“I am what I am…”

Examining the experiences of openly gay and lesbian teachers in a period of declining homohysteria

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6.2.3 LGBT issues in primary education

A small number of respondents (239) made specific reference to primary education, making the case for education on LGBT issues at this stage. Their broad argument was that challenging what they saw as the heteronormativity of these formative years would have a positive knock-on effect, both in supporting those who are not heterosexual or gender conforming, and in encouraging tolerance amongst their heterosexual peers by normalising it. Some participants also noted the long-term negative impact that bullying, discrimination and abuse during primary school had on their wellbeing.
Government survey

The education system doesn’t do enough to protect its LGBT+ students and does nothing to stop homophobic and transphobic language being used in schools.

Gender identity not given, bisexual, 16-17, Scotland
There has been **no real improvement** in the proportion of teachers who believe that their head teacher or school governors (in England and Wales) demonstrate clear leadership in tackling homophobic bullying.
School Report: open survey of over 3000 participants
(intended sample = LGBT students in school)
Climates

Hostile
• Section 28
• Homohysteric

Conditionally tolerant
• Glass closet
• Don’t ask, don’t tell
• Edwards et al. 2014 - teachers

Open and inclusive
• McCormack 2011 – students
Homohysteria

Homoerasure

Homohysteria

Inclusivity


One-time rule of homosexuality in operation

One-time rule of homosexuality in operation

Demise of the One-time rule of homosexuality

Awareness of homosexuality

Attitudes towards homosexuality
Cultural change
Previous research

• Countries
  • Australia (Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013)
  • England (Gray, 2013) - data from 2008
  • Ireland (Neary, 2012; Fahie, 2016)
  • America (Connell, 2015)

• Subject specific
  • Physical Education teachers (Sykes, 2009; Edwards et al., 2014)
  • Music teachers (Palkki, 2015).

• Edwards et al., (2014) state, ‘One such knowledge gap is in understanding the lived experiences of lesbian and gay teachers working in schools following the abolition of Section 28’ (p. 3).
## Participant Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Types of school</th>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Leadership position</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Secondary, Private</td>
<td>P.E</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Multi-academy, secondary, comprehensive</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes – SLT (Dept)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White European</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Secondary, independent</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes – Head of 6th</td>
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<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Secondary, faith school</td>
<td>P.E</td>
<td>Yes - pastoral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Secondary, comprehensive, academy</td>
<td>P.E, DT</td>
<td>Yes – pastoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>P.E</td>
<td>Yes – pastoral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Traveller British</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>Primary, faith school</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Secondary/FE</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>P.E</td>
<td>Yes – SLT (Asst)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Participant 1: “I've got feedback from pupils in different years - there's a few of them that on the notes they gave me saying you know ‘thank you’ without them saying their names they say that they’re part of the LGBT community so they felt supported so there are definitely out pupils within the school for sure.”

Participant 7: “I would say in the last few years there's been more of an open kind of talking point. I mean I've got year 7 lads that are out I've got a year 10 girl that's transgender”

Participant 8: I think that's quite comforting in a thought that my students coming to me saying this is where I'm currently at...what advice would you give me? Whereas they wouldn't necessarily go to another member of staff.

Participant 3: “I've only had 3 pupils come out to me”

Participant 11: And I'm not saying out on out role model, but definitely I think they think, 'oh do you know what it will be alright...whatever I'm thinking or feeling it's going to be alright. So I can go off to university and I can do this and I can do that'.
Participant 3: So I think everyone knew she was gay and she left, so for a while there wasn’t an out member of staff until I came out and now we’ve got loads.

Participant 5: So one of my colleagues who's gay, she said to me a few years ago, "you're the acceptable face of homosexuality" as a sort of joke because I do seek to set a good example.

Participant 8: Yeah it was actually, it was after me. When I came to the school...and actually she's more open and out than I am really if I think about it.
Trailblazer – impact on behaviour

Participant 1: **Yes for sure, 100%**. Obviously it's quite a masculine department but people are a **lot more aware of what they're saying** and what they're doing and how things can be perceived and that kind of thing so that's probably been the biggest difference for sure.

Participant 3: I do have quite a **lot of influence over people’s perceptions** of what gay people are and aren't and that sort of thing so I think that is really important.

Participant 7: Yeah, I think when I was at school I was crying out for somebody to speak to
Coming out – beingouted

Participant 1: Well that was taken out of my control a little bit where again there’s various versions of this from a couple of different members of staff telling the kids through conversations to one of the sixth form boys knowing about it and then deciding to kind of tell various kids through different years for whatever reason about me.

Participant 2: truly honestly it took maybe two months -the joy of social media - once I’d started adding people on Facebook they kind of realised but they never actually really asked but yes I'm definitely out

Participant 9: : Erm...thrown out, flat on my face...
Coming out – partially

Participant 12: So in terms of students - no - I've never ever discussed any of that side with my students.

Participant 8: There's obviously been conversations about it but never ever directly to me but if a child did say that to me I think I'd definitely, at this point in my teaching, would say yes to them.
Coming out – quietly

Participant 3: It's not okay just strolling in and singing 'I am what I am', you'd have the shock of your life...sorry that was outrageously stereotypical. I've never really had to kind of make that announcement because I have just dropped it into conversation.

Participant 4: if someone asks me a question I just talk about my partner and slip in the fact it's a he

Participant 5: So my colleagues came to know just through general conversation I didn't make a point of coming out to them it's just that they became aware that that's what it was and it wasn't a secret.

Participant 6: I had a friend who had already worked there so she'd already told them a little bit about me and she was also gay. So I mean it was kind of, I didn't really say anything...I've never had to come out as you would.

Participant 7: It wasn't a big issue at all; to be honest it was more of like a joke and a bit of a banter, point of banter in the department.

Participant 10: think I even mentioned it in my interview actually at that school

Participant 11: It would just emerge.
Coming out – to students

Participant 3: I quite enjoyed doing it, I kind of miss it in a way, you know just dropping it in, now husband, but then, back then it was boyfriend.

Participant 7: In my head of house role, had to speak to them and say "it's okay, it's alright to feel like that but obviously you can't throw upon your feelings on other people because they might not quite know how to deal with it I kind of said "from my experience, you know" and I said, I think from year 9 upwards I've said openly that "from my experience, I'm out".

Participant 11 (pupils): I certainly felt very comfortable talking about my partner amongst them, wouldn't offer it but when asked I would say.
It’s private!

Participant 1: **None of their business** really.

Participant 4: I don’t feel like bringing too much of your home life in is a good thing to me I just don’t

Participant 8: I think from a teachers point of view I know that there has been times that I've thought 'maybe you should just be more open with your sexuality' and there's another time where I think, I think the professional line, there has to be there professional line which I've said before, you know with kids, how much do they need to know about that. Do they need to know about that? Probably not.

Participant 9: I think I'm a very private person in general, I don't talk about a lot, I've always kept home and work very separate

Participant 11: **Work is work and home is home**

Participant 12: I tend to keep my home life and my work life quite separate
The fear – subject specific

Participant 6: “As a teacher I don't think it affects you know my lessons or my teaching but certainly I am more cautious you know when I teach gymnastics and you have to support...you know I'm very careful about that and you know, I make sure that I'm very clear about how I'm going to support them and which perhaps if I wasn't gay I wouldn't, I wouldn't be as worried about it”
The measure of ‘straightness’

Participant 4: Just purely something personal to me, I don’t feel like...even if I was straight I don’t think id mention it in front of the children.

Participant 5: Yes, my rule is - if I've observed a straight colleague say it or do it in an appropriate way then it's okay for me.

Participant 6: I just, it's not something that I would think you know it’s appropriate to share with pupils in general. In the same way if I was straight I wouldn't be talking about if I had a boyfriend or whatever.

Participant 8: I think the students are aware but they don't necessarily talk about it like they would talk about any other members of staff’s private life, does that make sense?

Participant 12: Because I feel that I'm able to develop very professional working relationships with my students and irrespective of my sexuality that's a line that I don't cross. It would be no different if my sexuality were different.
General conclusion

• Language is changing

Positives
• Teachers are coming out
• Pupils are coming out
• Positively affecting teaching
• From hostile to conditionally tolerant/open and inclusive

Negatives
• Climate – hostile, conditionally tolerant, open and inclusive
• Reverse relative deprivation
• Fear
• Public vs private on going debate
• Connell, C. 2014, School's Out, University of California Press.