (for the greatest likelihood of safety and success) tell administrators, other teachers, students, and students' parents about one's sexuality. An example of this would be a teacher becoming visible as a gay person through casual conversation or in response to a direct question about one's relationships status. The generation of the identity development model from this study, *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model,* fills a gap in the existing literature because it focuses on a visibility process prompted by external and not internal factors. The difference in focus from this researcher's identity development model from previous models has the potential to be liberating for gay people because it lifts the internal conflict part out of the identity development model, which takes away the connotation that there should be an internal struggle when a person is simply living their true identity. This model emphasizes that it is the gay teacher's environment that is the source of most homosexual identity conflict and not the gay teacher. The "work to be done" is on this environment, and this model supports this work.

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Limitations

Because this study relied in part on network sampling in which the researcher depends on her networks or on existing participants to recruit subjects for the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the researcher located participants who were or are teaching in the greater New Orleans area since this is where most of her professional and personal networks are located. So, all participants had lived or do live openly in a Louisiana K-8 public school (which could include charter schools). Louisiana is one of twenty-nine states in which an employer can legally discriminate against an employee based on his or her sexual orientation (DeMitchell, Eckes, & Fossey, 2007; Human Rights Campaign, 2013).

A few participants no longer teach in the greater New Orleans area though they lived openly at work when they did teach in the greater New Orleans area. They also still live openly at work in their current positions. Stephen now teaches in another state where an employee can also be discriminated against for his or her sexual orientation (DeMitchell, Eckes, & Fossey, 2007; Human Rights Campaign, 2013). Mark currently teaches outside of the greater New Orleans area, but unlike Stephen he is still within the state of Louisiana. Otherwise, all other participants are currently teaching in public K-8 schools in the greater New Orleans area.

The fact that all participants teach or taught while living openly in a public K-8 school in the greater New Orleans area does potentially limit this study. Though New Orleans is located in the South, which is often seen as a more conservative place than the North (Gallup, 2009), New Orleans is still generally seen as a more liberal place than the surrounding South. Additionally, there is a thriving gay community in New Orleans. So, the results of this study may not be transferrable to environments that have more conservative societal standards than New Orleans. However, *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model* is not intended to be

prescriptive but to allow for flexibility in the actual approaches the teachers take to becoming

visibly gay among administrators, other teachers, students, and/or students' parents.

The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model presented here is intended to

serve as a potential guide or simply as a source of support for other gay K-8 teachers who might

wish to live openly in their schools. In this sense, the findings from this study could still be

applicable or helpful for gay K-8 teachers living beyond the greater New Orleans area.

Ultimately, the researcher believes that if it is possible for a gay teacher to live openly in their K-

8 school safely and successfully, then the approaches she highlighted both in the summary in

chapter four and in the summary of findings in chapter five, would help a gay K-8 teacher

accomplish that goal. If those approaches do not result in the gay teacher being able to live

openly safely and successfully while at work in a K-8 school then the researcher does not believe

that there is an approach that would likely work in that given school as it is probably a hostile

environment. Thus, another limitation of this study is that *The Gay Teacher's Workplace*

Visibility Process Model does not provide support for gay teachers in hostile environments.

Implications

One important implication of this study relates to school leaders. The first stage in *The*

Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model is becoming visible to administrators and

other teachers. Many participants in this study began living openly immediately at work by

somehow making their sexual orientation known during the interview process to an

administrator. Other participants made themselves visible to administrators once factors like the

perceived supportiveness of administrators was assessed. So, if school leaders want to promote

an environment in which all teachers feel comfortable bringing their full selves to work, they

should understand that they are the initial gatekeepers who gay teachers will likely become

visible to first at work. In states where an employee is not protected from discrimination at work based on sexual orientation like Louisiana (DeMitchell, Eckes, & Fossey, 2007; Human Rights Campaign, 2013), school leaders could end the teacher's visibility process at work during stage one, becoming visible to administrators and other teachers. Through a positive reaction and/or supportive actions, such as informing the gay teacher they will have administrative support should they become visible to their students and it spark the ire of students or their parents, school leaders could increase the likelihood that a gay teacher could fully, safely, and successfully become visible at work. This could benefit the overall school community in ways that will be explicated upon.

Another potential implication of this study is that *The Gay Teacher's Workplace Visibility Process Model* could serve as a guide for those wishing to live openly while at work in their K-8 schools. It could provide the impetus for a gay teacher to begin living openly. This is important in light of the many distinct advantages openly gay teachers bring to the classroom as described by the participants in this study and according to the research referenced in this study, like the fact that openly gay teachers specifically detail feeling able to more deeply connect with students (Kissen, 1996; Mayo, 2011). Matthew described this advantage mentioned in the literature that he also perceives gay teachers to have:

> I do see how gay teachers can empathize more with students because often times we have grown up feeling like an outsider our entire lives, which really helps us work with students because a lot of students we work with feel like outsiders.

Additionally, Jess described how gay teachers living openly can impact more than the students in the gay teacher's classroom. She described how gay teachers living openly can impact students' parents, especially students' parents who are also gay, "I think it makes gay parents probably

more comfortable knowing that there are people, teachers, out at their child's school, that their family life is accepted." The advantage described, that an openly gay teacher can make gay parents feel more comfortable in their child's K-8 school, is also supported by the research (Kissen, 1996; Serwatka, 2010).

Finally, Rosie described how the benefits of her living openly at work are not just short term. She explained how she thinks her living openly will benefit not just her long-term but also her students:

It matters a lot for my future family about what [students] think about gay marriage and what they think about gay issues in general because obviously the fight is not obviously over with gay rights because we are having this conversation about why gay people can get fired, and they'll be bosses of gay people, or they'll be gay themselves, and so it matters.

One study also supported the idea of a long term advantage of a gay teacher living openly, like Rosie described above, which was that children who knew they had a gay teacher were more likely to grow up to be less homophobic and less xenophobic than children who did not know they had a gay teacher (Rofes, 2000). The quote above would support what that study held to be true.

So, gay teachers living openly at work can benefit those who are not gay in the K-8 school environment, and they certainly have the potential to greatly impact gay students in a positive way. As children themselves increasingly begin to come out at younger ages (Savin-Williams, 2005), the gay teacher can serve as a powerful role model for gay students who might desperately need someone to look up to (Khayatt, 1992; Marcus, 2005; Chang, 2007; Whitlock, 2007). As any teacher knows, especially the primary school teacher who might spend all day

with the same students, children typically ask their teachers a myriad of personal questions (Khayatt, 1992; Blinick, 1994; Kissen, 1996; Biegel, 2010). By responding honestly to these questions or acting in a way that informs students that their teacher is gay, the gay teacher can show students that the school and specifically the gay teacher's classroom is a safe place for identity development (McInnes & Davies, 2008).

Since the public K-8 school curriculum is so heterocentric, most gay students lack resources about healthy and positive homosexual lifestyles (Biegel, 2010). Students who do not identify as gay can find a multitude of positive examples of straight coupledom and adult heterosexual lifestyles in just the storybooks or texts found in the average school, but the lack of gay visibility in educational environments means many gay students lack road maps in their journey towards gay adulthood. However, if gay teachers live openly, gay students will not grow up lacking an adult embodiment of themselves. It's very possible that gay teachers can connect with gay students in a way that straight teachers simply cannot. But, as mentioned, gay teachers do not just benefit gay students; they can positively impact others in the K-8 school too, like other gay teachers.

As discussed, this study is particularly important for gay teachers because of the support it can provide in the form of a guide for them. For gay teachers, the ability to live openly at work is not a theoretical or moral question to ponder, it's a reality that far to often means the gay teacher must *navigate* their identity at work rather than simply *live* it without a second thought like straight teachers generally have the privilege of doing. Rosie explained the impact not being able to live openly could have had on her relationship, which illustrates how she had to *navigate* rather than just *live* her identity:

> I feel like my relationship with my current partner could go no further if I wasn't out at
> my job. She would never say that, but our next step is marriage. Our next step is kids, and
> we can't do that if I'm not able to be out at work.

The results of this study could potentially guide other gay teachers to become visible at work, which could be the very thing they need to do in order to make their career in education sustainable. Increasing the number of gay teachers who live openly *and* persist in the teaching profession might help solve persistent problems for gay youth (Anderson, 1994; Fetner & Kush, 2002; Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, & Rosario, 1994; Russell, 2003; Toomey, Diaz, & Russell, 2011; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Office of Adolescent Health, 2013).

Recommendations for Future Research

While conducting this study, the researcher was struck by how the participants seemed to feel it was more appropriate, easier, or safer to live openly if they were in serious relationships. Anna said:

> This isn't, I'm sure, on students' minds, but I know within society gay people are more
> acceptable when they are thought of as being monogamous. When we think about why
> gay rights are so on the rise, it's likely because we've been repainted not as people who
> have random sex all the time and get AIDS but as people who get married and have
> children and are loving, stable people just like heterosexuals. So, when I embody that as a
> teacher, it's safer than the single lesbian who might be preying on my female daughter.

The researcher began to wonder if single straight teachers also feel pressure to keep their sexuality invisible until they are in a long term relationship. Thus, future research should include a study to determine how the experiences of single teachers compare to the experiences of teachers in monogamous relationships.

Also, on a similar but slightly different vein, even though the concept of normative sexuality development established that childhood and adolescent sexuality is a perfectly normal part of childhood and adolescent development (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Diamond, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2005; Tolman & McClelland, 2011), participants who taught younger elementary children still felt like it was most appropriate to talk about their relationships in family terms like husband and wife even if their significant other was actually a partner, girlfriend or boyfriend, or lover to them. Perhaps using a post-modern lens, this researcher could explore how language, like for example using the term husband or wife over partner, might be impacting the larger gay community and/or gay civil rights movement. The researcher would like to explore questions like, is the language of husband and wife in lieu of partner or lover heterosexualizing homosexual relationships, and if so what is the impact of this?

Additionally, the researcher recognizes that she did not interview gay teachers who had tried to live openly at work and either were fired or quit afterwards. Interviewing this subset of teachers might reveal more about the potentially safe and unsafe approaches to living openly that the researcher already reported from this study. Gay teachers who quit or were fired after living openly might be able to reveal even more about potentially unsafe approaches to living openly than the teachers interviewed in this study who have been able to live openly without leaving the teaching profession.

Since the theme of spread came up so strongly in each participants interview, the researcher would like to do more exploration around this theme. For example, do gay teachers specifically tell someone they think will or will not spread the news of their sexuality? Along this same line, the researcher would also like to explore the interaction between openly gay teaches

and students' parents more. For example, why were there so few direct opportunities for gay teachers to make themselves visible to students' parents?

As mentioned previously, the researcher would like to conduct a study on gay teachers living openly in private K-8 schools, but those teachers were not eligible for this study. The context of their employment is different than gay teachers who are living openly in public K-8 schools so the researcher selected not to include gay teachers who are living openly in private K-8 schools. Thus, the identity development process for openly gay private K-8 teachers would likely differ from the identity development process for openly gay public K-8 teachers since they face different variables.

Finally, in addition to private school settings, the researcher would like to test this model in a few other settings. For example, the model was derived from the experiences of openly gay teachers in public K-8 schools, so the researcher would like to explore if the model holds true in a public high school setting. She would also potentially like to explore if the model would hold true in a higher educational setting.

However, these and the previously mentioned research ideas are beyond the scope of this study, but they represent just a few ideas the researcher has already identified for further research from this present study. Additionally, by selecting participants who work as teachers and who live openly as gay at work for this study, the researcher has excluded the voices of gay teachers who pass as straight at work. This population of teachers could be an additional future area for research too.

Conclusion

Heteronormativity can make it easy for people who are not gay to be blind to how often their sexuality is visible in everyday life (Biegel, 2010). A straight teacher who goes to the

grocery store with her husband and kids displays her sexuality for any student's parent or student to see. It can be hard if not impossible to hide one's sexuality, especially with a family. For example, Megan described living next door to students in the home she shares with her partner, which inevitably alerted the students and the students' parents who lived next door to her of her sexual orientation. It is unreasonable to expect any teacher, including gay teachers, to fully shed their sexual orientation at the school doors. Meka described what it is like when she did try to shed her sexual orientation at the school door, "So, I think when I wasn't out I found myself... I had to literally process everything I said in my head before it came out, which is annoying and just stressful." Rosie said of this same struggle she faced:

> You kind of die on the inside when you can't be out at school. [...] When I couldn't be myself eight to three or let's be honest seven to six, when I can't be myself there you slowly start to lead a double life, and you can't remember who you are in different spaces, and I just feel like that that's just a really awful place to live in that kind of space of duality.

Research certainly supports the idea that gay people lead happier and healthier lives once they are able to live openly (Biegel, 2010; Mayo, 2011). Logically, a teacher being able to live openly at work would likely experience a positive impact on their professional performance as research shows the act of living openly positively impacts other areas of a gay person's life.

Ultimately, deciding to live openly at work can be a difficult decision. Not living openly at work can be difficult as the above two quotes captured, but living openly at work can also still be difficult. A few of the participants, two of the eleven, acknowledged that their life as a teacher at least would be easier if they were either straight or not out. Mac said:

I'm not ashamed of being gay, but it would be so much easier being a straight teacher that

is for sure, and that's something that makes me extremely sad that I feel that way about

myself. I really like who I am. I am not ashamed of it, but I hate that I wish it was a

different way simply for the ease of my job.

However, many of these gay teachers revealed that despite the difficulties they potentially faced,

face, or will face, in being visible as gay people at work they continue to live openly in their K-8

schools in part because of gay students. Anna said:

It's not fair to make students you know shoulder the burden of living openly because

adults are afraid of losing their job or because it's hard for us. Well, it's hard for them, and

I feel like as an adult I have to be the adult, and it's my responsibility to share that same

burden and to live openly whatever the consequence might come.

The reality is gay students are living openly in increasing numbers in K-8 schools (Savin-

Williams, 2005). Gay students can either continue to do this alone, or they can be joined by their

gay teachers.

In the end, it seems that there is a lot of fear around gay teachers living openly in K-8

schools. Most of the teachers in this study certainly spoke to this fear though likely from a

different perspective than that of some lawmakers, judges, or even principals who also fear gay

teachers living openly in K-8 schools (Marcus, 2005; Rasmussen, Mitchell, & Harwood, 2007).

While the purpose of this study was to generate a gay identity development model, it was also

apparent from the participants' answers that those fears surrounding gay teachers living openly in

K-8 schools are largely unfounded, and this is a finding that must also be highlighted. Mark

asserted:

I've become more and more open over time. I've realized how few people actually

hate at this point in terms of the negative stigma that is often attached to homosexuality

and alternative lifestyles. I've come to realize that few people actually have those

perceptions anymore.

In support of this quote, almost all participants described positive or uneventful experiences

becoming visible as gay people in their K-8 schools. As seen in the results of this study, most

adults in K-8 schools can handle visibly gay teachers, and even more students seem able to

handle visibly gay teachers. It is fear that has made gay teachers less visible, but gay teacher's

can engage in a visibility process at work with safety and success.

At its core, gay K-8 teachers living openly can be about challenging heteronormative

structures that silence gay voices and leave gay educators and gay students on the margins of

society. It can be about destroying the heterocentric practices that deny gay personhood within

schools. Or, it can just be about an adult living his or her life honestly while at work. Gay K-8

teachers living openly at work does not have to be about controversy. It is certainly not about

sex. It is also not about pushing a homosexual agenda. It is really about humans. It is about every

child deserving the right to have a role model who personifies who the student is. It is about

every educator having the right to an identity beyond just that of teacher.

In the end, living openly as a gay teacher is really about making public K-8 schools safer

and more welcoming for all who enter the school doors. As the world becomes more diverse and

the United States becomes more progressive on gay rights, students need to see that gay adults

can live happy, healthy, and fulfilled lives (Kissen, 1996). As this study showed, gay teachers

are living openly while at work in their K-8 schools with safety and success. Gay teachers *can*

continue to become visible as gay people to administrators, to other teachers, to students, and to

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students' parents safely and successfully. As times change, popular opinion progresses, and the laws arc towards justice and equality. The time for gay teachers to live openly in their K-8 schools is now.

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Appendix A: Code Book

<u>Letter/Number codes</u>
N- = Negative Consequence
P+ = Positive Consequence
EP = Entry Point
S = Spread
D = Directly became visible
I = Implicitly became visible
NR = Neutral response or No response
1 = First became visible to
RS = Relationship Status
AS = Age of Students
F = Fear
GS = Gay student

<u>Color Codes</u>
yellow = relating to students' parents
pink = relating to students
green = relating to other teachers
blue = relating to administrators

Appendix B: Preconference Script

<u>Preconference Script and Questions</u>

Script:

Thanks for contacting me about participating in my study. As you know I'm hoping to describe

the approaches gay teachers take to living openly in K-8 schools, and, in my study, living openly

is defined as any action or statement made by a teacher while in a K-8 school that subtly or

overtly confirms a homosexual identity or denies a heterosexual identity. As I previously

explained to be eligible for my study there can't be any situation within the work environment

where you would deny your sexual identity.

Questions:

Do you feel you are eligible for my study?

Is there any person you interact with in your work context, like students or students' parents, who

you are not out to? Explain.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Kinds of Questions: grand tour and probing

<u>Introduction:</u>

I would like to talk to you today about how you would describe your experiences living openly as a gay teacher while at work in a K-8 school. I am hoping I can learn a lot from you by listening to your answers to the interview questions, and that I can use this information to develop an identity development model that highlights the typically safe and successful approaches gay teachers have described to living openly while at work in K-8 schools.

<u>Grand tour question:</u>

Tell me about your experience as an openly gay teacher.

At your current job, how do you know people know you are gay?

Have you ever had a job where you restricted how you lived openly? Describe.

Have you ever had a teaching job where you didn't live openly? Describe.

How did you first come out or begin to live openly as a teacher?

Why did you choose to come out or live openly as a teacher at that time?

How did that go?

Would you do anything different if you could do it over?

Can you tell me about a recent time where you had to come out or show you were living openly at work?

How did that go?

Would you do anything different if you could do it over?

Do you think the way you live openly has changed at work over time? If so, how?

Potential Probing Questions:

What have been the consequences of living openly at work?

Does your relationship status impact how you live openly at work? If so, how?

How do you think your living openly at work impacts your students if at all?

Appendix D: Consent Letter

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Brian Beabout in the Educational Administration Department at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting research to study and subsequently describe the approaches gay teachers employ to living openly while at work in K-8 schools in order to generate an identity development model. For the purpose of my study, living openly will be defined as *any action or statement made by a teacher while in a K-8 school that subtly or overtly confirms a homosexual identity or denies a heterosexual identity.* Specifically, to be eligible for this study, there cannot be a situation where you would deny your sexual identity while in a work context.

I am requesting your participation in this study, if you feel that you are eligible for this study. If you're willing, I expect to conduct two interviews with you each lasting between thirty and sixty minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or can withdraw from the study at any time. The results of the research study may be published, but your name, the names of your students, the name of your school, or any other information that would identify who you are will not be used. With your consent, interviews will be audio recorded, and the recording and subsequent transcriptions will be stored on a password protected computer until they are erased three years after the study.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you for your participation, I hope there will be some possible benefits because of your participation. For example, by potentially

highlighting the typically safe and successful approaches educators like you have used to live openly at work in K-8 schools through the generation of an identity development model, other gay educators may find a guide themselves to live openly too. This research could also serves as a springboard for dialogue regarding gay identities in K-8 schools.

Interview questions could be considered of a personal nature, and there is the potential that interview questions could make you feel uncomfortable. The risks associated with participating in this interview are highly minimal though. However, if you have any questions concerning the research study or your participation in this study, please don't hesitate to e-mail me at dmward1@uno.edu. Please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon (504-280-3990) at the University of New Orleans for answers to questions about this research, your rights as a human subject, and your concerns regarding a research-related injury.

Sincerely,
Diana Ward

By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

_____   _____   _____
Signature   Printed Name   Date

Appendix E: Participant Recruitment Message

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Brian Beabout in the Educational Administration Department at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting research to study and subsequently describe the approaches gay teachers employ to living openly while at work in K-8 schools in order to generate an identity development model. I am seeking potential participants for my study.

For the purpose of my study, I am defining living openly as *any action or statement made by a teacher while in a K-8 school that subtly or overtly confirms a homosexual identity or denies a heterosexual identity.* To be eligible for this study, there cannot be a situation where you would deny your sexual identity while in a work context. I plan on interviewing eligible and willing participants two times with each interview lasting between thirty and sixty minutes.

I hope there will be some possible benefits to you because of your participation in this research. This study may benefit you by supporting your thinking about the role of openly gay teachers in K-8 schools and furthering your ability to incorporate your full identity into your work. By potentially highlighting the typically safe and successful approaches educators like you have used to live openly at work in K-8 schools through the generation of an identity development model, other gay educators may find a guide themselves to live openly too. This research could also serve as a springboard for dialogue regarding gay identities in K-8 schools potentially leading to more accepting school environments.

If you feel you are eligible for this study and might also be interested in participating in this study, please contact me at dmward1@uno.edu.

Thank you,
Diana M. Ward

Appendix F: Gatekeeper Message

Dear _____,

As you might know, I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Brian Beabout in the Educational Administration Department at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting research to study and subsequently describe the approaches gay teachers employ to living openly while at work in K-8 schools in order to generate an identity development model.

I am asking for your help in identifying potential participants for my study. For the purpose of my study, I am defining living openly as *any action or statement made by a teacher while in a K-8 school that subtly or overtly confirms a homosexual identity or denies a heterosexual identity.* To be eligible for this study, there cannot be a situation where the teacher who identifies as gay would deny his or her sexual identity while in a work context. If you know anyone who you think might be eligible and interested in participating in my study, please send them the attached message. In order to protect these teachers' privacy I ask that you do not tell me who you have contacted, I want to give the teachers you contact the power to decide if they contact me.

I hope there will be some possible benefits to you because of your help in this research. This study may benefit you by supporting your thinking about the role of openly gay teachers in K-8 schools. The teachers you may help to recruit for this study might also benefit from their participation. Ultimately, by potentially highlighting the typically safe and successful approaches gay educators have used to live openly at work in K-8 schools through the generation of an identity development model, other gay teachers may also find a guide to live openly. This research could also serve as a springboard for dialogue regarding gay identities in K-8 schools potentially leading to more accepting school environments.

I appreciate any help you could give in helping me to recruit potential participants for this study.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please don't hesitate to e-mail me at dmward1@uno.edu.

Thank you,
Diana M. Ward
dmward1@uno.edu

Appendix G: IRB Approval

University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Brian Beabout

Co-Investigator: Diana M. Ward

Date: March 27, 2014

Protocol Title: "A Grounded Theory Study to Describe Approaches Gay K-8 Teachers Take to Living Openly at Work"

IRB#:   01Mar14

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of Ne w Orleans and federal guidelines. The above referenced human subjects protocol has been reviewed and approved using expedited procedures (under 45 CFR 46.116(a) category (7).

Approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Use the IRB number listed on this letter in all future correspondence regarding this proposal.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project!

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Vita

The author was born in Jacksonville, Illinois. She obtained her bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Tulane University in 2008. She completed her Master's in Education in 2010 from Arizona State University. She began pursuing her PhD in Educational Administration in 2011 at the University of New Orleans. She works full-time as an instructional coach in the greater New Orleans area for an alternative teacher certification program.