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To Share or Not to Share: The Impact of Disclosing Sexuality on Instructor Communication Apprehension, Instructional Effectiveness, and Student Relationships

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To Share or Not to Share: The Impact of Disclosing Sexuality on Instructor Communication Apprehension, Instructional Effectiveness, and Student Relationships

By

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the thesis committee.

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Abstract

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Previous research has explored the role LGBTQ instructor sexuality plays in the
classroom. However, little research explores the effects of disclosing LGBTQ
sexuality on the individual instructor. This study examines how LGBTQ instructors
report disclosures of their sexuality to influence their Communication
Apprehension, Instructional Effectiveness, and their Relationships with Students.
Qualitative interviewing methods were used to survey nine self-identified LGBTQ
college instructors from mid-size Midwest universities, and a grounded theory
approach was used to identify emergent themes pertaining to LGBTQ instructors'
experiences with their sexuality in the classroom. Interviewees reported varying
degrees of communication apprehension, instructional effectiveness, and
heightened personal relationships with students as a result of disclosing their
sexuality to students. Implications for critical and engaged pedagogy are provided.

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and interest you invested in me have truly shaped how I hope to contribute to higher education, and I will always look back on my time here as invigorating and inspirational.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Intuitively, one would expect that honest and open discussions in classes focusing on human communication would be respected, admired and encouraged. However, the myths and stereotypes that prevail in our society may not permit such respect, admiration, and encouragement (Ringer, 1994, p. 330).

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The day before I was supposed to introduce my students to the Story Corps project, I visited the organization's website to find a few interviews to play in class. I would soon be assigning my students a project requiring them to interview someone from a different generation, and the Story Corps website provided some great examples. As I perused the samples on the site, I stumbled upon an interview conducted with a man named Michael Levine who witnessed the Stonewall riots in 1969. Michael talked about the night he and his boyfriend saw dozens of police cars swarm around the gay-friendly bar they were at; about the drag queens who told the police officers they wouldn't leave; about the joy he felt when his gay friends held hands and kissed each other in public; and about how he felt the world would change and become a different place. The two-and-a-half minute sample interview had me in tears by the end so I decided to play it for my students the next day,

thinking it might inspire them to conduct meaningful interviews. I had no idea the level to which I would come to regret that simple decision.

I began my teaching career in August 2010 as a graduate student teaching two recitation sections of the Fundamentals of Communication course. I have found being a young teacher is not always easy; my students seem comfortable enough approaching me, but being only 1-2 years older than them provides a unique set of challenges. Perhaps the thing I struggle with the most is determining how much I should share about myself with my students. As a general rule, I try to keep my disclosures relevant to course material; if I can tell a personal story to make some concept more understandable, I will do it. However, I quickly discovered that my sexuality is the one exception to this rule. The day my students listened to Michael Levine's interview was perhaps the worst day of my teaching career to date; as they listened to Michael share the impact of the Stonewall riots on his relationship with his family, I was filled with a horrible sense of dread. I stood at the front of the classroom imagining my students thinking "Why would he play this interview?," "Is he gay?," "Why is he pushing this gay stuff on us?" "This is stupid," and so on. My anxiety was so intense I decided not to play the interview for my second class, instead choosing a generic story that lacked the emotional tug that I felt made Michael's story great. I also stumbled through the rest of the class period, having to repeat myself numerous times because I just could not seem to get it right. What I find interesting looking back on that day is how anxious I felt when I hadn't disclosed *anything* to my students, especially not that fact that I am gay.

      The question of whether to "out" oneself in the classroom is an important one, but academia seems to be split when it comes to the answer. Some scholars have argued for teachers to "come out" in lieu of the authenticity it creates in the classroom and the role teachers can play in reducing students' biases against gays and lesbians (Allen, 1995; Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002), while others caution against it for fear of the stigmatization that often follows (Barker & Reavey, 2009; Dew, Myers, & Wightman, 2005). As a new teacher, I assumed such disclosures were not important. After all, I had heard my own teachers use personal stories to elaborate on course material, often sharing things about their spouses or children; surely I could do the same. However, even though I assumed the problem would solve itself and I was making a big deal out of nothing, I found myself hesitating to share personal stories with my students and struggling to come up with other examples to help them understand course concepts. I found that the mere thought of sharing a story about a guy I dated—even if it provided a perfect example of one of Knapp's stages of relationship development—would fill me with such dread I would resort to telling a different story, often one from my relationships with women. If I did not have a story that would fit, I would use someone else's example. Often times I would resort to hypothetical situations that did not have as much clarity as my own experiences may have had. Feeling the need to make up examples or borrow them from others resulted in a lot more anxiety than I think I would have experienced if my sexuality was not an "issue" in my classroom. Unfortunately, I do not believe I am alone in this struggle.

LGBTQ instructors on college campuses across the country are faced with a dilemma regarding their choice to disclose their sexual orientations to students while teaching. Russ, Simonds, and Hunt (2002) reported that, when a potential instructor was perceived as gay by his student audience, students rated that instructor as significantly less credible, were more likely to offer critical comments on feedback forms, and were significantly less likely to suggest hiring the instructor in question. Despite vehemently urging LGBTQ instructors to continue to "come out" in the classroom, Russ, et al. demonstrated that students still view an instructor's sexuality as a salient—and often contested—issue when it comes up in class. While not disclosing one's sexuality may seem like the obvious choice, I believe withholding such a personal characteristic hurts an LGBTQ instructor's immediacy and inadvertently privileges heterosexual instructors who are free to disclose such information frequently without experiencing any negative ramifications. Further, I believe withholding one's sexuality can result in significant personal anxiety—or communication apprehension—which can be compounded in the classroom when faced with numerous students of various backgrounds and social positions.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is, quite simply, to explore how LGBTQ college instructors deal with the "issue" of disclosing their sexuality to their students. I am curious to see whether college instructors who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer choose to disclose their sexuality at all; when, how, and why they choose to do so; how such a disclosure affects their apprehension in the classroom; and how they feel disclosing their sexuality affects their interactions

with their students and their effectiveness as a teacher. Because discussions of any sexual orientation other than heterosexuality often evoke strong reactions from people for various reasons, LGBTQ instructors—who find themselves in a position where they may talk about their personal lives or share personal information about themselves in class—will undoubtedly consider whether they should disclose their sexual orientation in order to best manage classroom dynamic and maximize student learning. I want to explore how these instructors weigh the pros and cons of such disclosures.

This project is meant to contribute to the larger body of knowledge classified as Instructional Communication. I hope that this study will help us further understand more factors that may influence communication in the student-teacher relationship so that we may continue to improve our teaching and better help both ourselves and our students perform and interact to the highest standards possible. Specifically, my desire with this project is to explore another facet of self-disclosure in the classroom to determine how LGBTQ instructors may use strategic self-disclosure to better serve both themselves and their students.

It is also very important for me to approach this study from the *instructor's* perspective. Much of the research that has been conducted on instructional communication has been focused on the student, and rightly so. But in doing so, I worry that we, as a discipline, may be robbing instructors of their identities, instead constructing the instructor as an arrangement of various factors to be manipulated until the ideal "settings" are achieved. When we engage in instructional communication research solely for the purpose of discovering such configurations

as to maximize the student's performance in the classroom, I feel we render invisible the ways in which the student may influence the instructor's performance in return. Therefore, this study focuses solely on instructors and their perceptions of disclosing their sexuality to students.

Lastly, little attention has been given to the experiences of LGBTQ instructors in the classroom. Fassett and Warren (2007) argued "the classroom can be a site of profound oppression. To accept the notion of the classroom as 'just' anything… is to deny that the effects of the classroom are real" (p. 70). Historically, LGBTQ individuals have been rendered invisible and relegated to the fringes of society. In academia, LGBTQ individuals continue to face increased hardships pertaining to tenure, scholarship, and assessment and evaluation. In a system that continues to marginalize and oppress LGBTQ individuals, many LGBTQ instructors feel the "need" to fly under the radar, inconspicuously. hooks (1994) drew attention to this when she stated, "the choice to work against the grain, to challenge the status quo, often has negative consequences. And that is part of what makes that choice one that is not politically neutral" (p. 203). In response to this, I want this project to provide one more example—one more voice—for the LGBTQ community in academia. By furthering the dialogue concerning this stigmatized and marginalized population I hope to provide answers to future LGBTQ instructors who may be struggling to find and establish their positions within the academy, much like I have.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this study is to examine the effects LGBTQ instructors experience as a result of disclosing their sexualities to their students. Therefore, this

qualitative study will address three research questions pertaining to such

disclosures. Initially, my experience has led me to believe that choosing to disclose a

sexuality other than heterosexuality to one's students will result in a certain degree

of personal anxiety—or communication apprehension—on the part of the

instructor. However, how that apprehension will manifest itself is unknown. I begin

by posing the following research question:

RQ1: How do LGBTQ instructors experience communication apprehension when

disclosing their sexualities?

Additionally, I suspect that instructors do not take lightly the choice to

disclose or not disclose their sexualities to students. Undoubtedly LGBTQ

instructors decide that disclosing or not disclosing their sexualities to students

serves some purpose that they deem important, and make their decision to disclose

or not disclose their sexuality based on how effective they hope to be in the

classroom. To that end, I ask a second question:

RQ2: How do LGBTQ instructors view their instructional effectiveness as a result of

their choice to disclose or not disclose their sexualities?

Lastly, I believe disclosing one's sexuality to one's students in some way

influences the student-teacher relationship. Because students and teachers are in

somewhat continual communication with each other (through class discussion, one-

on-one meetings, submitted work and resulting feedback), disclosing information as

controversial as one's sexual orientation is likely to have an impact on LGBTQ

instructors' relationships with their students. Therefore, I pose a final research

question:

RQ3: How do LGBTQ instructors view their relationships with their students to be

influenced by their choices to disclose or not disclose their sexualities?

Précis of Following Chapters

With the rationale for this study clarified and the research questions posed,

Chapter Two consists of a review of the relevant literature that informed my

understanding of this study. In particular, the literature review includes such topics

as instructor communication apprehension, sexuality as an identity construct,

LGBTQ scholars in higher education, and the role of self-disclosure in the classroom.

This review also elaborates on the research void the present study will fill.

Chapter Three offers a discussion of the chosen research method for this

study and provide a theoretical justification for the use of that method: in-depth

qualitative interviews. Specifically, I examine the role of my own position within the

data collection process, my means of locating and soliciting research partners, and

my methods of capturing their experiences. Additionally, I discuss my use of

grounded theory to analyze the interview transcripts for emergent themes

pertaining to the research questions, as well as others that arose organically.

Chapter Four details the results of the analysis of this study. In this chapter, I

organize and present the findings garnered from my analysis. In particular, I provide

the answers to the research questions as they appeared from the analysis, as well as any recurring themes that emerged. Through the use of direct quotations as well as my own interpretation of transcript data, I attempt to capture the experiences of my research partners in text form.

Finally, Chapter Five provides a discussion of those results with implications for academics regardless of their sexualities. Additionally, I address the limitations of the present study as well as opportunities for future research agendas as they pertain to the findings of this study. The research voids that this study attempted to fill are addressed again in this chapter.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Young adults spend a majority of their lives in an educational institution, being taught and shaped by educators of various backgrounds and experiences. Because of their role in shaping the knowledge of young people, teachers are arguably some of the most influential role models we encounter. While educators have a number of reasons for entering the teaching profession, they cannot deny the inherent influence the teacher position affords them over their students. Despite this influence, however, most educators will acknowledge the role that their students play in (co)constructing the classroom environment. As a result of this mutual establishment of class dynamics, many instructors may, on occasion, experience communication apprehension in the classroom, particularly in instances where they perceive the students has having primary control of the class. For LGBTQ instructors, this may occur when their sexuality surfaces in class discussion. This study thus seeks to examine the relationship between instructor disclosure of sexual orientation and communication apprehension experienced by LGBTQ instructors. In order to better understand the impetus of this research program, a review of existing research relevant to the present study is provided here. This chapter will provide a theoretical justification for the present investigation by focusing on five areas of relevance: 1) a brief review of instructional communication as it pertains to the present study, 2) instructor communication apprehension, 3)

sexuality as an influential identity construct, 4) the role of sexuality in academia, and 5) self-disclosure in the classroom.

Instructional Communication Overview

By virtue of their trade, teachers are able to significantly affect the ways in which students view and interact with the world they live. The most successful teachers accomplish this by tailoring various aspects of their teaching to the students they are in charge of. Crucial to succeeding as an educator is to establish a sense of credibility with students. Teven and Herring (2005) explained that teacher credibility can lead to increased effectiveness in the classroom among other positive outcomes. While communication and education scholars have identified various components of teacher credibility, goodwill or caring has emerged as one important component influencing a student's perception of a teacher's credibility (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Being a caring, authentic teacher has been shown to act as a strategy to help students engage with course material personally and analytically (Allen, 1995). Allen and Baber (1992) further argued that being an authentic teacher means that individuals are "free to disclose who and what they are without harsh judgment," and that authenticity requires sensitivity (p. 383). One method of becoming an authentic teacher is the effective use of self-disclosure in the classroom.

Self-disclosure, among many purposes, can serve to humanize a teacher and make a teacher appear more approachable (Nunziata, 2007, as cited in Myers & Brann, 2009). Further, Cayanus (2004) argued that self-disclosure is one way of enhancing teaching effectiveness. However, communication scholars have pointed

out that self-disclosure should be used within reason; multiple studies have argued

that excessive self-disclosure can result in lower perceptions of teacher credibility

in students (Lannutti & Strauman, 2006; Myers & Brann, 2009). While every teacher

needs to be aware of the type and amount of personal information they disclose to

their students, LGBTQ instructors face a rather obvious and difficult decision—

whether or not to disclose their sexuality in the classroom.

Russ, Simonds, and Hunt (2002) explained marginalized status has

somewhat recently been identified as a variable that may cause instructors to lose

credibility with their students. In citing evidence that represents the

marginalization of female and non-White instructors, Russ et al. explained that gay

teachers face a similar threat. Despite the urge for gay instructors to disclose their

sexual orientation in lieu of numerous pedagogical benefits, Russ et al. cautioned

against the potential bias and hostility that may emerge upon disclosure of an

instructor's sexuality in the classroom.

To date, scholars have explored the relationships between an instructor's

disclosure of his/her sexuality and perceived credibility, student evaluations, and

the personal dissonance that instructors may face in choosing to disclose (Jennings,

2010; Russ, et al., 2002; Wright, 1993). However, no research was found that

explicitly examined the communication apprehension an LGBTQ instructor may feel

pre- or post-disclosure. Baiocchi-Wagner (2011) explained communication

apprehensive instructors may be perceived as less socially attractive, less assertive

or responsive, less competent, less composed, and less credible. In summary, any

instance of communication apprehension on the part of an instructor may have

serious negative repercussions not only for the instructor, but for the student audience. Because of the potential risk for increased communication apprehension LGBTQ instructors face in disclosing their sexuality in the classroom, it is crucial to develop a better understanding of the CA construct in teachers.

Instructor Communication Apprehension

Of the extant research that has been conducted regarding classroom dynamics, communication apprehension (CA) has received significant attention. Initially coined by McCroskey (1970) as a "broadly based anxiety related to oral communication" (p. 270), communication apprehension has been found to influence such factors as job preference, employment turnover, relationship satisfaction, attractiveness, credibility, and social networks (McCroskey, 2009). Further, CA has been studied extensively within the classroom context with the purpose of instructing teachers in how to help communication apprehensive students better succeed in classes that require oral presentations (i.e. public speaking courses). However, very little attention has been given to the study of CA from the instructor's perspective.

Research conducted on instructor communication apprehension has focused on the impacts of instructor CA on *students*, such as student perceptions of instructors, student behavior or performance, or students' development of CA (Baiocchi-Wagner, 2011). Kearney and McCroskey (1981) examined the relationships between teacher communication style, communication apprehension, and teacher effectiveness, and found that teachers who were perceived as highly assertive reported lower levels of trait CA. As a result, these teachers were viewed

as more decisive, challenging, and dynamic than teachers with higher levels of trait

CA. Baiocchi-Wagner (2011) also found instructor CA can manifest itself in face-

threatening acts from students such as questioning the instructor's expertise,

challenging the instructor's autonomy, and questioning the instructor's character,

all of which can further increase an instructor's apprehension in a specific context

or setting. Baiocchi-Wagner further reported that when faced with these acts from

students, instructors feel increased pressure to restore their face in the classroom

and recover from any negative repercussions of their initial apprehension. In

summary, scholars have found that instructors who do experience communication

apprehension can be subjected to negative repercussions from their students, and

instructors who do *not* feel generalized anxiety may still be subjected to context-

based apprehension in lieu of face-threatening acts from students.

  According to McCroskey (2009), trait communication apprehension

(orientation of anxiety or fear across general communication contexts) has been

distinguished from state communication apprehension (experiencing anxiety or fear

in specific communication situations but not others). While some instructors may

not experience significant levels of general trait CA, specific communication contexts

can elicit fear or anxiety that communication scholars have labeled state CA.

McCroskey explained that many people who may find themselves moderate or low

communication apprehensives may still experience significant state CA in various

situations. Among these situations, certain disclosures on behalf of instructors may

result in more fear or anxiety than other disclosures. Because sexuality can be a very

sensitive and difficult topic to breach, LGBTQ instructors appear to face a higher risk

of experiencing CA in the face of disclosing their sexual orientations in the classroom.

What may seem to be the obvious conclusion to draw from this review is that LGBTQ instructors should choose to not disclose their sexual orientations. However, Russ, Simonds, and Hunt (2002) point to the importance of trust and honesty in student-teacher interactions as well as the positive effects of being authentic and willing to disclose as reasons for instructors to share their sexual orientations with their students. However, choosing to disclose such information is highly personal and subjects instructors to possible sanctions in the classroom, which can result in difficulty negotiating various identities in their social and public spaces (Alexander, 2006). This "performative contestation" (Alexander, 2006) deters many instructors from choosing to disclose their sexualities. Therefore, a review of sexuality as it pertains to identity work is discussed next.

Sexuality and Identity

Scholars of various disciplines have conceptualized personal identity in different ways. Jung and Hecht (2004) explained that identity has been conceived by psychologists as central to self and self-concept, and by sociologists as social roles that influence social positionality. They further elaborated on the contribution that communication scholars have provided, describing identity as an enactment of self that individuals perform through everyday communicative practices. According to Jung and Hecht, "an individual's identity is created through internalization and negotiation of ascribed identities by others" and is co-created through communication with others (p. 266). Hecht (2002) explained that communication

rituals are the primary means of creating and expressing personal identity, and identified four "frames" of identity that conceptualize identity as a characteristic of 1) the person, 2) the enactment, 3) the relationship, and 4) the community. According to Hecht, identity is not only personal, but is enacted in social interaction, is mutually constructed with others whom we are in relationship with, and is communal. In the Communication Theory of Identity, Hecht further argued that these four identity frames are not independent, but rather interact with each other in a process he termed "interpenetration"—the separation or integration of the four frames of identity (p. 267).

Navigating these identity frames can be a strenuous task for any individual, especially when concerned with sexuality. According to Tierney (1997), "being openly gay is being in a constant state of preparation" (p. 95), and acknowledging the social responsibility that accompanies such an identity component. Bond, Hefner, and Drogos (2008) argued that understanding and appreciating one's sexual identity can be troublesome, particularly for individuals "who realize their sexuality may not fit societal norms" (p. 32). Bower and Klecka (2009) attributed this anxiety to the societal construct of heteronormativity, or "the assumption that heterosexuality is the common, default sexual orientation that does not warrant any specific attention, which makes it invisible" (p. 359). McNaron (1997) explained that "living in such a culture means that most people assume everyone is heterosexual, no matter how unlikely that becomes based on observable data" (p. 50). According to Bower and Klecka, part of this invisibility is the assumption that every person is heterosexual unless they make an overt contradictory statement.

Butler (1988) further blurred the lines of sexuality and "outness" by arguing that gender and sexuality are merely performances that we continually (re)enact; according to Butler, the system of compulsory heterosexuality that permeates many aspects of our society is both constructed and hidden "through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and 'natural' heterosexual dispositions" (p. 524). Butler further argued that gender and sexuality are constituted through acts that are performed, but these acts are not solely individual. Rather, "as a given temporal duration within the entire performance, 'acts' are a shared experience and 'collective action'" (p. 525), meaning the acts we do or perform that contribute to the construction of our genders or sexualities are acts that have been rehearsed and have been going on before we arrive on the scene. Further, Butler asserted that these constitutive acts take place within a "culturally corporeal space… within the confines of already existing directives" (p. 526). Butler's work thus highlights the larger cultural and societal framework that dictates—often covertly—how one is to "do" one's gender or sexuality. LGBTQ-identified individuals are often made explicitly aware of their social position within this framework as a result of their transgressive performances or their desire to do their sexualities right, for as Butler claimed, "those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" (p. 522).

Individuals from stigmatized social categories are often exposed to excess stress as a result of their social position (Meyer, 2003). Specifically, Hequembourg and Brallier (2009) argued that when individuals fail to conform to heteronormative expectations, they are often subject to sanctions. The strain and anxiety that LGBTQ

individuals experience as a result of these sanctions are internalized as "sexual minority stress" which can manifest itself in both positive and negative outcomes (p. 274). According to Hequembourg and Brallier, prejudicial events can result in sufficient sexual minority stress which may cause LGBTQ individuals to conceal their sexual identity in order to avoid experiencing further stress. Dew, Myers, and Wightman (2005) further elaborated socially-constructed negative attitudes toward LGBTQ orientations can affect heterosexual *and* LGBTQ individuals, making the performance of sexuality even more complicated regardless of one's sexual orientation.

Because of the stigma associated with LGBTQ orientations, many LGBTQ individuals experience apprehension when choosing to disclose their sexuality. Dew, Myers, and Wightman (2005) argued that for gay males, disclosure of one's sexual orientation is often excluded from generalized self-disclosure. Wright (1993) explained that gay men and lesbians often rely on secrecy to protect themselves from violence and biased judgments. Wright further argued that "coming out is not a discussion of intimate sexual details, it is a discussion of identity" (p. 27). For teachers, the decision to disclose their sexuality can be complicated by the desire to avoid social sanctions imposed on them by their students and the desire to foster openness and authenticity in their classrooms.

Sexuality in academia is not just something navigated in the classroom; for many instructors in higher education, the choice to disclose one's sexuality involves colleagues as well as students. Despite the purported freedom and acceptance that is said to permeate academia, many LGBTQ instructors find their experiences in

higher education to be riddled with uncertainty and secrecy. The classroom experience is perhaps the first thing that comes to mind when we consider teaching at a post-secondary institution, but the job of an academic encompasses much more than just teaching students. Therefore, the next section of this review addresses relevant scholarship devoted to chronicling the experiences of LGBTQ academics in higher education.

Sexuality in Academia

History of LGBT studies in higher education.

In his overview of the birth of lesbian and gay studies, Plummer (1992) explained that some of the earliest writings that might constitute the "first wave" (p. 4) of gay and lesbian studies emerged in the late 19th century during the emergence of the gay liberation movement, alongside its ally, the women's movement. Following this, Plummer explained how earlier writings—which provided "an articulation and a coherence to 'the homosexual' as a distinctly modern idea" (p. 5)—were quickly dismissed in the 1930's and 40's as homosexuality came to be understood as less a medical or pathological condition and more a social and political one. The supposed second wave of gay and lesbian studies then emerged in the 1950's and 60's, "symbolically arriving through the new women's liberation movement and the Stonewall riots of the late 1960's" (p. 5). According to Plummer, the literature produced during this wave dealt much more explicitly with the gay male and lesbian experience, written primarily by gay males and lesbians outside of the university. Plummer credited lesbian feminist theory with producing "the most

developed theoretical analysis of homosexuality" (p. 6), which may have coincided with the advent of lesbian studies courses in the late 1960's (Freeman, 2011).

In his brief history of gay, lesbian, and queer studies in higher education, Adam (2002) detailed the major shift that occurred in the field of gay and lesbian studies from seeking out an essential, "discoverable" (p. 18) homosexual in the 1970s and 80s to deconstructing the core categories in a more social constructionist approach in the 90s. According to Adam, this shift from essentialism to social constructionism—which he claimed mirrored the shift from *liberation* to *transgression*—led to the rise of queer theory out of gay and lesbian studies. Queer theory took a step back from gay and lesbian studies; instead of focusing explicitly on homosexuality, queer theory questioned "how people and desires came to be separated into the two camps of homosexuality and heterosexuality in the first place" (pp. 18-19). While queer theory was championed as a more inclusive field of study that affirmed "the widespread nature of homoerotic desire and the artificiality of the homosexual-heterosexual division" (p. 19), some scholars have become skeptical of the popularity of queer theory as a fashionable niche market that seems to have jumped on the cultural studies bandwagon (Pottie, 1997).

Today, the field of gay and lesbian studies exists with few institutionalized bases, often being housed in women's studies departments. Despite the call for further visibility in the academy, gay and lesbian studies scholars often face harsh critiques focused on the lack of intellectual coherence, the further marginalization of the field to a sort of academic ghetto, and the treatment of gay and lesbian concerns as the only concerns that matter. The result of these critiques is the perpetual

relegation of gay and lesbian studies to the fringes of academia and the continued rendering of LGBTQ individuals as invisible in higher education.

Current LGBTQ climate in academia.

The effects the economy has had in higher education are clear; we need look no further than our own departments and budgets to see that employment in academia has become more precarious as our country's financial situation has become dire. In lieu of the increasing instability or unavailability of positions in higher education, many LGBTQ instructors are forced to re-consider their choices to be out not only among their colleagues, but on their job applications and vitae. Whether or not these fears are founded has little to do with the issue at hand; rather, as Bennett (1996) explained,

> Since most academic institutions maintain silence on this issue, the onus for discovering whether one will be accepted or not lies with the individual gay. For most gay academics, even the tenured, this is, apparently, too great a risk to take. (p. 5)

In order to stay competitive and secure in an environment that is becoming increasingly unstable, LGBTQ academics are thus forced to reconsider whether or not being open with their sexuality is beneficial for their well-being, or a liability in the workplace. Bennett (1996) argued that every aspect of an LGBTQ academic's experience in higher education is tainted by the choice to remain closeted in the workplace, explaining "to live in the closet… is to be constantly aware of what one is *not* saying, is *not* doing, is *not* experiencing or receiving, because you are afraid to be fully, publicly yourself" (p. 5). While we might like to think that higher education has

advanced away from this oppressive, silencing institution, LGBTQ faculty who choose to live and work outside the proverbial closet continue to face significant difficulties in navigating their professional relationships.

For LGBTQ faculty who choose to live and work "out," the difficulties faced are often covert, masked behind established structures that are used to legitimate discrimination. For example, Bennet (1996) explained that many LGBTQ scholars refrain from conducting research that pertains to the LGBTQ community because their colleagues are often condescending toward such research programs. McNaron (1997) reported one of her interview participants as saying "a handful of people who are the official gay scholars can capitalize on being gay… but it's of no help to anyone else" (p. 38). Additionally, Bennett (1996) explained that LGBTQ studies "weigh less heavily toward promotion and tenure, and they are taken less seriously by scholars-at-large" (p. 6). According to Bennett, most research and scholarship is based on white male patriarchal models that privilege scholars who perpetuate such models in turn. The hierarchy that exists for research thus not only impacts the kind of research LGBTQ scholars choose to conduct, it influences their choice of method as well. Tierney (1997) reported one of his respondents preferred to conduct primarily numerical, quantitative work that did not require him to reveal any part of his identity in the research. For LGBTQ scholars, then, success in academia is based largely on one's ability to either hide or deemphasize their sexuality in the research they conduct.

LGBTQ academics clearly face a dilemma; how to negotiate one's personal and professional identity becomes difficult when you are of a transgressive

sexuality. Cress (1997) echoed this sentiment claiming "the intermingling of our private and professional lives is a challenging phenomenon that often casts us directly into the political arena" (p. 29). While there are numerous ways of bringing one's sexuality into the professional sphere, perhaps the most obvious method is directly disclosing one's sexuality to those you interact with, be it colleagues or students.

Disclosing sexuality in the classroom has obvious potential to impact the dynamics of the classroom setting, and could have significant ramifications for the instructor. A substantial amount of research has been conducted on instructional communication, including such factors as perceived instructor credibility, competence, caring, immediacy, and effectiveness, as well as student learning, motivation, and satisfaction (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Myers & Bryant, 2004; Teven & Herring, 2005; Teven & McCroskey, 1996). Because of the dynamic interplay between the disclosing of sexuality and these various constructs, the role self-disclosure plays in the classroom is addressed next.

Self-Disclosure in the Classroom

Instructional Communication scholars have long attempted to identify the relationships between various classroom traits and concepts in order to bring more clarity to the teaching profession and help instructors best manage the student-teacher relationship. Among the many correlations discovered, Cayanus (2004) argued that self-disclosure is one way of enhancing teaching effectiveness. Myers and Brann (2009) further explained that instructor self-disclosure may enhance student learning, interest, and motivation. Christophel and Gorham (1995) found

that student motivation was likely to be perceived as a student-owned trait, while instructors played a more significant role in student de-motivation. They further reported that "negative teacher behaviors are perceived as more central to students' demotivation than positive behaviors are perceived as central to their motivation" (p. 301). These findings suggest that instructors must take precautions to avoid de-motivating students in their classroom more than they must focus on motivating their students. One way instructors can accomplish this is by establishing and *maintaining* credibility with their students.

Credibility has been reported to consist of three components: competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Further, Myers and Bryant (2004) found that instructor credibility is perceived by students through instructor immediacy, flexibility, promotion of understanding, and trustworthiness in the classroom. Immediacy is conceptualized as communicative behavior that enhances the psychological and physical closeness between people (McBride & Wahl, 2005). This closeness has been shown to manifest itself in various behaviors such as expressiveness, nonverbal cues, and enthusiasm that project a sense of caring to students (Myers & Bryant, 2004). Interestingly Teven and McCroskey (1996) argued that the perception of an instructor's caring is more important than the instructor's actual caring. Myers & Brann (2009) found that one way instructors can establish this sense of caring is through the use of self-disclosure in the classroom.

After studying the relationships between amount, relevance, and negativity of instructor self-disclosure, Cayanus and Martin (2008) found that when teachers

disclosed more often with less negativity, students reported greater learning and motivation. Similarly, Cayanus and Martin reported that students responded more favorably when instructors disclosed non-negative information, and suggested that instructors lose credibility when disclosing more negative information. Myers and Brann (2009) asserted that the timing of self-disclosures also plays an important role in enhancing credibility, as students view instructors favorably when they balance self-disclosure with course content. Perhaps the most important characteristic of effective self-disclosure, however, is relevancy. Cayanus and Martin (2008) reported that when teachers disclosed higher amounts of *relevant* information, students reported greater levels of meaningfulness and impact. Similarly, McBride and Wahl (2005) found that instructors primarily use self-disclosure to clarify or extend course content.

While self-disclosure has been shown to have numerous benefits in the classroom, Lannutti and Strauman (2006) explained that the key to effective self-disclosure may be in how personal the disclosure is. When testing the relationship between instructor disclosure and liking, they speculated that the personalistic degree of an instructor's disclosure may hold significant influence. The issue many instructors encounter, however, is the ability to disclose to one student at a time, making their disclosure more personal as opposed to disclosing to the entire class. Because of the difficulty involved in disclosing individually, many instructors strategically choose what types of information to disclose and what types to not.

In studying teachers' management of privacy boundaries, McBride and Wahl (2005) reported that instructors typically disclosed about four topics: information

about their families, personal feelings and opinions, information about their daily outside activities, and details about their personal history. McBride and Wahl also reported four topic areas that instructors typically chose to conceal from their students: personal information, negative personal relationships, sexual topics, and negative character or image aspects. According to Hosek and Thompson (2009), instructors reported avoiding these types of private disclosures in order to minimize student discomfort or to manage risks to students' face.

While navigating self-disclosure in the classroom is challenging alone, LGBTQ instructors face what Yescavage and Alexander (1997) described as a "double-bind" (p. 117). According to them, disclosing an LGBTQ orientation is often seen as "flaunting" sexuality, while not speaking of it can be seen as lying to one's self. LGBTQ instructors are uniquely challenged with the decision to disclose aspects of their identity that may enhance student familiarity and motivation, or polarize students and result in de-motivation. Further, Bower and Klecka (2009) found that teachers were unable to "adhere to norms in ways that were pleasing to all parents, administrators, students, and colleagues" (p. 370). LGBTQ instructors on college campuses are faced with a dilemma regarding their choice to identify their sexual orientation to students while teaching, a situation which has ramifications for both instructors and students alike. This difficulty results in sexual minority stress that could cause instructors to experience higher levels of communication apprehension in their classrooms.

Numerous scholars have devoted time to discussing "coming out" in the classroom over the past few decades, but, as Opffer (1994) argued, "Most of the

current theoretical literature deals with etiological concerns," (p. 318) or the reasons *why* LGBTQ instructors choose to disclose their sexualities to their students. What we are missing is research that focuses on the instructor, research that captures their experiences and gives voice to a population that is likely rendered invisible; research that focuses on the effects of those disclosures on the instructors who take that risk and *their* experiences in the classroom.

With this review in place, we now have the lens through which the rest of this study will be viewed. Having discussed 1) how this project fits within the instructional communication field, 2) instructor communication apprehension, 3) sexuality as an influential identity construct, 4) the role of sexuality in academia, and 5) self-disclosure in the classroom, the need for this study is clear. In the following chapter I detail the methods used to gather the data needed to answer the proposed research questions.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects LGBTQ instructors experience as a result of disclosing their sexualities to their students. More specifically, I aimed to uncover how LGBTQ instructors perceived their communication apprehension, instructional effectiveness, and interpersonal relationships with their students to be affected by disclosing their sexualities to their students. In particular, I asked:

RQ1: How do LGBTQ instructors experience communication apprehension when disclosing their sexualities?

RQ2: How do LGBTQ instructors view their instructional effectiveness as a result of their choice to disclose or not disclose their sexualities?

RQ3: How do LGBTQ instructors view their relationships with their students to be influenced by their choices to disclose or not disclose their sexualities?

In this chapter, I detail the methods used in this study. In particular I uncover how the personal narratives of LGBTQ instructors were gathered and used to answer the research questions and shed light on the predicament LGBTQ instructors find themselves in when deciding whether to disclose their sexualities. The sections that follow detail 1) the role of my own position within this research project, 2) the means of soliciting research partners and gathering data for the project, and 3) the method used to analyze the gathered data.

Position of the Researcher

At this junction I feel it is necessary to acknowledge my position in regards to this research project. As a self-identified interpretive researcher I do not believe life experiences can or should be generalized, especially when those experiences chronicle the stories of marginalized individuals. Therefore, I think it is imperative to acknowledge the subjective and biased nature of using interviews to collect data for this research project and interpreting the data through my own socio-cultural constructs.

Feminist standpoint theory is one means of acknowledging the inherently biased and subjective nature of knowledge. According to Griffin (2009), standpoint theorists "insist that there is no possibility of an unbiased perspective that is disinterested, impartial, value-free, or detached from a particular historical situation" (p. 446). Harding (2010) further elaborated that "objectivity never has been and could not be increased by value-neutrality. Instead, it is commitments to antiauthoritarian, antielitist, participatory, and emancipatory values and projects that increase the objectivity of science," (p. 352) arguing for the need for more research that explores and privileges populations on the fringes of society as a means of garnering a less false view of society. Rubin and Rubin (2005) summed this up nicely in explaining "standpoint theory… emphasizes whose standpoint or point of view you are taking" (p. 25).

The data gathered for this project are all interpreted and analyzed through my own point of view, that of a young, white, gay male graduate student. These intersecting identity constructs undoubtedly led me to emphasize certain aspects of

the data while de-emphasizing others, but the goal of this project remains the same.

The themes that emerged are commonalities that arose as I read through interview

transcripts, but they are not to be generalized to the extent that they become

construed as characteristic of all LGBTQ instructors regardless of positionality.

Some stories and experiences captured in the interviews will resonate with some

readers, and other readers will not feel their experiences are recorded here. I feel

this is what makes qualitative work both challenging and rewarding; those

experiences that are not chronicled here deserve further attention and scrutiny in

continued research, and those experiences that are reported in this project are

meant to enhance our understanding of the target population while acknowledging

the incompleteness of our knowledge.

Data Collection

  Recruitment.

   Because this study involved the investigation of human participants,

approval to conduct this research was granted by the IRB at my institution

(Appendix A). Research partners were then located and recruited through the use of

known-group and snowball sampling. According to Reinard (2008), known-group

sampling is most appropriate for "identifying groups that are known to possess a

particular characteristic under investigation" (p. 446). Initial recruitment occurred

via email; the recruitment script (Appendix B) was emailed to the director of the

LGBT Center at my institution, who then forwarded the email to potential

interviewees. All nine research partners self-identified as LGBTQ. Immediately

following the completion of each interview, research partners were asked for

referrals for further potential interviewees. Reinard explained that this method of

recruitment, known as snowball sampling, is useful "when it is not really possible to

identify all members of the population at the outset" (p. 447). Referrals were then

contacted via email with a copy of the original recruitment script and consent form.

Instructors interested in being interviewed for the project responded to me

via email to set up an interview time. Each potential interviewee received an email

with available times from which they could choose to be interviewed as well as a

copy of the consent form approved through the institutional review board

(Appendix C) prior to meeting in person. In addition to providing verbal consent,

each research partner completed a signed informed consent form prior to the start

of the interview.

Participants.

The total sample for this project consisted of nine self-identified LGBTQ

college instructors. Of the nine research partners, six were males and three were

females. Additionally, five male interviewees identified as gay, one male interviewee

identified as both gay and queer, two female interviewees identified as lesbian, and

one female interviewee identified as bisexual; none of my research partners

identified as transgender. Because of this, readers should bear in mind that the

experiences articulated in this project are not illustrative of transgender or

transsexual individuals All research partners were White college instructors from

two predominantly White, mid-size universities. Various levels of education were

represented by these educators: two interviewees held M.A. degrees, three held M.S.

degrees, one held an M.F.A., one an M.L.I.S., two were A.B.D. (one currently with an

M.S. and one with an M.A.), and four had PhD degrees. In addition, research partners

had college teaching experience that spanned from three to 25 years. Research

partners also represented a number of academic departments, including Counseling

and Student Personnel; Theatre and Dance; Library and Information Science;

Student Activities; Social Work; Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Studies; Archeology

and Anthropology; Human Performance; and Communication Studies.

This "demographic" information is reported here to provide clarity and

frame the responses that are quoted in Chapter 4. My intent is not to provide this

information to show how the data may be generalized across the LGBTQ population.

Rather, I want to avoid generalizations and demonstrate the diversity that exists

even within the small sample used in this project. My goal is not to essentialize my

sample, but to give more visibility to their stories and experiences. Todres and

Galvin (2005) explained "breadth and depth are not necessarily about numbers of

respondents or sample size but about focus" (p. 21). In keeping with this sentiment I

want to focus on the individuals present in this study, to generate new knowledge

and understanding exploring the unique contexts in which my research partners

live and work.

Qualitative interviews.

Irving Seidman (2006) argued "stories are a way of knowing… telling stories

is essentially a meaning-making process" (p. 7). Because I set out to chronicle the

experiences of LGBTQ instructors, I felt the best method to use for this project was

qualitative interviewing. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) explained that qualitative

interviews "are particularly well suited for studying people's understanding of the

meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world" (p. 116). Additionally, Weiss (1994) articulated a number of reasons to conduct a qualitative interview study, among which were to develop detailed descriptions of events, integrate multiple perspectives or observations, and learn how events are interpreted, all of which were goals of this study (pp. 9-10).

While more quantitative methods of gathering data may have provided valuable insight into this research project, I felt qualitative interviewing best allowed me to investigate my research topics and accomplish my research goals. Although the three research questions I asked frame the direction I took with this project, what I wanted to do was dive into the experiences of LGBTQ instructors in order to better understand those experiences. Seidman (2006) explained "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Because of this, the information I hoped to capture—the meaning I hoped to uncover—could not be gathered through quantitative means.

The interview process.

For this project, nine interviews were conducted, all of which were done face-to-face. All interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the research partner to ensure convenience, comfort, and privacy. The interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes, and each interview was recorded using a digital audio recorder. I took minimal notes during each interview, usually to help remind myself of information I wanted to have the research partner elaborate on later in the

interview. However, none of the written notes were used in transcribing or analyzing the interviews.

All interviews were semi-structured, a method of qualitative interviewing that Rubin and Rubin (2005) called responsive interviewing. According to Rubin and Rubin, one characteristic of responsive interviewing is that "the design of the research remains flexible throughout the project" (p. 30). I drafted a list of preliminary interview questions to frame the flow and direction of the interviews, but the questions were asked in varying orders depending on the direction in which each research partner took the conversation.

Interviews also followed three phases that I categorize as 1) rapport-building, 2) probing, and 3) closure. Initially, the questions I posed to each research partner centered on their teaching background, including their content areas. This rapport-building phase of the interview allowed my research partners to disclose rather impersonal information about their selves to help us both gauge each other's conversation conventions and begin the interview on a more casual note; essentially, the first phase was a means to break down the barrier between researcher and participant while still maintaining enough interpersonal distance "to allow the participant to fashion his or her response as independently as possible" (Seidman, 2006, p. 96). The second phase of the interview consisted of the main interview questions pertaining to the research project, during which I prompted my research partners to share their experiences with disclosing their sexualities to their students. Here the interviews became more organic in that I relied less on the order of the questions in the interview script and instead let my research partners guide

the discussion, returning to the script to re-focus each interview as needed. Finally,

the closure phase involved a kind of wrap-up where I asked my research partners

for closing thoughts or advice in order to help bring the interview to a close. In

structuring the interviews in this manner, I found I was able to effectively introduce

and conclude the conversations involving somewhat personal information without

introducing unnecessary tension or uncertainty. As Rubin and Rubin (2005)

suggested, I tried to use an interviewing style "that makes the conversational

partner feel comfortable, obtains needed information, and is compatible with the

researcher's personality" (p. 31).

Method of Analysis

The analysis for this project revealed both cognitive approaches to and

performed tactics of disclosing one's sexuality to students, which was achieved

through a thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Weiss (1994) explained,

> The dense information obtained in qualitative interviewing permits
>
> description of the many sectors of a complex entity and how they go
>
> together… quotations from the interview material can help the reader
>
> identify with the respondent, if only briefly, by presenting events as the
>
> respondent experienced them (p. 10).

Further, the analysis can be characterized as an issue-focused analysis, wherein the

researcher attempts to "describe what has been learned from all respondents about

people in their situation" (Weiss, 1994, p. 153). According to Weiss, such a

description of collected data moves from the discussion of one issue to that of

another related issue, with the whole description explaining the experience in

question more holistically (p. 154). In order to achieve this analysis, a pseudo-grounded theory approach to analyzing the transcripts was used.

Grounded theory.

According to Reinard (2008), grounded theory is "a set of explanations that has immediate relevance to a specific field setting under investigation" (p. 279). When using grounded theory methods, a researcher will continually code, revisit, and re-code their data to ensure that the level of abstraction developed from the research is "grounded" in the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained rather succinctly that "grounded theory is derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data" (p. 5). The benefit of a grounded theory approach to data analysis is that it encourages "researchers' persistent interaction with their data, while remaining constantly involved with their emerging analyses" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 1). In using grounded theory methods, the researcher is thus able to theorize inductively from the data gathered while continually grounding any theorization in the data, ensuring a systematic approach to theory development.

Coding.

Each recorded interview was closely transcribed in its entirety. During initial transcription, any part of a recording that was muddled or unclear was noted in the working transcript to verify in subsequent transcription checks. After each initial transcription was complete, I listened to each interview again while reading through the transcript to ensure accuracy. No follow up interviews were conducted.

Upon completion of transcribing the interviews, hard copies of each transcript were printed out and the research partners were assigned a pseudonym

to ensure confidentiality. Initially, I coded the transcripts by identifying passages that I felt directly related to the research questions posed as well as repeated sentiments within transcripts and commonalities between interviewees. Each transcript was read in the order in which the interviews took place, and emergent concepts were written down in the margins of the transcripts. Additionally, I compiled a sort of master list of emergent concepts; each time a concept was identified, I wrote it down with a notation of the pseudonym and page number to locate the passage later. Additionally, every time a concept reoccurred, the research partner's pseudonym and corresponding page number were added to the list. I reviewed the interview transcripts in this manner twice, adjusting the wording or phrasing of concepts and eliminating or condensing redundant or incomparable concepts. These concepts were then organized into common themes, which I named and defined using the words of my research partners to represent the ideas contained within.

The results of this study are presented in the next chapter. In particular, I contextualize the analysis by reporting *why* the instructors interviewed choose to disclose or not disclose their sexualities to their students as well as the recurring themes that emerged from the analysis. Direct quotations from the interview transcripts accompany my report of the findings in order to ground the analysis in collected data.

Chapter Four

Results

This chapter details the findings of the present study. After coding the interview transcripts I compiled, I was able to decipher responses to my research questions as articulated by the LGBTQ instructors who agreed to be interviewed for this project. What follows is a survey of what my research partners had to say with regard to disclosing their sexualities in the classroom. I begin this chapter by conceptualizing *why* the instructors I interviewed choose to disclose or not disclose their sexualities, *when* they choose to do so, and *how* they disclose. Next, I review their responses in light of the research questions that framed this study. Last, I discuss the emergent themes that were uncovered during my analysis of the interview transcripts.

Framing the Responses

It is necessary for me to first conceptualize the responses I gathered from my research partners before returning to the research questions, as there were a number of items that needed to be addressed before the research questions could be explored further. Because the three research questions that frame this study all hinged on whether or not LGBTQ instructors disclose their sexualities to their students, we first need to explore how the instructors I interviewed conceived their own "coming out" disclosures. What follows is thus an overview of why, when, and how my research partners chose to disclose their sexualities to their students.

To share or not to share? Reasons for being "out."

In order for me to understand how to best elicit the information I was looking for from my research partners, I needed to gauge whether or not they did indeed choose to disclose their sexualities to their students. In asking my research partners whether or not they are "out" members of the LGBTQ community when teaching, I was able to hear a variety of reasons *why* my research partners choose to disclose or not disclose their sexualities. After reviewing their responses, it seemed as though my research partners viewed disclosing their sexualities as beneficial for accomplishing both 1) advocacy-based goals, and 2) education-based goals. The following section attempts to capture these two reasons for being "out" in the words of my research partners.

"***I was doing them a disservice by not being out.***"

First, a number of my research partners indicated that part of the reason they choose to disclose their sexualities to their students is to accomplish what I consider advocacy-based goals. As some of them explained,

> I opted not to say anything and went through my first two-and-a-half years here as a really strong ally, and what occurred to me is that that just didn't feel like enough. What I realized was *I was doing them a disservice by not being out*. (Bethany, personal communication, October 11, 2011)

> If someone is talking from a place of ignorance, it's my responsibility to give them information for them to realize that they have misspoken. It's my responsibility to bring information to the banquet table if someone is starving themselves and they don't realize that what they're saying is either

inappropriate or just unknowledgeable. (Andy, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

These two quotations depict a common theme among interview responses. A number of my research partners explained that they felt a sense of duty to share their sexualities with students if disclosing that information about themselves would help students broaden their perspectives and think critically about their own assumptions. Not sharing their sexualities was sometimes seen as a detriment to students if doing so would allow the students to maintain a narrow understanding of the world around them.

Additionally, some of my research partners explained that disclosing their sexualities worked to confront the stereotypes that students may have of LGBTQ individuals as well as counter the invisibility of LGBTQ people in a heteronormative society. As Julie explained, "I think I start to challenge them on some of their stereotypical beliefs. Ultimately the purpose is to let them meet one of us and see that we aren't just these stereotypes that they've created in their head" (personal communication, November 1, 2011). Barry also described how disclosing his sexuality to his students worked against societal pressures to stay hidden by explaining,

I think the most insidious part of how society treats gay folks is that they literally force us to not be who we are. In a lot of cases the general public would prefer that we stay hidden, and that's why I don't ever try to hide anything. (personal communication, January 13, 2012)

Julie and Barry both explained how disclosing their sexualities to students counteracts societal pressure to keep such information concealed, and undermines stereotypes that may inaccurately represent LGBTQ individuals.

This sentiment of counteracting hegemonic invisibility of LGBTQ people was further articulated by research partners who emphasized the importance of *visibility*, both on campus and in society. Kelly Jo, who chooses not to disclose her sexuality to her students, explained "the only thing that I think it might affect is if there's some student that wants to connect or might be struggling with their sexuality; if I'm somebody that they feel they can talk to" (personal communication, November 3, 2011). Moreover, Jim stated, "when the opportunity comes up to show them that there are gay athletes, there are gay coaches, there are gay sports fans, I want to be able to do that" (personal communication, January 19, 2012). Additionally, Jerry explained, "I think it's important to be visible, I really do. And I want to be a resource for students who are coming out, for people in the community who feel like they can't" (personal communication, October 21, 2011). For some instructors, being an LGBTQ person that their students could look to—thus allowing them to "know a gay person"—was an important benefit of sharing their queer sexualities with their students.

"Am I giving my all?"

Aside from accomplishing advocacy-related goals, all of my research partners explained that their being "out" in the classroom was beneficial for their students for a variety of reasons related to establishing a healthy classroom environment. When I asked Jerry why he discloses his sexuality to his students, he responded,

"because I want the kids to know that they can, and they can be safe. I just want them to feel comfortable" (personal communication, October 21, 2011). Bethany explained that being open about her sexuality with her students "gives students in class who are gay permission to be more open about that too" (personal communication, October 11, 2011). For these instructors, sharing their sexualities helps students understand that they can also be comfortable sharing personal information about themselves in an affirming and supportive environment. Additionally, a number of research partners explained that this openness sets a positive example for students. Jim explained,

> If I'm trying to be real and make the classroom a place where people can be who they are and come together in a learning community, and that we all learn from each other, then I think that's predicated on an honesty that I need to model for people. (personal communication, January 19, 2012)

> Another of my research partners, Dan, also told me that speaking openly about his sexuality provides a model for his students when they interact with each other. "Providing that [example] gives people something to look at and follow as well, so I think that helps them open up as well to each other" (Dan, personal communication, October 26, 2011). Further, Andy explained that identifying his sexuality in the classroom was even more beneficial for LGBTQ students, stating "it's very, very important because when I was a young boy, I didn't see any images of what it meant to be a positive role model that I knew was gay. And that's why I'm out" (personal communication, October 27, 2011). Setting a positive example for

both straight and LGBTQ students became an important effect of my research partners disclosing their sexualities to their students.

Not all research partners were as quick to endorse the model-setting approach, however. For some interviewees, the motives behind disclosing their sexualities were more difficult to decipher. Julie articulated as one of her concerns with disclosing her sexuality to her students the need to be aware of "what is it you're trying to achieve with self-disclosing, and understanding consequences, both positive and negative, to coming out to students" (personal communication, November 1, 2011). Another research partner, Benjamin, expressed his worry that "there's always this level of '[it's] about us,' and we have to be really conscious that we're not abusing students" (personal communication, February 3, 2012). Julie further explained, "making sure that there's something about private conduct, and about the wellbeing of the client, and that I'm not going to do any harm, applies to students, too" (personal communication, November 1, 2011). In order to balance this dilemma and ensure that disclosing one's sexuality to students is the correct choice to make, Kelly Jo argued that each instructor needs to consider,

> Does the fact that I have this part of my life that I don't share with them impact the classroom? If they feel that's what needs to happen, then they need to [disclose] so they're not getting up in front of students on a daily basis wondering "*am I giving my all?*" (personal communication, November 3, 2011)

According to these interviewees, discerning why it might be beneficial for instructors to disclose their sexualities to students is not an easy task. Instead, there appeared to be some ambiguity when articulating reasons for being "out."

Even though not all of my research partners choose to disclose their sexualities to their students, those who do articulated the preceding reasons for doing so. With this framework in place, we next need to look at *when* and *how* my research partners reported making such disclosures to their students. The following section explores their responses in order to better conceptualize how their responses pertain to the research questions.

The best laid plans: Exploring the *when* and *how*.

The ways in which my research partners discussed disclosing their sexualities to their students—and how those discussions relate to the research questions—are best understood by examining the timing and technique my research partners reported employing when disclosing in the classroom. When interviewing my research partners, I asked each instructor *when* they choose to disclose their sexualities, if they do, and *how* they do so. I attempt to represent their responses below in order to complete my framing of the subsequent analysis.

"It can happen at any time."

Initially, a handful of instructors explained to me that the subject of their sexuality comes up at the beginning of every class as opposed to later in the semester. Bethany explained rather simply, "you know, I probably do it right off the bat" (personal communication, October 11, 2011). Jerry explained that he tells his students he's gay "right away, there's no question. The kids know right away—

probably day one, day two, day three—that they're dealing with someone who's in a same-sex relationship" (personal communication, October 21, 2011). Similarly, Dan explained his experience with talking about his sexual identity in his online class, explaining, "at the beginning of the semester there's a forum for introductions, and part of what I share is I have a partner. People know up front" (personal communication, October 26, 2011). The impetus for disclosing their sexualities so early in the semester was the desire to establish an open and honest classroom setting right from the start, rather than waiting for a specific instance to arise where their sexualities might need to be discussed.

Contrary to Dan, Jerry, and Bethany, the majority of the instructors I interviewed reported more of an organic, spontaneous discussion of their sexualities. Barry explained to me that when he addresses his sexuality depends on when it is relevant to class discussion: "there are times that it is relevant, there are times that it's not. I'll simply make the comment if it happens to be relevant to the kind of discussion we're having" (personal communication, January 13, 2012). When I asked Julie if she addresses her sexuality in her classes, she explained "some yes, some no. I think it's situational, context-specific," (personal communication, November 1, 2011). Similarly, instead of premeditating when to address his sexuality Benjamin told me, "it just kind of happens. I have these stories I tell—the same stories every year—and when they come up, they come up. I don't premeditate," (personal communication, February 3, 2012). These instructors argued that the topic of their sexuality does not lend itself to specific times in the course of the semester. Instead, they seemed to support the notion of a more natural

incorporation of the topic into class discussion, albeit in a way that they construed to be more pedagogically sound.

Finally, instead of isolating the discussion of their sexualities to just one instance, some instructors reported a sense of continually or repeatedly weaving their sexuality into their discussions in class. Jim explained to me, "it's not a one-stop shop in that way. It's an ongoing process. Any time a new class comes, you have to go through the process" (personal communication, January 19, 2012). Similarly, Bethany argued

> Socially, we have a construction of everyone being heterosexual, and we
> work from that one place. So it forces people to have to make some kind of
> statement about themselves or their identity. I don't think you can do it once;
> people have to constantly come out. (personal communication, October 11,
> 2011)

Of course, I would be remiss to only present these perspectives on the timing of disclosing one's sexuality. When I asked Kelly Jo whether she talks about her sexuality in her classes, she answered,

> No. I mean, there hasn't been a time where it's been something that would
> work its way into what we talk about. A lot of what I use in class is based on
> my experience as a programmer; it doesn't have anything to do with my
> sexuality. (personal communication, November 3, 2011)

Although Kelly Jo was the only instructor I interviewed to explicitly vocalize this sentiment, a number of my research partners expressed similar ideas. Andy explained "I'm not hiding anything, but I don't make it a point to come out"

(personal communication, October 27, 2011). Barry also gave me an example: "[it's]

certainly nothing that I ever hide; if anybody asks me a question, you know, 'do you

have a wife?' I'll simply tell them, I don't have a wife; my *husband* thinks it's

perfectly fine!" (personal communication, January 13, 2012). Similarly, Jim stated,

> I'm not going to be like, "oh and I'm gay!" But I also won't shy away from the
>
> way that people would talk about, you know, the weekend. That's self-
>
> disclosure in the way that any professional on campus would feel
>
> comfortable doing, and I'm not going to treat that as different because my
>
> partner is male instead of female. (personal communication, January 19,
>
> 2012).

According to these interviewees, it is not always possible to pinpoint a particular

time where the topic of their sexuality might come up in class. Rather, they

articulated a feeling of being open to talking about their sexualities without

necessarily making it a point to address the topic intentionally.

The above selections represent the variety that exists in *when* LGBTQ

instructors might choose to disclose their sexualities to their students. With this

review in place, we can turn next to *how* my research partners reported addressing

their sexualities in their classes, if they choose to do so at all. The next section

provides an overview of the "techniques" used by the instructors I interviewed to

talk about their sexualities in class.

"It just becomes part of how I talk about my world."

For the most part, my research partners explained to me that they choose to

incorporate disclosures of their sexualities into class discussions when the subject is

relevant to the topic at hand. In these cases, my research partners indicated that disclosing their sexualities provides the students with a clearer example or allows them to think about the material in a more complex manner. As Barry explained,

> I just simply work it into a discussion. For example, we'll talk about one of the things that anthropologists simply ignore, so something I would say is, 'my partner [name] and I would simply never have been counted in any of these early studies. (personal communication, January 13, 2012)

Similarly, Benjamin told me one of the stories he uses in class:

> I was giving an example and I just blurted out, 'even though I'm gay I still do the male thing.' That's just part of the story. For the nature of my subject matter those kinds of stories are important to make the concepts clear. (personal communication, February 3, 2012)

In addition, Julie acknowledged "what I teach in that class is that each person has a multi-layer of diversity, so my sexual orientation is just one layer. It's that demonstration of the core content" (personal communication, November 1, 2011). For these instructors, discussions of their sexualities are worked into the class discussion as a means of further elaborating on some concept or idea pertaining to the class.

Other instructors explained that rather than choosing to incorporate their sexualities into class discussions, they instead opt for more overt, direct statements. Jerry explained, "I will do it often in a humorous way. I'll say, 'well if you didn't think he was gay, now you know! So surprise!'" (personal communication, October 21, 2011). Similarly, Andy conceived of disclosing his sexuality as "community

building," stating "It shouldn't be about innuendo and gossip. Let's not have all this banter, let's put it out there. If you love it, you love it; if you hate it, you hate it. But let's talk real," (personal communication, October 27, 2011). However, Bethany explained that often times such overt disclosures of sexuality can end up decreasing the efficacy of those disclosures, explaining "I don't do it with a lot of fanfare. And I like that part of it, too, because then it becomes less about 'oh, she's a lesbian,' and more about 'she's a normal person'" (personal communication, October 11, 2011). This inconsistency between whether overt, direct disclosures of sexuality are more or less effective was further illustrated by Julie, who questioned, "What's right, what's wrong, what's the best? Would it be better for me to just blow the hinges off the door? I get into a really big challenge about that professionally," (personal communication, November 1, 2011).

A number of instructors also drew attention to the role that their physical appearance or performance plays in representing their sexualities, rather than focusing explicitly on verbal disclosures. Barry explained, "I'm in pretty good shape, I'm tall, and I don't lisp, so [students] just would never assume, you know, 'why would this guy be gay?'" (personal communication, January 13, 2012). Similarly, Andy explained that some students "just thought [I] was this really groovy, open-minded metrosexual. It's kind of shocking to me, but [it] just goes to show that you can't necessarily stereotype somebody," (personal communication, October 27, 2011). Additionally, Bethany described how she feels her personal appearance might allow for students to dismiss her disclosures: "I don't present particularly gay, so I can just let them sort of forget that, and I recognize the privilege in that. That's

part of why I bring it up every couple of classes in some kind of way," (personal communication, October 11, 2011). These instructors vocalized the idea that there's more to disclosing your sexuality than just telling people.

Overwhelmingly, the instructors I interviewed explained that their sexualities come up in conversation simply because that's the way they talk about their experiences. Jim detailed how his students typically learn about his sexuality not through "one of those 'announcements,' but just through the process of me telling stories, or joking or laughing, or trying to put them at ease," (personal communication, January 19, 2012). Similarly, Benjamin explained, "in terms of how I teach—using personal examples—if I'm going to talk about myself, I have to be honest" (personal communication, February 3, 2012). I think Bethany put it quite simply when she said "it just becomes part of how I talk about my world," (personal communication, October 11, 2011).

With this framework in place, we can now address the research questions posed at the beginning of this study. During the course of my interviews, I asked each of my research partners a series of questions pertaining to their experiences of communication apprehension, their perceived instructional effectiveness, and the relationships they have with their students, and how all of these concepts relate to their choice to disclose or not disclose their sexualities to their students. The following section details their responses as they relate to each of the three research questions.

Revisiting the Research Questions

Initially, RQ1 asked: "How do LGBTQ instructors experience communication apprehension (CA) when disclosing their sexualities?" During my interviews, any discussion of communication apprehension was loosely construed as "nervousness" or "anxiousness," and my research partners discussed their experiences with communication apprehension using that framework. Although there was no consensus regarding the relationship between disclosing sexuality and experiencing CA, responses tended to fall into two general categories; the instructors I interviewed reported either no CA pertaining to disclosing their sexualities, or they experienced minor sensations of nervousness or anxiousness.

First, a number of instructors explained that they felt no apprehension pertaining to discussing their sexualities. When I asked Jerry whether he got nervous or anxious to disclose his sexuality to his students, he replied, "No. Not at all. I feel like the honesty factor really rules. If I can be honest with you, you can be honest with me, and we can get that out of the way," (personal communication, October 21, 2011). Benjamin responded similarly, answering, "no, because I just do it nonchalantly. It's not planned, I don't think about it in advance, so there's no reason for me to get anxious," (personal communication, February 3, 2012). Jim explained his lack of anxiety by explaining, "I think my perspective is more like, I don't have an issue with it, why should you? And if you do, sorry, your issue," (personal communication, January 19, 2012). For these instructors, the topic of their sexualities resulted in no perceived or reported communication apprehension.

Other instructors I interviewed had different experiences, reporting a number of instances where disclosing their sexualities resulted in some form of communication apprehension. Typically, my research partners shared stories of their first times addressing their sexualities in the classroom. Bethany explained,

The very first time I disclosed in that first class a couple years ago, it was kind of a train wreck because I over-thought it. I started babbling and then kind of laughed and said 'I'm clearly very uncomfortable with announcing this!' I did not anticipate the nervousness I would have. (personal communication, October 11, 2011).

Similarly, when I asked Barry whether or not he ever gets nervous discussing his sexuality in class, he explained, "yeah, the first couple times, but now it's not an issue. It's just surprising how difficult it is to overcome so many years of programming that that's something you hide," (personal communication, January 13, 2012). In addition to experiencing apprehension during class, Julie reported being apprehensive of disclosing her sexuality during breaks in the middle of an extended class session. "I think the most anxiety-producing thing is when you're in the classroom, maybe we're just on a break in-between class, and the opportunity presents itself to disclose. Do I take it? Do I not take it?" (Julie, personal communication, November 1, 2011).

A number of factors arose that seemed to influence when these instructors experiences communication apprehension pertaining to disclosing their sexualities. As noted above, Julie reported a kind of constant inner dialogue where she ponders "is this appropriate self-disclosure? What is this going to do to the relationship? Is

this me wanting to fit in with this group?" (personal communication, November 1, 2011). Additionally, Bethany shared how a negative experience she had with her colleagues influences her experiences of CA, explaining "I have a slight bit of anxiety still. The lack of support is part of what ratchets up my stress level about [disclosing]," (personal communication, October 11, 2011). For Bethany and Julie, their apprehension manifests itself "physically; I get just a little bit queasy," (Bethany, personal communication, October 11, 2011) and in a sort of constant intrapersonal conversation:

> I have this whole internal dialogue. You're thinking about the timing, and [a] discussion I had with my colleague, and I think about the couple of students I've had write different things on my evaluations when I was teaching about gays and lesbians. (personal communication, November 1, 2011).

These responses suggest that disclosing one's sexuality to students may or may not influence feelings of communication apprehension, depending on extenuating circumstances both in and outside of the classroom. Although dominant discourses in academia construct teachers as primarily influencing—and being influenced by—students, my research partners suggested that confining our discussions of instructor sexuality to the classroom context is a narrow approach to understanding the ways in which sexuality may intersect with other dynamics to influence an instructor's experience with communication apprehension. Instead, a variety of factors, including department support, interpersonal interactions with colleagues, and previous experiences with disclosing sexuality all influence feelings of apprehension LGBTQ instructors may experience in the classroom.

RQ2 focused on the relationship between sexuality disclosures and perceived instructional effectiveness, asking "How do LGBTQ instructors view their instructional effectiveness as a result of their choice to disclose or not disclose their sexualities?" Again, although there was no unanimous conclusion to be gained from my research partners, the instructors I interviewed typically reported their choice to disclose their sexualities as a means of improving or inhibiting their teaching effectiveness. In addition, a number of instructors claimed that being "out" in the classroom—or even *not* being "out"—had no bearing on their teaching effectiveness.

First, some of my research partners claimed that their sexualities—or any discussion of their sexualities—had no influence on their teaching effectiveness. For example, Jerry explained to me,

> Getting it and then staying consistent with it tells me that I'm doing a great job with the kids; they're letting the audience see a slice of life that they've never seen before. I'm not sure being out in the classroom has anything to do with that. If I make a difference, then I know my job is done… I'm not sure that being out really has any effect on that. (personal communication, October 21, 2011)

Similarly, Kelly Jo—who doesn't disclose her sexuality with her students—speculated,

> I don't think [disclosing my sexuality] would affect my effectiveness as a teacher, getting my subject matter across. It might affect my relationships with students as far as, instead of going over to the Center and talking to somebody they don't know, they can come and talk here. But I don't see how

it would affect how or what I teach in the classroom. (personal

communication, November 3, 2011).

Both Jerry and Kelly Jo conceptualized their teaching effectiveness as being neither

improved nor impeded by disclosing their sexualities to their students. For them,

how effective an instructor is in educating students is not related to the instructor's

sexuality or whether the instructor chooses to disclose that sexuality to students.

Thus, instructor disclosures of sexuality are completely irrelevant to "getting the job

done."

Other instructors I interviewed had differing opinions. For many instructors,

being open about their sexualities in class allowed them to be more aware of the

issues they discuss in class. As Jim explained,

The self-reflection I needed to get to in order to not have this weight on me

for being closeted has helped me be a better instructor. I have a better

awareness of a wider variety of issues that deal with people who have and

have not. (personal communication, January 19, 2012)

Similarly, Bethany commented "the way I ask questions or answer questions comes

from a sense of awareness of marginalization," (personal communication, October

11, 2011). For them, this critical awareness or experience of the issues or concepts

that they discuss in their classes is directly related to their sexualities, and being

open with their students allows them to teach more effectively.

Still other instructors cited their abilities to better demonstrate course

content through personal examples that involve their sexualities. According to

Benjamin, "the reason why I'm [disclosing my sexuality] is there's a specific

example, and they need to be fully aware of the example. So in terms of the concept

being discussed, that's the educational purpose," (personal communication,

February 3, 2012). Similarly, Dan explained, "if I were just a straight White person

standing there, they would get it, but as a gay man there's a little more 'oh yeah,

you're right' kind of sense to it," (personal communication, October 26, 2011).

According to Benjamin and Dan, being able to disclose their sexualities to their

students allows them to provide clearer examples for students and improves their

overall teaching effectiveness.

However, a number of my research partners pointed to the dark side of

disclosing their sexualities, not just for themselves but for their students as well. As

Julie explained, "I like to think that maybe [disclosing my sexuality] makes a

difference for some people, but does everything now become about my sexual

orientation?" She further elaborated, "it's another layer I think GLBT faculty are

constantly thinking about; I don't know what it would be like to not have my

abilities in the classroom be related to my sexual orientation," (personal

communication, November 1, 2011). Andy echoed these sentiments, explaining how

often times his successes are chalked up to his sexuality. "Rather than, this is what it

should be to be phenomenal, this is what we expect all our staff to do, it's because

[I'm] gay. '[I'm] just that way,'" (personal communication, October 27, 2011). As for

how disclosing their sexualities affects their students, Julie explained "it could go

either way; I think for some students it may help, and then for other students it may

be severing," (personal communication, November 1, 2011). Barry also addressed

how disclosing his sexuality might be ineffective for some students by stating "I

could see where it may decrease efficacy if a student has a prejudice. At that level, if

a student has a bias and they think I'm an ineffective teacher—at least in part

because of their bias—well, fine," (personal communication, January 13, 2012). For

Barry, the burden falls on the students to work through any potential bias they may

have with regards to his sexuality.

My research partners voiced a variety of perspectives pertaining to how

disclosing their sexualities influence their teaching effectiveness. As such, there was

no clear "answer" to my second research question. For the instructors I interviewed,

disclosing one's sexuality to students could enhance an instructor's teaching

effectiveness. However, in doing so, LGBTQ instructors identify with a socially

marginalized community and run the risk of having their abilities as educators tied

exclusively and inextricably to that marginalized identity. Whether the rewards

outweigh the risks is something these individual instructors needed to consider.

RQ3 asked "How do LGBTQ instructors view their relationships with their

students to be influenced by their choices to disclose or not disclose their

sexualities?" Responses from my research partners overwhelmingly supported the

idea that disclosing their sexualities to their students was beneficial for the

relationships they have with their students. Responses typically supported one of

three assertions: 1) disclosing your sexuality makes students more comfortable

seeking you out, 2) disclosing your sexuality makes interactions with your students

more personal, and 3) disclosing your sexuality makes relationships with your

students more reciprocal.

First, many of my research partners explained that after disclosing their sexualities to their students, they noticed students seeking them out more. Andy explained, "once they know [I'm gay], I think they actively seek me out more," (personal communication, October 27, 2011). Similarly, Bethany responded, "over the past couple years, I have students who just show up in my office and come hang out. We weren't really talking about anything in specific, but it seemed important for those particular students," (personal communication, October 11, 2011). Julie also explained how she finds students approaching her about things unrelated to class once she discloses her sexuality: "I find that the other GLBT students we have seem to come to me for advising on different issues, like different career choices, about my input on practicum, further education; I've seen that," (personal communication, November 1, 2011). According to these instructors, disclosing their sexualities to their students constructs them as more approachable teachers, resulting in students seeking them out more frequently.

Second, my research partners explained that disclosing their sexualities seemed to heighten the personal nature of the student-teacher relationship. As Jim explained to me, "I think [disclosing my sexuality] has sent the message that I'm willing to offer a genuine reflection of who I am. If I were to pick one reason why I do it, it's about genuineness and authenticity," (personal communication, January 19, 2012). Barry discussed how the fact that his students know he is gay helped them "understand me as a person, so students have a better understanding of who I am as an individual," (personal communication, January 13, 2012). Further, Andy explained that his openness with his sexuality in the classroom allows him to be less

guarded with his students. "I think by being honest with who I am as a gay man, I can be honest with my students on all parts of my classroom," (personal communication, October 27, 2011). Dan also discussed the more personal nature his relationships with his students take as a result of being open with his sexuality: "I think it sets up a rapport, so that's why I do it; for students to know that you're a real person," (personal communication, October 26, 2011). Essentially, discussing their sexualities in class allows my research partners to establish heightened interpersonal relationships with their students.

Finally, my research partners emphasized the heightened reciprocity they experience in relationships with their students after disclosing their sexualities. As Jerry explained, "if people know me they will trust me, and they'll be honest with me" (personal communication, October 21, 2011). Jim also expressed similar sentiments, saying "if I'm expecting them to be authentic, engaged learners, then that same goes for me. You're going to be human, and I'm going to be human, and we're here to try to learn and become better people," (personal communication, January 19, 2012). Additionally, Barry discussed how he notices his students opening up more once he does. "When I have had call to share something with them that is really deeply personal, their communications with me do open up. They become more willing to talk about themselves as individuals," (personal communication, January 13, 2012). According to my research partners, disclosing their sexualities to their students establishes more of a balanced, reciprocal relationship that may enrich the overall classroom experience of both the students and the instructor.

After addressing the research questions that framed this study, a number of additional themes emerged from the interviews that are worthy of addressing here. These themes relate to my research partners' experiences being LGBTQ both inside and outside of the classroom. Because these responses may better inform our understanding of the lived experiences of a marginalized group of people, I address these emergent themes next.

Emergent Themes

There were three themes that emerged from the interview transcripts in addition to the research questions posed at the beginning of this study. Although some of my research partners' responses that follow may be tied to discussions earlier in this chapter, I felt they were unique enough to explore apart from the research questions. Similar to the framework I provided at the beginning of this chapter, each of the three themes is articulated in the words of my research partners, in order to better ground the analysis in their experiences. In the following section, I provide an overview of 1) the personal needs to disclose one's sexuality, 2) the role that course content plays in disclosing sexuality, and 3) institutional support for LGBTQ faculty.

"Self-disclosing could be because of your own personal needs."

Undoubtedly because so much of education is focused on students, most of the responses provided throughout this chapter have referenced the role that students play when LGBTQ instructors consider whether or not to disclose their sexualities. However, the first theme that emerged from my interviews with my research partners was the discussion of personal needs to "come out" to students.

Jerry articulated this quite clearly when he said, "I just want them to feel comfortable, and *I* want to feel comfortable. I couldn't stand living my life hiding something; I have to be open and honest with myself," (personal communication, October 21, 2011, emphasis mine). Similarly, when I asked Kelly Jo what advice she would give to LGBTQ instructors who are considering disclosing their sexualities to their students, she replied, "I would encourage them to do what works for *them,* and what is going to fulfill *their* needs," (personal communication, November 3, 2011, emphasis mine). This type of primacy is rarely afforded to instructors in instructional communication research, but as Benjamin explained, "self-disclosing in the classroom could be because of your own personal needs. That has to be part of the equation too," (personal communication, February 3, 2012).

A few of my research partners expressed frustration that so much thought has to go into deciding whether or not to disclose their sexualities or not. As Bethany asserted, "Why is this so hard? I get sort of pissed! This shouldn't be so hard! Who actually cares? But a lot of people, which is why I continue to do it," (personal communication, October 11, 2011). Julie expressed similar frustrations. "Then I think, geez, if I was heterosexual, would I even have to be thinking about this? But because of my sexual orientation, I think about that. And I always think, so what are my heterosexual counterparts doing?" (Julie, personal communication, November 1, 2011). For these instructors, the choice to disclose or not disclose their sexualities to their students becomes linked to their own personal turmoil surrounding the issue. For these instructors, Jim argued such a personal stake is not only warranted, but acceptable. "If you feel like that will help *you* be a better teacher

and help *you* have better, more honest relationships with your students, awesome. Do it," (personal communication, January 19, 2012, emphasis mine).

"The class isn't 'what the professor is'"

The second theme I discovered in coding my interview transcripts was the ways in which course content justifies a disclosure of sexuality. All of my research partners expressed consideration for the content of their classes, regardless of whether or not they viewed the content as facilitating their sexuality disclosures. Although not all of my research partners agreed on the role course content plays in justifying their openness about their sexualities, they each provided interesting insight into what other LGBTQ instructors might consider when figuring out what is the best for them.

First, a majority of my research partners reported that the content they teach makes disclosing their sexualities relevant to class discussions. As Bethany explained, "if I taught biology or math, there'd be less room for me to be able to do that, but because of what I teach it's easy for me to incorporate pieces of my life into that," (personal communication, October 11, 2011). Dan took a similar approach to course content, instead focusing on the demographic of students his field typically attracts. "Most people who go into librarianship tend to be more liberal and open-minded. Librarianship tends to have more gay men—an overrepresentation, maybe—than a different profession might," (personal communication, October 26, 2011). Barry also acknowledged this, explaining "the kind of people who go into anthropology as a discipline are the kinds of people who are pretty open minded.

You can't be a closed-minded anthropologist; it doesn't work," (personal communication, January 13, 2012).

For other instructors, course content was perceived to be less influential. As Jerry put it, "I don't think that my sexuality necessarily plays into what I do," (personal communication, October 21, 2011). He further elaborated that the content of his class is irrelevant when it comes to discussing his sexuality: "if I were in English, the students would know I was gay; in whatever subject I was teaching, it's such a part of me that I feel like I would be the same." For Andy, content plays less of a role in how open he is with his sexuality than his personal teaching style.

> By being a *facilitator*, I can bring topics to the table, but also my feeling is that anybody can bring topics to the table. Even if it's a contrary view, it's a view that's important and we should have a dialogue about it. (Andy, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

For Kelly Jo, who explained to me she does not disclose her sexuality to her students, the content of the courses she teaches is less important than the examples she might use in class. As she argued, "if there was something that had to do with my sexuality that I could give as an example, absolutely, I would bring it out in the classroom. In what I'm teaching, that's just not there right now." When considering what role the content plays in disclosing one's sexuality, LGBTQ instructors may want to consider what Julie articulated: "I'm out in the community and everything, but when it comes to my classes, the class topic isn't 'what the professor is for that day'. You have to think about why you are self-disclosing," (personal communication, November 1, 2011). If the content *does* lend itself to a sexuality

disclosure, my research partners would suggest incorporating it into examples to further class discussion.

"I just don't think [we're] on the radar."

The last theme that I discovered in my interview transcripts was that of institutional support for LGBTQ faculty and staff. A majority of my research partners explained to me they felt perfectly safe, secure, and respected in their positions at their respective institutions, as is evidenced in the following excerpts.

> "My colleagues, my dean, all of it is super supportive and a great place; it's just a great place to be," (Dan, personal communication, October 26, 2011).

> "I really feel like this is a university that is very accepting," (Jerry, personal communication, October 21, 2011).

> "With the fact that I'm not openly out, it only affects me with people that I know, but I've never had anything negative. It's been nothing but positive," (Kelly Jo, personal communication, November 3, 2011).

> "With my colleagues I definitely feel safe, secure… I feel like my relationship with my partner is supported," (Julie, personal communication, November 1, 2011).

These interviewees articulated clear feelings of security and acceptance as members of their respective institutions, and expressed a certain degree of satisfaction with how their institutions fostered a comfortable environment for them to be open about their sexualities.

However, this sense of acceptance and security was not shared by all of my research partners. A number of instructors mused about the difference between

"talking" and "doing" diversity on their respective campuses. As Bethany explained, "I've come to recognize that we can talk about being supportive of faculty that are diverse, but that doesn't actually happen," (personal communication, October 11, 2011). Dan also described similar feelings on his campus, claiming, "I don't have a belief that our administration's collective support of anything to do with minorities is really altruistic as it is wanting to attract those populations for the numbers, so it looks good," (personal communication, October 26, 2011). In addition to expressing skepticism of her institution's support of diversity, Bethany shared a story with me about an incident she had with a student that she attributes to her sexuality. When she approached her department to figure out what to do, she explained,

> I went to the department to talk about how to get some support for this, and
> got none, and basically wasn't overtly told [to] get over it, but pretty much. If
> it had happened to any other member of the faculty, it wouldn't have been
> handled the same way. (personal communication, October 11, 2011)

Although the rest of my research partners who expressed feeling a lack of support from their departments or institutions, Bethany's story provided an example of open and outward hostility she perceived to be related in part to her sexuality. Such stories represent experiences of antagonistic environments that still plague LGBTQ faculty members.

The fact that any of my research partners expressed dissatisfaction with their institutions' support of LGBTQ faculty suggests that they believe more can and should be done for them. As Bethany further argued, "the students clearly want and need more faculty to be out, and yet we get nothing; there's nothing to help support

us in that," (personal communication, October 11, 2011). Additionally, Dan

explained "they do a pretty decent job for students; faculty and staff, we have no

support whatsoever to foster any kind of community," (personal communication,

October 26, 2011). When I asked Dan how he perceived his institution's lack of

support for LGBTQ faculty, he explained, "I just don't think it's on the radar."

  This chapter represented the analysis portion of my research project. I have

attempted to give voice to a select few LGBTQ instructors and capture their

experiences with disclosing their sexualities to their students. The following chapter

will provide further elaboration on the analysis contained here, in which I will

address the implications and limitations of this study as well as avenues for further

research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom (hooks, 1994, p. 207).

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It has been a long, laborious journey to reach this point in my project. After numerous hours spent discussing this predicament of "do I tell my students I'm gay," countless hours capturing experiences in text form, laboring over transcripts, attempting to find some shred of meaning in stories that were both foreign and known to me, we have arrived at the discussion. I have explained the impetus for this project, why it is needed, the form it took, and what I discovered, and now there is only sense-making left.

For the purposes of this chapter, I discuss the implications of my project, the limitations of the study, and avenues for future research. In addition, I feel the need to provide a conclusion, revisiting the narrative that sparked this conversation almost two years ago. The following sections, then, are to provide closure to the project, even if it is only a beginning.

Implications

The analysis presented in Chapter 4 yields significant implications for the study of self-disclosure, LGBTQ identity, and academia. Specifically, the experiences shared with me by my research partners have led me to consider what this study suggests with regards to sexuality and engaged critical pedagogy in higher education. As hooks so eloquently articulated at the start of this chapter, the classroom is a site of possibility; how we as educators use that possibility is up to us. The responses of my research partners demonstrate a consideration for the role sexuality plays in academia, and the implications of their stories speak to the kind of education experience hooks champions us all to pursue.

The queer classroom as a field of possibility.

Initially, the responses I gathered from my research partners suggest that disclosing sexuality to students may represent an intersection of queer theory and engaged pedagogy in the classroom. According to Slagle (2003), "queer criticism insists that individual sexualities are a fundamental aspect of who we are as human beings; sexuality, then, cannot or should not be viewed as a peripheral issue of identity" (p. 134). Essentially, Slagle argued that sexuality is always public. This is in keeping with hooks' (1994) notion of engaged pedagogy:

> I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. (p. 21)

The responses articulated by my research partners suggest that disclosing an LGBTQ sexual identity to students may distinctively unite queer theory with engaged pedagogy in a way that uniquely undermines hegemonic systems of oppression in academia and works to empower students to take charge of their education, thus constructing the classroom as a site of resistance.

I believe such a queered/engaged space renders irrelevant the oppressive master narrative that pervades discussions of "coming out" in the classroom. The dominant discourses in instructional communication research construct self-disclosure, and specifically disclosures of sexuality, as dependent on the content of the course in question. Such narratives frame personal identity constructs as articles that can be put on and *taken off,* as opposed to lenses through which individuals interpret, interact with, and communicate about their lived experiences. Slagle (2003) argued, "our sexuality is always present, and always influential in the decisions that we make about our lives in general, and our communication in particular," (p. 134). In a queered/engaged classroom, discussion of sexuality becomes the key to constructing the classroom as a site of change.

What does this intersection of queer theory and engaged pedagogy mean for the LGBTQ instructor? In an applied sense, we need to move beyond rationalizing discussions of our sexuality in the classroom as only topical if relevant to course content. By limiting conversations of subjected or marginalized identities to course material that might "warrant" such conversations, we work against notions of the classroom as a field of possibility and instead reinforce the idea of the classroom as a rigid, unyielding site of knowledge transfer. Instructors need to consider for

themselves why, when, and how they want to bring their sexuality into the classroom, but basing that decision on how our sexuality will fit within the curriculum disempowers us and prevents our students from experiencing their education in nontraditional and exciting ways. Instead, we need to construct our classrooms as sites where *all* identities can serve to challenge and expand our perspectives and those of our students in order to help everyone better reach a new level of actualization.

Such a construction allows us, as queer/engaged educators, to imagine new realities with our students. hooks (1994) argued that the classroom is the "most radical space of possibility in the academy," (p. 12). By continuing to construct the classroom as a queer/engaged space, we can ensure that the classroom remains a site of intellectual and social transformation—a field of possibility.

Facing reality collectively.

During the coding process, it became apparent to me that there were two narratives being communicated by my research partners in regards to disclosing their sexualities. My male research partners typically reported less intrapersonal uncertainty when considering disclosing their sexualities to their students, while my female research participants reported considerable dissonance. In particular, Bethany explained "When I think about who I am, I tend to put my gender first and my sexual identity second. So I see things through the lens of gender, but you can't pull them all the way apart," (personal communication, October 11, 2011). Additionally, Jim explained similar findings of a research project he completed:

> In my research, I had a lot of men who were that same "I don't care, that's
>
> your issue." And that really contrasted the women who said "I'm putting my
>
> job in jeopardy if I do that." One of the conclusions that I came to in my study
>
> was that part of that comes back to male privilege. (personal communication,
>
> January 19, 2012)

The responses articulated through this study suggest the presence of sexist privilege in LGBTQ discourse. Specifically, the responses reiterate a "homonormative" cultural narrative that privileges the experience of the gay male while subjugating the experiences of other genders and sexual minorities. Stryker (2008) explained that the term "homonormative" became suitable for use "where homosexual community norms marginalized other kinds of sex/gender/sexuality difference" (p. 147). She further argued "homonormativity… aimed at securing privilege for gender normative gays and lesbians based on adherence to dominant cultural constructions of gender" (p. 147-148). For many female instructors, such homonormativity is accomplished when sexuality and gender oppression are inextricably layered upon each other to compound experiences of marginalization in the classroom. Additionally, homonormativity in the academy may uniquely target transgender or transsexual instructors who may be undergoing a significant transition in their sex, gender, or sexual identity. Because of the particularly stigmatized nature of transitioning from one gender or sex to another, transgender/transsexual instructors may choose not to disclose such experiences to their students. However, depending on the instructor and the type of transition they are undergoing, students may be able to witness their instructor undergoing such changes, thus presenting

both students and instructors with unique challenges in negotiating the boundaries of disclosing sex, gender, or sexual identity.

Friedman and Leaper (2010) reported that lesbian, bisexual, and queer women experienced discrimination based on their status as sexual minorities and as women. Similarly, the difference in experiences of the lesbian and bisexual female instructors and the gay male instructors interviewed for this study are representative of ways in which sex, gender, and sexuality intersect to compound discrimination and subjugation in the classroom. By privileging sexuality norms that reiterate sexist oppression and marginalize the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, or queer women, we establish a homonormative narrative that functions to divide rather than unite the LGBTQ community.

Instead, we need collective labor for freedom. If we hope to have a transformative impact in the classroom, we need to create a context "where we can engage in open critical dialogue with one another, where we can debate and discuss without fear of emotional collapse, where we can hear and know one another in the difference and complexities of our experience," (hooks, 1994, p. 110). We also need to recognize that the struggles LGBTQ instructors face in navigating their sexuality in the classroom is not only their issue to deal with; oppression, marginalization, and stigmatization are the concerns of everyone. It is imperative that LGBTQ instructors seek out those support systems that will help enable them to embrace all aspects of their identities in the academy, whether in the classroom, department, college, or institution. We need to make our problems the problems of our students, our colleagues, our chairs, our deans, and our presidents. The fight to end

heterosexism and heteronormativity in higher education is one that should be

fought on all fronts and by everyone involved, not just by LGBTQ instructors. We

need to seek out and create an academic context that will help the academic

community collectively work to reject norms, standards, and practices that openly

discriminate and discourage LGBTQ instructors who attempt to create open,

authentic classroom settings.

Such a context rejects homonormative constructions of appropriate gender

and sexuality performances; it rejects institutional and departmental apathy

towards LGBTQ faculty; and it genuinely celebrates diversity in all forms of

expression. Deconstructing heteronormative and heterosexist practices in higher

education is not just a cause to be championed by the sexual minorities such

practices oppress; it is a cause to be championed by the collective body of academia.

Students, teachers, administrators—both gay and straight—need to imagine ways to

move beyond boundaries in the classroom, to transgress.

The practice of freedom.

Finally, knowing the teacher as a person—as genuine, authentic, and

invested in the classroom as a site of transformation—is a practice of freedom.

hooks (1994) explained that dominant academic discourses construct the teacher as

an objective mind free of experience and bias. This conceptualization, she argued,

represents "the absence of any requirement that we be self-actualized," (p. 17)

effectively subjugating notions of wholeness and upholding a dualistic separation of

public and private. Instead, hooks argued that instructors need to "bring narratives

of their experiences into classroom discussions," (p. 21). Bringing these narratives

into the classroom and acknowledging the multiple facets of our identities for our students will allow us to transform the curriculum and become wholly present in mind, body, and spirit.

Again, knowing the teacher as a person—as genuine, authentic, and invested in the classroom as a site of transformation—makes the personal political. Experiencing the teacher as more than a tool to convey information helps students understand their own positionality within the institution of higher education. By acknowledging the hegemonic invisibility of LGBTQ sexualities in the classroom, instructors can demonstrate the political condition symptomatic in such suffering. In disclosing their sexuality to students, LGBTQ instructors can further deconstruct the normative systems of oppression that constrain and confine their identities and the identities of their students.

Simply put, LGBTQ instructors need to talk about their sexuality. Allowing dominant discourses to silence sexual minorities perpetuates oppression in the academy, and is the antithesis of education as the practice of freedom. Although discussing sexuality in the classroom may pose risks to LGBTQ instructors, not doing so permits heteronormative and heterosexist ideologies to flourish unchecked and (re)creates the classroom as a site of subjugation. To talk about sexuality in the classroom, to dare to create theory "from the location of pain and struggle" (hooks, 1994, p. 74), is liberating for both students and teachers. It is the practice of freedom.

By choosing to disclose our sexualities to our students, we can only better ourselves and those we instruct. Being completely authentic, owning our complex

identities, and representing ourselves to our students as best we can serves to

humanize the classroom experience and make the classroom a place of mutual

education and commitment to learning. In choosing to disclose our sexualities to our

students, we acknowledge the classroom for what it is, and what it can be: a site of

radical social, political, and intellectual transformation. Such a small step on our part

can lead to a world of difference.

Limitations

This research project is not without its limitations. First, although the chosen

method best allowed me to accomplish the goals I had for this study, it is not

without its drawbacks. Because of the personal investment I have in this research

project, it is impossible to guarantee that my biases have not misrepresented my

research partners in any way. Additionally, due to the nature of responsive

qualitative interviewing, it is possible that my research partners may have fallen

victim to social desirability bias, responding to my interview questions in a way they

thought I would want them to or would view favorably. Qualitative interviewing is a

distinctly subjective research method, and that subjectivity should be taken into

account when considering my report of the responses.

Second, although it was not my goal to be able to generalize the findings of

this study to the larger LGBTQ community, those looking for support or suggestions

in this study will notice a lack of diversity among my participant sample.

Specifically, the preponderance of gay male voices and the lack of transgender

voices provide a limited depiction of experiences of LGBTQ faculty. Of significant

importance is the lack of transgender representation in this project. Additionally,

my sample represents virtually no ethnic or racial diversity as my research partners were all White, and the extent to which my research partners represent different class statuses is unclear as I did not question them about their class backgrounds. By not doing so, I may have inadvertently confined the identities of my research partners to just their sexual identities rather than exploring the ways in which their multiple identity constructs intersect to inform their understandings of their sexual identities in the classroom. These limitations are in part due to the challenges of locating and soliciting LGBTQ research partners in academia.

Future Research

Based on the analysis conducted for this study, I propose two avenues of future research. First, due to the preponderance of responses from my research partners indicating the need for and benefit of being viewed as a genuine, authentic person in the classroom, future researchers should consider revisiting the instructional communication research pertaining to power bases in the classroom—specifically the use of referent power. French and Raven's (1968) five power bases have been studied extensively in instructional communication research, but most of the existing research has become outdated (see McCroskey & Richmond, 1983; Richmond, 1977; Richmond & McCroskey, 1984). McCroskey and Richmond (1983) explained that referent power refers to a student's identification with a teacher and the relationship between the two; the stronger the student's identification with the teacher, the stronger the teacher's referent power. Future research exploring LGBTQ faculty and disclosures of sexuality in the classroom should consider examining whether disclosing sexuality to students is deliberately used by LGBTQ

instructors to surrender more oppressive, coercive forms of power for more empowering and mutually beneficial referent, or whether disclosing sexuality to students confers power to the students in light of their knowledge of personal information about the instructor.

Second, although I believe more instructional communication research should take a more teacher-focused approach, it may be time to revisit studies like that of Russ, Simonds, and Hunt (2002) who found that students reported learning twice as much from heterosexual instructors as they did from homosexual instructors, in addition to reporting that students were nine times more likely to hire an instructor they perceived as straight over one they perceived to be gay. The experiences of my research participants conflict with many of the findings of Russ, Simonds, and Hunt, perhaps because their study was conducted over a decade ago. Further research should be conducted on student perceptions of LGBTQ instructors in order to document more current student sentiments regarding LGBTQ faculty. If this project is indeed indicative of an evolution in student perceptions of LGBTQ instructors, such information might influence further LGBTQ instructors to consider disclosing their sexualities in the classroom setting.

Conclusion

When I first conceived of this project two years ago, it was out of a thirst for answers. To quote bell hooks (1994), "I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me," (p. 59). It has not been easy to name my pain, to "theorize from that location," (p. 74), but it has been rewarding. Having immersed myself in the theories of other LGBTQ teachers—

peers, colleagues now—I have found more support than I could have hoped for, yet fewer answers. What is left within me is a burning desire to radically transform my own teaching practices, to "create new ways of knowing, different strategies for the sharing of knowledge," (p. 12).

If you were to ask me, now, at the conclusion of this project, whether I will choose to disclose my sexuality to my students, I do not have an answer. The question now is not whether I will share my sexuality with my students; it is whether I will work to create a transformative space for us to come together and learn from each other, to succeed and fail in a learning community that transcends the normative boundaries of what a classroom is supposed to be, and what the student-teacher relationship is supposed to look like. To that question, I answer yes.

As an educator, I have grown immensely over the past two years. My students and my peers have challenged me to continually rethink my methods and expand my horizons, to ensure that I am being as effective and empowering as I can be. And yet I'm just beginning. Fassett and Warren (2007) explained that critical pedagogy "is ultimately about the journey, rarely the destination," (p. 164). If that is the case, then I hope to mirror those who "celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom," (hooks, 1994, p. 12).

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Appendix A

IRB Proposal Approval

Kristen Treinen, Ph.D.
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AH 230
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Justin Rudnick
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Armstrong Hall 230
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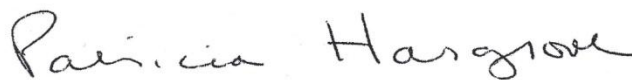August 4, 2011

Dear Kristen and Justin:

Re: IRB Proposal, Log **#3856** entitled *"To Share or Not to Share: The Impact of Disclosing Sexuality on Instructor Communication Apprehension"*

Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of August 4, 2011. On behalf of the Institutional Review Board I wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study. Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the IRB as soon as possible.

The approval of your study is for one calendar year from the approval date. When you complete your data collection, or should you discontinue your study, you must notify the IRB. Please include your log number with any correspondence with the IRB.

This approval is considered final when the full IRB approves the monthly decisions and active log. The IRB reserves the right to review each study as part of its continuing review process. Continuing reviews are usually scheduled. However, under some conditions the IRB may choose not to announce a continuing review.

Sincerely,

Patricia Hargrove

Patricia Hargrove, Ph.D.
IRB Coordinator

Cc: File

Appendix B

Recruitment Script

Hello-

My name is Justin Rudnick, and I am a graduate student in the Communication Studies department at Minnesota State University, Mankato. As part my degree requirements, I am currently working on a research project for my Master's thesis. I was referred to you by _____ , and I would like to ask if you would be interested in helping me complete my research project by being a participant in my study.

My research attempts to uncover the personal effects an LGBTQ college instructor experiences as a result of sharing or not sharing their sexualities with their students. I will be conducting face-to-face interviews with all willing participants in order to capture their stories and analyze them for trends to help me answer my research questions. If you are willing to participate or would like additional information about my research project, please contact me via email (justin.rudnick@mnsu.edu) or by phone (507-779-5339).

I sincerely hope you will consider helping me conduct this research project, and I look forward to your response!

-Justin Rudnick

Appendix C

Consent Form – Sexuality Disclosure Study

You are invited to take part in research about the effects of disclosing sexuality to students. You are a potential participant because you are a college/university instructor and have regular interaction with students. The research is being conducted by Dr. Kristen P. Treinen and Justin Rudnick at Minnesota State University, Mankato. We ask that you read this form before agreeing to participate in the research.

Purpose
The purpose of this research project is to learn more information about the effects that choosing to disclose one's sexual identity in the classroom has on instructors. In particular, we are interested in learning how the decision to disclose or not disclose this information affects an instructor's anxiety in the classroom.

Procedures
If you agree to participate in this research, and sign this consent form, we would like to conduct a face-to-face interview with you. All interviews will be conducted by Justin Rudnick, and will take approximately 1 hour. You are free to choose the time and place of the interview in order to help accommodate your schedule. The interview will be audibly recorded, and will consist of questions pertaining to your experiences with disclosing or not disclosing your sexuality to the students you teach.

Risks and Benefits
You will be asked various questions that may be highly personal in nature. These questions may pertain to your sexuality, your position at your respective institution, your department, and the subject matter you teach. Your responses to these questions will not be shared with anyone else. At any time you may refuse to answer any question you are asked with no penalty whatsoever. There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Confidentiality
The records and recordings of this study will be kept private, available only to Dr. Kristen P. Treinen and Justin Rudnick. Anything you share will remain confidential. In any sort of report of this study, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. You will not be asked for your address or phone number, and your name will be changed in any report that is written. All consent forms, recordings, and transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet; only the researchers for this study will have access to the records.

Voluntary nature of the study
Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will not affect your current or future relations your institution, Minnesota State University, Mankato, or the researchers conducting this study. Even if you sign the consent form, you are free to stop participating in the research at any time without penalty. You do not need to complete any part of the interview if you feel uncomfortable doing it. Refusal to participate in this research will involve no penalty.

Contact
The researchers conducting this study are Dr. Kristen P. Treinen and Justin Rudnick. You may contact the researchers at the University by calling (507) 398-2213 (department phone). If you have any questions or concerns regarding the treatment of human subjects, contact: MSU IRB Administrator, Minnesota State University, Mankato, Institutional Review Board, 115 Alumni Foundation Center, (507) 389-2321.

I have read the above information and understand that this survey is voluntary and I may stop at any time. I consent to participate in the study.

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Date

_____
Signature of Researchers

_____
Date

☐   Participant received a copy.