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HOW GAY AND LESBIAN EDUCATORS POSITION THEMSELVES IDEOLOGICALLY IN THE
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NATALIE DARBY
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HOW GAY AND LESBIAN EDUCATORS POSITION THEMSELVES IDEOLOGICALLY WITHIN
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BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Kristy Brugar, Chair

Dr. Jacob Pleasants

Dr. Crag Hill

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ABSTRACT

In this study, I aim to better understand the ideological positioning of gay and lesbian educators in the classroom setting. Through conducting a qualitative study, I interviewed three teachers who identify as gay or lesbian. They were asked a series of questions in an environment in which they felt the most comfortable. These questions ranged from topics about their sexuality to classroom management. Each interview took approximately thirty to ninety minutes and was then transcribed for data purposes. Looking at the lives of LGBTQ+ educators, the political atmosphere, and the history of LGBTQ+ teachers, the literature contextualizes the current issue. Using a teacher identity framework, the research answered the question as to the ideological positioning of gay and lesbian educators within a classroom context. The findings of this study show that the three gay or lesbian educators that were interviewed took neutral positions when it came to their ideological positioning. This study reflects the need for better policies in the LGBTQ+ community at the national level, pre-service teacher training, and better professional development opportunities in school districts.

Chapter 1. Introduction

I, a white, straight woman, explore the ideological positioning of gay and lesbian educators within the classroom context. Through an intersectional lens, I aim to shed light on their experiences, challenges, and the impact of their ideological stances on educational dynamics. In working with members of the gay and lesbian communities, I have made it a personal goal to understand better the lives and placement of gay and lesbian educators. In doing so, I have made sure to be a constant ally of the LGBTQ+ community by being a spokesperson for equitable education concerning LGBTQ+ teachers and students. Implementing safe classroom policies in which LGBTQ+ students and faculty feel valued in the classroom has been an ongoing process in my classroom. Recognizing my own identity, I approach this research with sensitivity, seeking to amplify voices and perspectives that contribute to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Meeting Mr. Brent¹

To this day, I vividly remember my professor asking me if I would be willing to travel forty miles every day to be placed as a student teacher in my level three internship. For a level three placement, the student teacher has to spend three hours a week in the classroom observing, co-teaching, teaching, and asking questions that might come up in the process. She went on to explain to me that this particular teacher was one of the best in the business, and I would learn so much from him by being in his classroom a few days a week. My professor had spoken so highly about him that there was no way I could pass up the opportunity- and I had a car that worked perfectly and

¹ All names mentioned in this study are pseudonyms.

parents who did not mind giving me cash to make the drive. I told her that I would gladly be placed with him and I anxiously awaited the day that I would get to meet this superstar educator.

When the day came for me to begin my level three placement, I arrived early and walked up to the door. Coincidentally, my new cooperating teacher was walking in at the same time- which was an oddity looking back on it because he was usually running late. I immediately recognized him by his name tag, Mr. Brent. I quickly introduced myself and without a second thought, Mr. Brent began taking me around the freshman academy to meet everyone. One of the people he introduced me to would end up being my first boss right out of college. He walked and talked fast and had a smile on his face. Everyone we stopped and talked to sang praises for Mr. Brent and told me how lucky I was to be learning from him.

They were all right. It is almost unexplainable the talent that Mr. Brent has for teaching content in the classroom. He included everyone in the classroom and made the room feel like a home. He had me hooked- I was watching magic happen in a classroom.

One of the first lessons that I watched Mr. Brent conduct was one about perspective. Mr. Brent held up a Bison and asked each individual student what they saw, summed up into a word. He would not allow students to use the same words more than once, so each student had to come up with something different. As each student spoke out, Mr. Brent would write what the students were saying on the board. Once finished, he had the students look at the board and point out all of the different perspectives all of the students in the classroom had about the Bison. He went on to

point out that each person comes into the classroom with a different set of perceptions, and that it is important we respect all thoughts and opinions. You could almost see the “a-ha!” moments that the students were having in their seats. As I mentioned above, it was complete magic.

Somehow, he continued to keep that magic alive all through the semester. As the semester wrapped up, I asked Mr. Brent if he would allow me to teach with him again in my level four placement. In the level four placement, I would be in his classroom every day the next semester, and I wanted to ensure he did not mind me sharing his space. He told me he would gladly have me as a level four intern, I worked out the details with my professor, and the semester was set. He allowed me to take lessons as my own and continuously supported my ideas. I was able to get comfortable in his classroom knowing that if I faltered, he would be there with tips and tricks to help me mold my skills.

As that next semester went on, Mr. Brent began to feel more comfortable around me and opened up about his personal life. Before this, he had talked mostly about surface-level things, such as what he enjoyed most about education or what he had for dinner the night before. He frequently talked about his dream of working in policy work for education or going back to school to get his doctorate. No matter what, our conversations at this time were always centered around education and his love for the profession. He spoke about education and the process of teaching in such a way that you knew his efforts were genuine.

As Mr. Brent grew more comfortable, he began to talk about his partner and how he was about to help him move to the eastern part of the U.S. I was shocked at first, Mr.

Brent had never made a mention of his family- let alone a significant other. I began to hear more frequently about the details of his life- which he adored talking about. My curiosity grew and I asked him why he kept the majority of his identity a secret from co-workers and students. From what I now know about Mr. Brent, this is surprising. He is very inviting and open, so when I initially learned about him keeping this part of himself a secret, I wanted to understand more. As someone with no experience of having to keep my personal identity a secret, I could not understand why he had to do so. I knew what an amazing educator he was, why would anyone care about anything else? Looking back, I am aware that this is a very naive viewpoint, but at the time his response broke my heart. He told me how there were no protection clauses concerning sexuality in the school employee handbook, and how he feared the backlash of parents with the current political climate. He figured it would just be easier for him to keep his identity a secret and continue to teach students to the best of his ability. Mr. Brent has an impeccable ability to navigate his social and political stance in not only the realm of education but life in general.

LGBT+ Issues and Legal System

In the past five years, accomplishments have been made regarding the legalities of this conversation. In June 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that workplaces could no longer discriminate against LGBTQ+ employees, including educators (“Momentous,” 2020). In 2021, Lonnie Billard was asked not to resume his teaching duties after announcing his engagement to his partner (Weiner, 2023). Lonnie sued the school, and the courts ruled in his favor. Even later, in 2003, a Utah Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Wendy Weaver, a teacher in Utah for twenty years, was not breaking any

laws. Wendy is a lesbian, and those who called for her termination felt that she was not a fit role model to be around children. The courts decided that they had no right to fire Wendy, nor to make the school board do the same. Wendy still teaches today at the same school, believing that this win is important for all teachers (American Civil Liberties Union, 2003). There are countless other court cases that go along with the ones mentioned about that all have varying degrees of success.

The Problem

The relationship that I built with Mr. Brent is what made me question the ways in which gay and lesbian educators position themselves in the classroom. For the past year, I had watched one of the best educators this career field has ever seen, and he did so with care to ensure that his personal identity would not impact his time in the classroom. It set me on a mission to try and open the eyes of those around us that gay and lesbian educators are doing some of the best work, sometimes even better than their straight counterparts, in shaping the minds of our future generations.

All across the United States, we have some of the top educators guiding our students to success and leading them to bright futures. These educators go through teacher preparation programs and relentlessly put in the work that is necessary to teach future generations.

For many of the students within these schools, school is a place where they find themselves. Students begin to figure out who they are as people and what it means to be a person in society within the four walls of a classroom. They create identities and begin to share those identities with others. For the educators within those four walls, for some, sharing their identity could be career-ending. This also began the push for me to

start looking at the policies that are put into place for LGBTQ+ educators and the protections in school handbooks. Not only did I want to see the kind of policies that the state of Oklahoma had in place, but across the U.S. In a nation that oftentimes has to create incentives to bring people into its teaching profession, that same nation also seems to be willing to disregard an entire group of people as worthy for protection clauses.

The Importance

In the current educational environment, the positioning of gay and lesbian educators within an ideological context is complex and frequently deeply misunderstood. Despite the efforts made by many LGBTQ+ groups and the fact that visibility has increased, there is still an unknown territory when it comes to how gay and lesbian educators navigate their identities within the classroom. In this thesis, I seek to investigate the ways in which gay and lesbian educators work with their identity, interactions with students, and the perceptions the schools and students have of these educators. By looking at the identities of these educators, I aim to shed light on the complexities of gay and lesbian educators and how they ideologically navigate their identities in the classroom.

If for most educators the goal is to encourage and build up inclusive classrooms, it is necessary to understand the inclusivity of gay and lesbian educators within the classroom context. Teachers in general make an everlasting impact on the majority of the students that come into their classrooms- despite what their sexual orientation may be. Many times, the lives of gay and lesbian educators are either marginalized or overlooked in the grander sense of education. When we look at the ideological

positionality of these educators, we are able to amplify their voices and better understand them. With this type of visibility, gay and lesbian educators are seen and their voices are brought to the forefront of the conversation. When we take the time to understand the lives of these educators, we begin to create a more inclusive educational environment in which the students in these classrooms feel safe, supported, and respected.

When talking about how gay and lesbian educators position themselves in the classroom, it is almost impossible to not talk about social justice education. Looking at the political standpoints of any part of educators, we see how teachers in general are political forces. In LGBTQ+ educators specifically, looking at their positionality in the classroom allows the reader to see how they navigate power dynamics, challenge discriminatory practices, and promote equity for all their students. In talking to the participants in this research, being a cheerleader or a guide for their students was an important reason for their lean toward education. The ideological stance of any educator can impact educational policies and the decisions that are made at all levels of government. With this type of research, policymakers will be better able to understand the priorities and needs of LGBTQ+ educators and their students.

The Path to Understanding

Through the literature and one-on-one interviews, I have had with three different educators that identify as either gay or lesbian, I have built a comprehensive study of how gay and lesbian educators position themselves ideologically in the classroom. These personal conversations that I had with these three educators are the foundation of this work. Looking at the lives of other gay and lesbian educators, the policies that

are currently in place in schools across the U.S. concerning LGBTQ+ educators, the history of these educators, and teacher identity as a whole- the process of understanding begins. The understanding of gay and lesbian educators' presence in the classroom, and the deeper look at what their presence in the classroom means to the student body in which they teach.

Chapter 2

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

In terms of a gay or lesbian teacher's *ideological* positionality, there is not much literature that has been written. My contribution to the literature would be to understand the positionality of gay and lesbian educators in a classroom setting- and investigate how these educators ideologically position themselves in the classroom. Much of the literature discusses the challenges that LGBTQ+ educators face when navigating their sexuality in the classroom, and teachers in general deal with finding ways to place themselves politically in the classroom. Analyzing the current political atmosphere of the United States is an important part of the research. In order to understand where we are now, we have to study the inner workings of these systems. It is difficult to understand how the system has gotten to this point without looking at the history of lesbian and gay educators. Looking at the evidence and what was expected of educators in the past, will give the reader a clear understanding of how we have gotten to this point in education. Lastly, covering teacher identity is a necessity when talking about education, let alone gay and lesbian educators.

For this research, I used the University of Oklahoma's library database to search for articles. By using keywords like "gay educator," "lesbian teacher," etc. I was able to find an influx of articles. I also used the OU database to find books and pulled specific chapters from said books to aid in my research. Once I found articles and books that met the criteria, I read through them and noted important information. I kept all articles in a binder that was separated in terms of article information.

The Lives of Gay and Lesbian Educators

There are several articles written concerning lesbian and gay educators, and how they navigate their sexuality within the classroom, and sometimes out of it. Lineback and colleagues discuss the challenges that gay and lesbian educators face within their professional lives as well as their personal lives. This article only focuses on those teachers who identify as either gay or lesbian and focuses on evidence that has been proven in past research, that challenges emerged with all gay and lesbian educators, regardless of their level of openness with students (Lineback, et. al. 2016). The teachers in this study had a list of reasons as to why they may or may not be open to their students about their sexuality and they were centered around the perception of how students and parents might feel (Lineback et. al. 2016). Many felt that if they were to be open about their sexual identity with students and parents, it would negatively impact the relationships that they build in the classroom as well as ensuring that students stay in classes taught by a homosexual educator (Lineback et al. 2016). The conversations that the authors' had with the participants in this research are all centered around fear. The fear of losing job security, lacking the ability to build relationships, violence, and not being able to connect with colleagues on a personal level (Lineback, et al. 2016). Almost all of the participants in the article believed that having the support of work colleagues made work-life better when navigating their sexuality in the profession (Lineback, et al. 2016).

The notions of fear are continued in conversation in *Lesbian and Gay Educators Functioning in Heteronormative Schools* (Hooker, 2018). The “fear of being fired, fear of entering the field of education, fear of undermining authenticity, and fear of being outed and facing harassment and isolation (Hooker, 2018).” Each participant who participated

in the research gave pieces of their experiences as gay or lesbian educators in the field of education. They discuss the need to always be careful to remind themselves of their sexuality and position in the school every day (Hooker, 2018). The participants also discussed the fear of being labeled and the fear of how others might perceive them for being homosexual (Hooker, 2018). Isolation and the fear of not making connections within the workplace were also brought up when talking about their experiences (Hooker, 2018). Many of them talk about how they feel as though they have “betrayed” or “could not be authentic” with who they were within their professions (Hooker, 2018). Many of the same themes that other researchers have uncovered, come through in this article- such as how the author notes that the teachers in this particular article note that their heterosexual co-workers do not have to struggle with an internal debate on whether or not to have a picture of their partners on the desk (Hooker, 2018). *Can gay and lesbian educators form authentic relationships in their school communities*, the author looks at how gay and lesbian educator “form and maintain” relationships with their communities (Hooker, 2019). Hooker’s research revealed that all of his participants varied in openness to their schools. For the most part, Hooker’s participants were out to a few colleagues, but when it comes to the students and their families, they are mostly private (Hooker, 2019). This is a common theme amongst the literature over the lives of LGBTQ educators, this idea of privacy as safety.

In *“Because I live it”: LGB teacher identities, as professional, personal, and political*, Llewellyn (2023) discusses how many teachers who identify as homosexual have varying experiences throughout the school system. This research also looks at how teacher identity and the teacher experience interact with each other, particularly for

those teachers who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Some of the participants in this research discuss the need to be themselves and when schools do not give them that space, they feel they need to leave (Llewellyn, 2023). They go on to mention that an administration that is supportive of its teachers is also important, though state policies can frequently hinder administrations from offering appropriate support (Llewellyn, 2023). The teachers interviewed in this research talk about the push for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ members so that their students who identify as a part of the community can feel supported and valued in schools (Llewellyn, 2023).

Political Atmosphere

In the last several years, the United States has seen a push on what many southern states are calling “Don’t Say Gay” bills, which would effectively end the discussion of anything LGBTQ+ related in the classroom (Barbeauld, 2014). In *“Don’t Say Gay” Bills and the Movement to Keep Discussion of LGBT Issues Out of Schools*, the author discusses the implications that would be placed on students and teachers if a bill like this were to be passed. Implications such as the rise of suicide and bullying cases among students (Barbeauld, 2014). The author breaks down each “Don’t Say Gay” bill from two different states and unveils the homophobic language in each one, which receives pushback from the people within the state (Barbeauld, 2014). When it comes to educators being able to discuss contentious topics in the U.S., Rebecca Cooper Geller, in her article *Teacher political disclosure in contentious times: A “responsibility to speak up” or “fair and balanced”*, breaks down how teachers in the United States feel about discussing controversial social and political issues in the classroom. In this research, the participants that Geller used had different opinions on

teacher political disclosure. The spectrum varied, with some feeling they absolutely needed to ensure students were receiving factual information, to some feeling more comfortable speaking about European issues rather than American (Geller, 2020).

When he was elected in 2016, Trump promised to be the most “gay-friendly Republican president (Moreau, 2018).” People across the nation soon realized just how wrong that was once he began putting people into office who were openly homophobic or transphobic (Moreau, 2018). *Trump in Transnational Perspective, Insights from Global LGBT Politics*, compiles Trump’s first years in office and the policies he put into place that drastically devalued the LGBTQ+ community. When we look at the political climate within the United States, it is no shock to anyone why gay and lesbian educators are careful with their positionality in the classroom. With so much stacked against these educators and no help from people of power, it is no wonder why some chose to hide their identities.

As of 2020, the United States Supreme Court ruled that workplaces could no longer discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or sexual identity (“Momentous,” 2020). Landmark decisions like this are monumental, but there are still strides to be made at the community level to ensure the support of our educators.

The History

Anyone who is an educator, regardless of sexuality, will tell you that the profession of teaching is one of the most heavily policed professions. Not just by the district or school administrations, but by parents, students, and sometimes even colleagues. Imagine not being a part of the heteronormative preferences that come with teaching, the scrutiny only intensifies. In the chapter, “*Like a Fox Guarding the*

Henhouse": *The History of LGBTs in the Teaching Profession* in the book, *Schools Out: Gay and Lesbian Teachers in the Classroom*- the author discusses the evolution of education and how we see it today. Education was originally seen as a "last resort" for men wanting to make a name for themselves (Connell, 2014). In the late nineteenth century, we began to see the shift that is more women coming into the teaching profession and making it seen as though it was meant only for women (Connell, 2014). It is often that people equate teaching with maternal aspects such as nurturing, empathy, and motherly. When men decided to re-enter the profession, many of them came in with the same qualities, therefore raising eyebrows (Connell, 2014). Originally, teachers were required to sign morality contracts, and if they broke the contract it was cause for firing (Connell, 2014). In this chapter, the author continues through the decades with various programs that were put into place, the violence that gay and lesbian teachers endured, and the feelings that came along with those actions.

How homosexual teachers conduct themselves within public schools has been a talked about subject among historians since the twentieth century. One historian, Karen L. Graves, in her book, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers*, analyzes the Johns Committee, a conservative group, and the deep investigation they took on Florida public schools. These investigations took place between the years of 1957 and 1963, in which they removed specific teachers, whom they felt identified as homosexual, from their positions inside the school, as well as had their license to teach revoked (Graves, 2009). The committee's main argument was that homosexuality was spreading throughout their school systems, and by removing these teachers from their positions as teachers, the group would be saving the children within

the schools. The group used tactics such as coercion and intimidation during their interviews to get the answers that they wanted (Graves, 2009). In the interviews, one can immediately sense the tone of the interrogation based on the immensely personal questions that these school officials were asked to answer. These questions were not questions that school administrations should ever ask of their employees- questions about their sex lives and sexual preferences (Graves, 2009). The book gives a well-rounded view of the thoughts that were held by conservative officials inside of the school and their general feelings towards the gay and lesbian teachers working among them.

Another historian, E. F. Litton wrote an article titled, *Voices of Courage and Hope: Gay and Lesbian Catholic Elementary School Teachers*. Though the article was published in 2001, many of the teachers interviewed have experience with teaching in the early 90's climate surrounding homosexual teachers. In the article, Litton interviews homosexual teachers who are within the Catholic school system. Litton outlines the hostilities, such as the looks, comments, and outright fear for their lives, that these teachers would have experienced inside the Catholic schools and the absolute worst fear of being found out (Litton, 2001). In this article, Litton showcases the fear and sadness these teachers faced due to the system that they were teaching in. This piece shows that the same negative feelings were not just confined to the public school system. Writings such as Graves and Littons, are imperative for our understanding of the past. How they both describe the teacher's feelings of not being safe, shows us how the passage of time did nothing to diminish the fears of teachers who identify as gay or lesbian.

Theoretical Framework

In this thesis work, I will be using Teacher Identity as the theoretical framework. For this framework, I will be focusing on Kaplan et. al's. (2015) version of Teacher identity framework. Within that framework, teacher identity can consist of the following: (1) epistemological and ontological views, (2) aims and goals, (3) self-image, and (4) perceived possibilities of practice (Pishghadam, et. al., 2022). In using this lens, I will be able to explore the individual educator's beliefs, experiences, and self-perceptions and how those shape their teaching practices. Using this framework allows the researcher to analyze the balance between personal identity and the professional role of the educator. By looking at the aims and goals, perceived possibilities of the educator, and the self-image of the participants being interviewed in this research, the ideological positioning of the educators will be uncovered.

To answer the research question, I needed to understand how each participant structured their own teacher identity. Using the four components of this theoretical framework I was able to understand their positioning. In looking at the three teachers' epistemological and ontological views I am better able to understand their justifications for how they teach and behave in the workplace. This is the same for each teacher's aims and goals. Using this framework, I am able to structure the interview questions in a way that the three participants' goals for education can be identified. In my opinion, the self-image of the participant is the most important part for this particular research question. The participants that will be interviewed have structured their careers around how the public perceives them to ensure their safety and privacy. Their perceived possibilities of practice are another reason this framework will be employed. These

educators have morphed how they teach as a source of protection for themselves, and in Findings, the reader will see that.

Chapter 3. Methods

For this research, I was curious about how gay and lesbian educators position themselves ideologically in the classroom. I sought out gay and lesbian teachers that I knew personally but were located in different parts of the United States. To figure out the answer to my research question, I interviewed each participant with the same set of questions and analyzed their responses. Through these responses, I was able to create three individual case studies that are vastly different.

Participants

For this research, I focused only on those educators who identify as either gay or lesbian. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to look into the experiences of other educators in the LGBTQ+ community. When picking my participants, I knew those I chose on some level. I approached them, and let them know that I was researching how gay and lesbian teachers position themselves ideologically in the classroom and was wondering if they would be willing to be a part of that. I specifically sought after gay and lesbian teachers that I knew because I knew how sensitive these conversations were going to be, and I wanted my participants to feel comfortable on a personal level. Though I know they are anonymous, it makes me proud to have the voices of people I consider to be friends will be heard.

Mrs. Q

Participant number one is a woman who lives in central Oklahoma and identifies as a lesbian. She has been a health teacher for the past two years as well as a girls' basketball coach. This was her second career, as she was in the military for fifteen years before leaping into education. She is married and has three children, and she has

no intent on hiding her sexual identity from her students or the staff at the school she works in. I have had the privilege to work with her for the past year and build a long-lasting friendship. For this paper, she will be referred to as Mrs. Q.

Mr. Christian

Participant number two is a male who identifies as gay. He currently lives in Houston, Texas, and has taught seventh-grade social studies for the last several years. This participant was the most guarded and frequently morphed the questions in ways that he did not have to address his sexual identity. That statement will be apparent in the next chapter when reading the 'Findings' and how he answered each question. He does not teach in a particularly welcoming environment and is very concerned about safety. When taking a group of eighth graders to Washington D.C. last year, my group was lucky enough to be paired with his group of students. Through that experience, we were able to be acquainted and form a friendship. For this interview, he will be referred to as Mr. Christian.

Mr. Brent

Participant number three is also a male who identifies as gay. He currently lives in Virginia but is originally from Oklahoma. He has taught social studies in both states and in his interview, we get to see the differences in his answers about teaching in each state. In this interview, readers will be able to see the growth that this educator experienced when moving from Oklahoma to Virginia. I had the absolute honor of being his student teacher for a year while he worked in Oklahoma. Through that experience, I learned just what it meant to be a teacher. After teaching closely for a year, we became close friends. He will frequently be referred to as Mr. Brent throughout this paper.

Data Collection

I approached each participant with care, knowing that asking them to discuss their identities might be a challenge. When asking, I acknowledged the fact that this was a sensitive topic and that this could be triggering for some. Before the interview could happen, each participant signed a consent form in which they had to say yes or no, asking them if I could use direct quotes or video them, etc. Once those consent forms were signed, I was able to print them and move forward to the interviews.

Each participant was interviewed one-on-one and had the opportunity to decide how they wanted their interviews to be conducted. Participant number one chose to have her interview in person and in her classroom. Due to the fact that participants two and three currently live out of state, they chose to have their interviews take place via Zoom. They were asked a series of nineteen questions that ranged from how they navigate their sexual identity in the classroom to how they handle classroom discussion in general.

Interview Questions

- Are you aware of the school's policies regarding discrimination, diversity, inclusion, and nondiscrimination?
- Have you ever been accused of promoting an agenda in the classroom because of your sexuality?
- When it comes to addressing negative comments from students or parents, are you passive or do you interact with the comment?
- Would you consider yourself a "social justice educator?"

- Do you feel encouraged or discouraged to disclose your sexual identity to your students/school?
- How much do you focus on this idea of a “classroom community?”
- What are your main goals as an educator?
- What does a “safe classroom” look like to you?
- How comfortable are you with teaching controversial issues?
- How important is it for your students to know your identity?
- If you are out to your students, how do you address that with them?
- Why did you become an educator? What did that process look like for you?
- Are there any particular strategies that you use when addressing things like diversity or to promote understanding of controversial topics?
- Does being in the LGBTQ+ community influence your philosophy on teaching?
- Have you encountered any negative situations regarding your sexual orientation since becoming an educator? Any positive ones?
- Do you promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity in your classroom? If so, in what ways?
- Are you a part of any LGBTQ+ groups at your school?
- How do you position yourself politically in the classroom?
- How do you encourage classroom discussion, how do you ensure that dominant voices are not the only ones being heard?

Each interview took between thirty and ninety minutes. Once they were finished, I sat and transcribed each interview. Unfortunately for me, I am not what some would call technologically literate, so I transcribed each interview by listening to and typing each individual interview. For each participant, it took me about four hours to transcribe each

interview. Once the interviews were transcribed, I was able to analyze my data. I did the initial run-through, just reading and noting similarities and differences in each interview. Once that was finished, I read through them again to try and find any themes that were common across all the participants. I was able to code the interviews in a few different ways; school support, safety, joy, fear, inclusivity, political stance, perspectives, and classroom community. Through these codes, I went back and began highlighting the places in which I saw the obvious correlation to the codes. Once the highlighting was complete, I went back through and made notes in the margins to show a connection to the codes. Finally, after I finished coding, I wrote paragraphs for each code explaining what I found in each interview.

Data Analysis

When I decided to take on this research question, I wanted to ensure that I gave the participants the respect that they deserved. I did not want to lump all of the data that I found into one sterile research paper. I felt that each story had to be heard, and the best way for me to do that was to write case studies for each participant. When writing their studies, I wanted to start their stories with quotes that set the tone for each individual story. Once the interviews were completed for each individual, I sat and wrote individual summaries that I took away from each study. This allows me to use the real-life experiences of gay and lesbian educators to showcase how they ideologically place themselves in the classroom setting. It allows me to show how these educators navigate their identities, beliefs, and values in the classroom.

Chapter 4. Findings

In this chapter, I focus on the interviews that I conducted with each participant. Each interview was centered around finding out how three gay and lesbian educators ideologically position themselves in the classroom. Highlighting each interview was an important part of this process, each experience is different, and how each teacher ideologically positions themselves within a classroom setting is different, but they share many similarities. In understanding how these educators conduct themselves, we challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions about gay and lesbian educators. Using real-life experiences of gay and lesbian educators promotes understanding and empathy for our teachers. Finally, representation. These interviews show that, to their core, gay and lesbian teachers are just people who want to do good things for their school and community, and that they truly do have a place in education.

Mrs. Q: “The Inability to Hide”

“I am not a person that is going to shy away from stuff. If people have something to say I will do it as professionally as possible. Sometimes it is just education, so I am here to help educate, even if they disagree.”

If you were to walk down the back of the Freshman Academy in a suburban high school in Central Oklahoma, you might be lucky enough to meet Mrs. Q. You might hear her laughing with students or handing out fist bumps to anyone who walks by. She teaches health to a wide variety of students who vary in age. Unlike the two male participants in this study, Mrs. Q cannot quite hide her sexual identity, so she embraces it. She refers to herself as a masculine lesbian and has no qualms talking about her wife

or her children. This is not Mrs. Q's first profession, she was in the military for fifteen years before walking into the education field, and during the time of this interview, she had only been teaching for two years.

Becoming an Educator

Mrs. Q talked about how she has always been involved in things that serve the community, which is one reason why she joined the military. When she decided to retire from the military, she was looking for something that would maintain her financial stability. Freshly out of the military, she tried a job at Amazon but it did not feel right to her. She admitted that the money was great, but she had always wanted to be involved in some sort of social service where she could help young people. She talks about how she grew up in a single-parent household and that she did not have access to much growing up. In the military she had gone out and seen the world, so she knew that she wanted other kids to understand that no matter their background, life is what you make it, but you have to go out and get it.

Being Comfortable

When I asked Mrs. Q if she felt encouraged or discouraged to disclose her sexual identity to her school, all she told me was that she did feel encouraged to disclose that. Her being that comfortable, prompted me to ask how she addresses her sexuality with her students. This was her response:

“Well honestly, I just do it like any other teacher when they are describing themselves. You know, like ‘Hey, I am married, Here are some pictures of my wife and my kids.’ You know, I kind of go through it that way. If someone brings it up and says ‘Wife?’ Yes,

yes I have a wife. I have pictures of her and my family on the walls,
just like any other teacher would.”

This was such a contrast compared to the other two participants in the study who seemed to take on this role of the super teacher persona to try and hide their sexual identity, Mrs. Q openly embraced it.

Since she felt comfortable telling her students that she was married to a woman, I was curious if she felt it was important for students to know her sexual identity. She tells me that she does not feel as though it is abundantly important to her. She knows that students struggle with their own identities, so she feels like when she does share about her wife and kids, it is giving those students who struggle an opportunity to see the future. A future in which those students that identify as gay or lesbian have the opportunity to have, what society would consider, a traditional family unit- minus the same-sex marriage. She does not push her marriage or life on her students, but she feels as though representation is important. When asked if being a part of the LGBTQ+ community influences her philosophy on teaching at all, she tells me that she does not think so. She says: “I am just me.”

Confronting the Negativity

Mrs. Q does not necessarily see negativity about her sexuality in the classroom, but she has experienced negativity as a high school girl’s basketball coach. She says that most of the parents who have a problem with her sexuality will mostly ignore her completely. With the little interaction that she has had with these parents, Mrs. Q thinks that she knows the root of the problem. Many of the girls on the basketball team either identify as lesbian or bisexual, and those parents feel as though Mrs. Q might have

something to do with that. These parents think that because their daughters spend so much time with Mrs. Q, her sexual identity is rubbing off on them. Mrs. Q's family comes to every game, so these parents and these students see that her family is very present and they are not going anywhere.

Ideological Stance

Mrs. Q focuses on the classroom community by ensuring that her classroom feels like a family. In health class, many of the topics that they discuss can be personal, so she wants students to feel like her room is a place where they can feel safe. She wants the students in her classroom to feel like they can be themselves without judgment. This foundation makes teaching controversial issues in the classroom much easier for Mrs. Q. She enjoys teaching about controversial issues because of the conversations that the students can have. In these conversations, the students are open about what they do and do not understand. Mrs. Q is even able to help guide students through any misunderstandings they might have about topics and help them come to their understanding.

When it comes to positioning herself politically in the classroom, Mrs. Q stays neutral. She says: "I don't. I stray away from politics. Honestly, I am not as educated on certain politics anyway. I don't talk about politics; this is health anyway." When it came to discussing whether or not she identified as a social justice educator, her sentiments were almost the same. "I mean, I guess more passively, like if something pops up and there is a comment made by a student or something like that I am going to address it. I will educate them based on what I know, but actively doing it every day, no."

Her goal as an educator is to be that trusted adult for those students who might not have one. She wants them to feel as though they can come to her with a problem, and she will help them or get the necessary help they may need.

Summary of Mrs. Q

Mrs. Q found the fulfillment and joy in education that she had been searching for after her time in the military. Helping to guide those students who might not have the stability at home helps her feel as though she has a bigger purpose than just teaching health class. Having the ability to show those students that the world still spins if you are gay, and that you still have the opportunity to live whatever life you want. With that mindset, Mrs. Q faces any negativity head-on. She does not let the opinions of others deter her from making a difference in her classroom. Mrs. Q proves that when you are unable to hide the qualities that make someone uniquely themselves and embrace those qualities, beautiful things can happen.

Mr. Christian: “Security”

“My first year, I had this mug with rainbow colors on it. Not even the rainbow flag colors, it had a three-colored rainbow and one of my co-workers was like, ‘I don’t think that you should put that out, you don’t want to get questions about it.’ That kind of set my tone.”

Mr. Christian teaches social studies in a classroom in Texas. He is a tall man who has a boisterous laugh and is always connecting with students on different levels. In his interview, Mr. Christian seemed to discuss being an educator overall, almost not acknowledging his sexuality unless specifically asked questions that had to do with it. As the reader will notice, many of the questions he molds into questions about teaching or teachers in general. Like our third participant in this study, Mr. Christian puts much of

his energy into being a super teacher, one that almost overcompensates due to his identity as a gay man. In the interview, I could get the sense that talking about his sexuality and his being an educator was uncharted territory.

Fear

Mr. Christian has never read the policies regarding his school's policies on discrimination, diversity, and non-discrimination, though he does tell me that he knows they exist. He tells me that he does not necessarily feel discouraged to disclose his sexual identity, it is just something that he has to find balance with. He is not currently married, but he knows that he would like to be in the future. When he does get married, he would like to have the opportunity to place pictures on his desk with his partner. He struggles with this, on the one hand, he feels that it is not any of his student's business. On the other hand, he would like the opportunity to show his family off like any heterosexual teacher would do. In his school district in Texas, if he were to put pictures up with a future husband, he is not sure that his school district would back him if he were to encounter any public backlash.

Mr. Christian's fear of facing backlash does not come from what happens in the classroom, but from what he sees on the news. In his classroom, I was curious to know if he promoted any LGBTQ+ inclusivity practices- this was his response: "No, that makes me feel like a bad gay saying it, I wouldn't say that I promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity. I think instead, what I do is try to focus on inclusivity in general. I don't want to give any ammo."

Finding Ways to be Involved

In Mr. Christian's district, there are no groups for gay and lesbian students to get together; or groups like the Student Gender and Sexuality Alliances. Mr. Christian does sponsor the Dungeon and Dragons group at his school. The group was started by a student who preferred to be around adults versus kids his age, so he asked Mr. Christian if he would be the sponsor. Mr. Christian agreed and quickly discovered that the students joining this club were the same students who were struggling to make connections with other students. In Dungeon and Dragons, the students get the opportunity to be whoever they want to be. They try being other people; boys play as female characters and girls play as male characters. While they are playing, Mr. Christian is usually working on grading papers, however, he does listen to their conversations, so he does know that many of the students in the group do identify as gay. He explains to me that this is one of the more rewarding parts of his job, being able to give these students a space to embrace each other's differences and for them to unapologetically be themselves.

Educator Goals

For Mr. Christian, his goal as an educator is to make history as relatable as possible. He tells me about his own time throughout the education system and how much of the time he felt that history was just something that needed to be memorized. In teaching history, he is able to show that these events that happen throughout history affected real people and the events were not just these blimps in history. "It wasn't until I got to college and had my first history teacher that talked about people as if they were people and not just this idea that had to be met." With this mindset, Mr. Christian

creates the kind of classroom which students are able to be themselves. He focuses on the importance of people and their impacts.

Ideological Stance

Mr. Christian tells me that he emphasizes establishing a classroom culture. When asked if he considered himself a social justice educator, he said that he positions things or words in a way that students cannot weaponize. He does this so that students do not feel as though they can come back and use it later in the classroom so that they know certain actions are not tolerated. He feels as though school is where students get a lot of interaction outside their normal spheres. This idea of a classroom culture is influenced by his experiences in the LGBTQ+ community, {When asked if being in the LGBTQ+ community influences his philosophy on teaching}: “Honestly, maybe not my teaching as much as just my classroom management. I don’t know, it has helped me realize my struggle of how to figure out life as a gay person.” With this knowledge, he knows that most of his students perform better when they are placed in a group setting, therefore classroom discussions are an integral piece of his classroom dynamic.

These classroom discussions are facilitated mostly by the students. Mr. Christian will present the topic and have the students discuss it within their groups. He will go around to each group and participate in the conversations that are going on around him. In doing this, he ensures that all voices are heard in his classroom, not just the dominant ones. He feels as though these groups offer an opportunity for those students who tend to sit in the background and will feel more comfortable in small group settings. The topics range from politics to general trivia about students within the groups he creates.

With most classroom discussions in a social studies classroom, the conversation often leads to Mr. Christian being asked about his political stance. Mr. Christian does not feel as though the students need to know about what his political views are, preferring to stay as neutral as possible. “Truthfully, I think that the best policy is for our kids to not know. To be able to walk from our classroom and not even know.” He tells me that when discussing political points, he will often put memes (pictures that often make students laugh) on his slides. When doing this, Mr. Christian will put political memes from both sides to not ostracize a group of people. With these pictures, it often breaks up the monotony of the content.

Mr. Brent: “The *Right School*”

“I became an educator because I really believe in students. I love kids, and I wanted to do something that would help support them. Education is so foundational and instrumental, and I believe that with a strong education, you can get a lot in life.”

The last participant that I interviewed was Mr. Brent. Readers from earlier might remember him from the introduction, where I expressed he was the reason for diving into this research. Mr. Brent has had the opportunity to teach in two very different states in the United States and has had vastly different experiences in both areas. His subject area is social studies, and he has taught at different levels such as middle school and then moving up to high school. In his interview, Mr. Brent discusses the differences in confidence at each school. He started out teaching in a rural community in Oklahoma and then moved on to teach at a suburban school in Oklahoma that was much larger. After teaching in Oklahoma, Mr. Brent got the opportunity to move to Virginia and teach at one of the top-performing schools in the state.

Becoming an Educator

I wanted to know what factors played into Mr. Brent's becoming an educator. Since I knew him personally, I knew the bullet point version, but I wanted to hear the full story. He tells me about his grandmother and how she is an educator, and that even at the age of eighty, she is still tutoring students. His first choice for a career was to become a pediatrician. He went to school and quickly realized that he did not enjoy science and changed his major to politics. Mr. Brent tells me several times that he is a people pleaser, and being in politics meant that at least fifty percent of the people he would be interacting with would not like him. Knowing that, he decided that politics was not for him either.

In college, he decided to take a course that taught the Great Depression and New Deal. In this class, he was able to do some archival research, research out in the field, and connect the things that they were doing to the content. All of these things made Mr. Brent excited about the idea of education, so he enrolled and prepared. He tells me that from the moment he walked into the classroom, the students were what he enjoyed the most. He enjoyed the relationship-building, and all the moments that had nothing to do with the curriculum, but just getting to know and understand his students. Letting his students know that he values them and that he is there for them.

His main goals as an educator are to make sure that every student who walks through the door knows that they have a place in his classroom, to provide a quality education to all students, and lastly to ensure that every student who walks through the door finds something interesting or something they connect with in the content. He tells me that he wants his students to take risks and that he wants them to fail. He wants them to fail so that they understand that as long as they are moving forward in their

endeavors, things will happen. They will not always get it right, but as long as they keep going, things will be okay. It is just one big learning process.

School Support

When we discussed the topic of school support, Mr. Brent had varying perspectives on what that looked like in all the schools he taught at. I was curious if Mr. Brent knew anything about the discrimination policies that the schools he had worked in regarding sexual orientation. He started by telling me about his experiences in the smaller, rural school in Oklahoma. He knew that the community was more rural, so he was careful not to give anyone ideas that he might be a gay man, even though he did tell me that he did not look into whether or not there were certain policies put into place regarding sexual orientation. When he moved to the bigger suburban school in Oklahoma, Mr. Brent decided to look at the school handbook and see what it had to say about sexual discrimination policies. To his surprise, the school's handbook had nothing to say about sexual orientation nor what the policies for discrimination for sexual orientation were. He told me that it set the tone, and he knew that he had to be careful again and not give anyone any ideas.

Once Mr. Brent moved to Virginia, he admitted that he did not look at the school's discrimination policies. When I asked him why, he told me that he already knew the school valued things like diversity, equity, and inclusion. When he went to tour the school, the school had pride flags hanging in the hallways and signs that talked about inclusion and equity. He felt more supported immediately. As the interview progressed, I could tell that Mr. Brent was more comfortable discussing his experiences in Virginia as a teacher versus while he talked about his time in Oklahoma. The inflection in his tone

changed, and he became more animated, he was describing a place that seemed to strengthen him.

I moved on to ask him that even though some of these schools did not include verbiage about sexual orientation in their staff, regardless of if he had ever felt supported by the school and its staff to share that part of himself. In Oklahoma, he felt discouraged and he hid that part of himself at all costs. He knew that it would impact the relationships with students and parents. He felt that given the current political environment in Oklahoma, it just was not a very accepting place. Once he started building a working relationship with his co-workers, he felt comfortable coming out to a select few in the suburban Oklahoma school, but that it was an isolated few.

When he made the move to Virginia, Mr. Brent told me that he was not going around and telling everyone his sexual identity, but he did feel more encouraged. He even put a pride sticker on his board- something he would have never done in Oklahoma. In Virginia, Mr. Brent also kept pictures of his partner on his desk and said that if a student had asked if that were his partner, he would feel comfortable telling the truth. He reiterated that his sexual identity was not something he was just openly sharing with everyone, but he felt that he could be less hidden in the school in Virginia.

Safety

I asked Mr. Brent if he had ever experienced negative behavior or comments from students or parents regarding his sexuality. He could not remember an instance in which anyone was outright derogatory to his face, but he knew that parents in the suburban school in Oklahoma had requested that their child not be placed in the same room as a gay educator. He tells me that his sexuality is something that he always has

to be aware of, and he is always assessing the communities in which he is teaching and knows that he will have to be careful the majority of the time. The constant worrying about if a parent finds out or the school finds out and they start to look or treat you differently. He explains that people feel a certain way about who you love or who you are, and you have to be aware of your community, even your colleagues. Mr. Brent tells me that teachers in general have to be careful, regardless of sexual orientation. He says that teachers are constantly being watched to see if we will mess up, and how everything we say can be turned against us.

I moved on to ask Mr. Brent what a safe classroom looked like to him, even if the school itself might not be the most welcoming. A safe classroom for Mr. Brent looks like a place in which students feel valued, and it feels like a space where they can share their thoughts, beliefs, and ideas without encountering judgment. He goes on to talk about the bison activity that I mentioned in the introduction, and how that activity helps him ensure that students understand there are multiple perspectives in the classroom, and that it is a safe space to share those perspectives. He talks about the importance of amplifying student voices so that students feel included and that dominant voices are not the only ones being heard. This is why the idea of classroom community is of utmost importance to Mr. Brent.

Ideological Stance

To build relationships with students, Mr. Brent feels as though students should know a little bit about who their teacher is. He wants them to know a little about himself, but not everything. Sexuality is not something that he would openly share with his students, but things like his love for football, family, or antiques are all things that he

would share. He feels as though that is enough when it comes to the personal level of identity. This conversation led me to ask whether or not being a part of the LGBTQ+ community influenced his philosophy on teaching, and he had this to say:

“Yes, because I think that being in a marginalized community really have you look at the curriculum. I know that recently when people are looking at textbooks or banning books, and you already see that LGBTQ+ voices are not really in the textbooks- the reasons they are not there are because some people feel as though it is controversial or they may disagree with the beliefs. There are people who are part of the community that has made an impact and a positive for the development of the *country*- so why are we not including them because they are gay?”

He goes on to talk about how leaving out the voices of LGBTQ+ people has to change. Being a part of the community has made him want to elevate voices, and he wants to create an environment that supports students and that his classroom is a space in which students can be themselves.

I asked Mr. Brent how comfortable he was when it came to teaching controversial issues in the classroom. He reiterated that, given the current political environment, teaching controversial issues in the classroom can be tricky. If he can connect whatever they are talking about to the standard, he feels like he is in the safe zone to discuss and teach the topic. When talking about controversial issues, he makes sure to leave himself and his opinion out of it. His exact words were:

“My opinion does not matter to them. Whatsoever. I just try to be

out of it completely because at the end of the day it is not for them to know my opinion. Students always ask though- what do you think about it? I always play devil's advocate because I think that even if you believe something so strongly, but you can hear the other side, you are helping yourself by learning and listening."

With controversial issues, it takes students to understand multiple perspectives for learning to take place. Due to not expressing his opinion on controversial issues, Mr. Brent stays as neutral as possible when it comes to placing himself politically in the classroom. He lets them know that he is an active participant in government elections, and he encourages students to do the same when they come of age. He is not concerned with how his students identify politically, he only gets concerned when students become derogatory towards one another because he wants students to feel important in his classroom.

I asked Mr. Brent if he had ever considered himself to be a social justice educator and it was another instance in which he had varying experiences. He tells me that he has evolved in terms of being a social justice educator. While in Oklahoma, Mr. Brent felt that if he were to engage in social justice practices, he would have ended up on the news or would get him in trouble with his school. When he moved to Virginia, he realized that social justice education was more accepting and he realized how important it was to him. He became the co-sponsor of the Equity Coalition at his school in which they practiced restorative justice. Once he made the move to Virginia, he felt more comfortable with understanding these programs and getting involved.

Importance of Change

In Mr. Brent's experiences, he felt as though he had zero school support while living in Oklahoma. When he made the move to Virginia, he felt highly supported and began to get involved in school groups that promoted things like equity and inclusivity. In Oklahoma, Mr. Brent did not feel as though it was an accepting community for him to share his sexual identity, except with an isolated group of individuals within those communities. He talks about how teachers in general need to be careful with the things that they say and do in the classroom because we are always being watched.

Mr. Brent found joy in education and teaching students. He focuses on building strong classroom communities and ensuring that the students in his classroom feel valued. He emphasizes classroom discussion as a way for students to build that classroom community, and that he has evolved as an educator over the years when it comes to finding strategies that work. When he builds these strong foundations in his classroom, he can discuss things that might be controversial and students understand different perspectives. When it comes to his own beliefs, Mr. Brent feels as though neutrality is the best policy. In staying neutral, he feels as though students will not be persuaded one way or the other, but will listen to the facts and make their own informed decisions.

Moving from Oklahoma to Virginia allowed Mr. Brent to break the constraints that the state of Oklahoma often puts on its LGBTQ+ educators. He was able to flourish and become the educator that not only his students needed, but he needed as well. Having built a friendship with Mr. Brent, it has been an honor and a privilege to watch this growth take place.

Summary of Findings

The three teachers that I interviewed all have similar ideological stances when it comes to teaching political or controversial topics in the classroom. Each teacher feels that either not discussing or remaining neutral is the best policy. The reasoning for that viewpoint changes, with one teacher not wanting to discuss controversial or political issues due to not understanding them at capacity, another feeling as though classroom discussion allows students to form their own conclusions, and then an educator that feels as though the students just do not need to know.

In this research, I had one participant who challenges the traditional image of a teacher by being openly gay and accepting herself for who she is, another teacher who feels as though it is in his best interest to remain anonymous in his sexuality, and then finally an educator that had to move to a different state to finally feel comfortable. This research shows that some gay and lesbian educators face challenges in showing their sexual identity in educational settings. No matter the case, every one of these educators mentioned students as being the leading reason as to why they became or were educators. They have dedicated years of training and classroom time to be able to help guide students and show them their value. Each participant openly stated that the students were the best part of their job, valuing them over the curriculum at times.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this research was to identify how gay and lesbian educators ideologically position themselves within the classroom setting. From the interviews, two of the male participants take extra care in ensuring their personal lives stay exactly that, personal. They do this by taking on the personality of the super teacher, meaning, they develop innovative projects for students, help build the school culture, and can always be found supporting a sport that is in season. This allows the attention to be taken off of their sexual identity and allows them to embrace their identities as an educator while simultaneously hiding their identities as gay men who happen to be educators.

In the case of Mrs. Q, she did not allow the pressures of societal norms to hide her sexual identity or her family. In her case, hiding was inevitable. Mrs. Q presents herself as a masc lesbian and speaks freely about her wife and children. This allows her to be more relaxed in her classroom, and she forms deep emotional bonds with all students, especially the ones who identify as LGBTQ+. It would be interesting to expand this research to see if that is the case for all lesbian educators, or if it is just the case for Mrs. Q. With her being masc presenting, it could just be that she is more comfortable in her skin since she has never had to hide who she is.

The outcomes of each of the interviews varied when it came to how these educators ideologically placed themselves in the classroom. In the case of Mrs. Q, she chooses to be open and honest. She is willing to answer any and all questions, to an extent when it comes to sharing her beliefs. She admits when she does not have enough knowledge on a topic and tries to keep things in line by creating a classroom community in which her students feel as though they are a family. Mr. Christian completely hides his identity

and, ideologically, feels as though secrecy or privacy is the best policy. He focuses on classroom discussion and ensuring all voices are heard. By creating fun and interactive assignments for his students, he can make history a more tangible thing for his students. In the case of Mr. Brent, geography played a huge part in his stance in the classroom. While in Oklahoma he felt as though he was only able to be the teacher that the communities in which he served would allow him to be. That meant his ideas on social justice or his own identity needed to stay hidden. However, when he makes the move to Virginia he can actively participate in organizations that support social justice and even sponsor some. He can share a bit more about his life, even though he is not concerned about whether or not his students know he is gay, he is not afraid of them finding out either. Giving students the space to express their beliefs without feeling shamed by ensuring his classroom feels like a community that is supported. In Virginia, Mr. Brent can bloom into an educator who can wholly support his students and embrace a pedagogy that was unattainable in Oklahoma.

Knowing these educators is a privilege. Through the process of this research, I have been able to understand better and support my fellow educators. This has allowed me to spread my findings to others who share some of the same misconceptions in the mainstream media about our gay and lesbian educators. I can be a better ally and work towards helping my school be a more inclusive environment. Implementing more inclusive LGBTQ+ content in the curriculum, discussing the implications of this research with the administration, and encouraging students to embrace themselves are all ways that I and others can ensure that we are supporting our educators.

Implications

As a result of this research, one can see that there are opportunities for improvement regarding the need for better policies that are more inclusive to LGBTQ+ educators. Not only is this a state issue, but a national issue. These policy reforms can take place starting at the district level. Districts could begin to integrate professional development in which they teach strategies to better support those colleagues and students who identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Once the professional developments are implemented, a case could be made for implementing different pedagogical practices. With these new pedagogical practices, gay and lesbian educators could potentially incorporate their identities into their teaching practices. When incorporating their identities, districts could begin to take a look at district materials and implement an LGBTQ+ curriculum to encourage more representation.

With more representation, a case for these more inclusive pedagogical practices could be made. Encouraging this inclusivity could bring about changes for both teachers and students. With inclusivity, we allow our gay and lesbian teachers to be wholly themselves. That would mean instilling confidence in our teachers and embracing them for who they are in their entirety. When our teachers can be confident in their identities, it translates to students that they can be wholly themselves without the fear of societal backlash. From what was uncovered in the three interviews that took place in this research, the student experience is the most important for educators. As a teacher myself, what I have learned is that school is where students come to find out who they are, and often they use it as an escape from pressures at home. Equipping educators with the tools and environment to be themselves would only build up the confidence of students the same way.

We can begin equipping in-coming educators by implementing more LGBTQ+ representation in pre-service courses. With this representation, educators go into the education realm already equipped with understanding and the tools to support their colleagues and students. When we teach this knowledge to our pre-service teachers, we are instilling confidence in more ways than one. Not only do the pre-service teachers come in with confidence, they are able to deal out that same confidence when it comes to their co-workers and students.

Conclusion

My goal for this research took on many forms. The question has morphed into many different versions, and in that formation, I landed on how gay and lesbian educators position themselves ideologically in the classroom. From the research that I conducted, I have concluded that these three gay and lesbian educators want the same outcome for their students that straight educators want. All of my participants discussed the necessity for a classroom community. Each participant specifically discussed how they went about creating that atmosphere, and each one mentioned that the students were the best part of the job. That is not to say that I went into this research believing otherwise, but I made it a point to keep an unbiased opinion throughout my research.

In the United States and due to the teacher shortage, teachers are a hot commodity; one does not have to be a graduate-level researcher to find out that information. In this society, it is baffling that we still put limitations on our educators who do not fit into the mold of society's status quo. We have read three very different case studies where we see teachers doing their best. These teachers deal with the fact that they are severely underpaid and are reduced to talking points by legislators; they also

deal with the backlash from the communities that they serve. In turn, they are required to figure out how they will ideologically position themselves in the classroom due to sexual orientation. A case has been made here that gay and lesbian educators are not out to indoctrinate their students; they put time and consideration into how they ideologically position themselves in the classroom to ensure they are being the kind of educator our students need- real, understanding, and supportive. Our educators are real human beings. Human beings with real lives and emotions. Let's allow them to be that.

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