

**IS CURRICULUM IN THE CLOSET?  
INSTRUCTORS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT GAY AND LESBIAN  
CONTENT IN ALBERTA UNIVERSITY GENDER COURSES**

**©NORMA M. HEALEY**

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## Dedication

This work is the zenith of several years of post secondary education, beginning with my undergraduate degree and optimistically concluding with a doctorate in the future. I could not have accomplished any of this work without the continuing support and encouragement from some very strong-minded and unwavering women in my life. I owe this accomplishment to Dr. Nancy Buzzell who held the light for me when I was stumbling around in the darkness. Thank you Nancy for teaching me that I must always “think of what I want, rather than what I fear.” For that wisdom and your warm smile, I am eternally grateful.

This thesis is also dedicated to my mother who taught me that if you have the ability to read then knowledge is never out of reach, and no part of the world is inaccessible regardless of gender, age, socioeconomic status, race, religion, or sexual orientation. I thank you Mom for always having books around that allowed me to escape to another world, and for teaching me that we can educate ourselves in whatever way we choose.

I thank both of you for believing in me during times when I didn't. You are truly inspirational.

## Abstract

This study focuses on the nature of university instructors' beliefs and attitudes toward gay and lesbian content in the university Gender course curriculum. It was intended to provide a better understanding of factors such as academic freedom, societal influences, personal opinions, curriculum, and institutional influences that might affect attitudes and thus undermine the inclusion of discussion about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) issues.

Participants in the study were seven instructors from the faculties of Social Sciences, Faculty of Education, Applied Psychology, and Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge, in the province of Alberta, Canada.

The study revealed that although there was only a slight diversity of beliefs and attitudes about the topic among the participants, a majority of them felt positively toward inclusion of information in the university curricula. The positive attitudes were expressed as a willingness to teach about the subject matter, and a belief that LGBT content should be integrated throughout the general curriculum. The implications and the challenges of incorporating LGBT issues into the curriculum were also discussed.

Participants discuss that LGBT issues are not adequately represented in the curriculum, that there is a need for more public awareness and education about homosexuality, a need for greater inclusion of gay and lesbian issues in university programs, a desire for less marginalization of the LGBT topic, and a vow to provide more respect for LGBT persons.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This study investigated faculty perceptions toward offering courses that include and integrate discussions and material within the curricula concerning issues relevant and perhaps specific to Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual or Trans-gendered students (LGBT).

Specifically, the research question asks, “What are instructors’ perceptions about gay and lesbian content in Alberta university Gender courses?” The objective was to gather information and study instructors’ perceptions in an attempt to open up opportunities for further research into the impact that personal perceptions have upon professional efforts to understand and address university students who still wrestle with their sexual identities.

Principally, the study will attempt to identify factors that are both internal and external to the course instructors’ control over including gay and lesbian content in their course curriculum. These factors include but are not limited to academic freedom, societal influences, government influences, and/or personal opinions/biases that unlock, restrict or prohibit the content of the curricula. This chapter provides the researcher’s personal experiences or background of the study, the purpose of the study, and the suggested significance of the work. Chapter Two contains a review of related literature (1994-2001) that not only surveys the literature about this topic but also evaluates previous findings and the support for studying this issue.

Chapter Three describes the researcher’s chosen method of conducting the study, participant identification and selection, the procedures utilized for the interview question development, data analysis and related theory, and finally the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter Four provides results of the collected interview data along with relevant excerpts from the raw data that highlight the emergent themes. The aforementioned is followed by a discussion of the results, the researcher's conclusions, and implications for counselling in Chapter Five.

#### *Background of the Study*

This study has personal relevance, and is based on observations made about lost opportunities for some university curriculum to include and represent LGBT students within a university's diverse population. Approximately eight years ago, I decided that it was time to pursue a goal of completing a university degree, majoring in Psychology. It was during this time as a mature student that I noticed that very few courses within the Psychology program requirements included lecture discussions or curriculum content about issues that may be unique to LGBT students.

At the university where I completed my undergraduate degree a Woman's Studies course offered a full class lecture on the topic of homosexuality, and a Culture of Anthropology course discussed societies where homosexuality was seen as just one of many natural human choices of sexual orientation. Primate Anthropology courses often referenced the homosexual tendencies of the humans' predecessors, yet on the other hand, Psychology courses and especially the Psychology of Gender courses at that time in 1998, as far as I was aware, offered little or no information to students about topics of relevance to non-heterosexual students.

Bohan (1997) claims that during class discussions about relationships, families, values, beliefs, norms, societal expectations, adolescence, development, and diversity, gay and lesbian students are rarely given an opportunity to see their lives reflected in the

curriculum in a positive way. She further advocates that classroom discussion is almost always presented from a heterosexist lens. For example, based on my personal educational experience in 1998 there was generally no discussion about how relationship issues for homosexual couples may have different dynamics than for heterosexual couples.

The reality that there are an unlimited variety of homosexual families does not mean that there is a limited amount of stress surrounding the existence of diverse families in a heterosexist society. The definition of heterosexism (Milton & Coyle, 1999) generally refers to the presumption that all members of society are heterosexual unless declared otherwise, or as Andrews (1990) puts it that heterosexual relationships are the norm. Both of the aforementioned authors suggest that heterosexuality is also assumed superior to other sexual orientations, and society has little tolerance for diversity outside the “norm” of heterosexuality. Milton & Coyle (1999) agree that the heterosexist framework is based on the assumption that heterosexuality is more natural or healthy, than other sexualities. Thus, they state that this heterosexist framework is often demonstrated in many classroom curricula, even if students declare their orientation and thus their needs or desires for others to attempt to give up or broaden their unilateral heterosexual views of the world. According to Greene (1999), the experience of heterosexism is not a single or isolated event, and individuals cannot disconnect their development or existence from its broader context.

In 1973, the American Psychological and Psychiatric Associations decided to remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) lexicon, where it was considered pathologically abnormal, and an aberration

(Milton & Coyle, 1999). However, the truth is that many Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender persons (LGBT) continue to battle a predominantly heterosexual society's lingering iron grip on sexual orientation as an unbearable vital threat. An interesting assertion by Milton & Coyle (1999) is that there is significant evidence to suggest that in a society where hostility is often aimed at gays and lesbians, and legal structures limit their human rights, lesbian and gay persons experience higher rates of emotional distress. It is pointed out by Flowers (2001) that unless the affected youth see themselves reflected in the curriculum they are marginalized, resulting in high drop out rates, social isolation, and numerous other problematic outcomes.

As reflected by Anderson (1997), gay and lesbian youth are routinely reviled in the two places where a child should feel safe and supported: family and school. Gay and lesbian youth have no choice but to become what Grossman (1997) calls runaways or throwaways. The fact that more gays and lesbians currently appear to be coming out of the woodwork and the closet presents a new role for people of all kinds within school communities in current societies.

MacGillivray (2000a) agrees that discussion is usually exclusive of gay and lesbian experiences, and is often silent about issues of sexual orientation and gender identity in general. Yet, LGBT students can proffer diverse perspectives and contributions to material taught in some university courses.

When I approached the professor who taught my undergraduate gender course about why there was no discussion that included issues and concerns that may be unique to LGBT students, the response was that she had not thought about it. As simple and innocuous as this statement sounded at the time, it conjured up numerous underlying

assumptions on my part. In my mind, it only makes sense that the classroom is the opportune place to stir up critical thinking about any controversial topic. My reaction to the professor's response was to wonder why she had not thought about it. I asked myself if she had considered or realized that LGBT students were as important as heterosexual students, if she had assumed that the entire class comprised heterosexual students, or whether or not she was even aware that the university student population was quite diverse. Fortunately, after the next class the same professor invited me to discuss the topic further. She concluded that until someone had brought it to her attention she had not thought about it, and there definitely should be LGBT discussions in the lectures. She then stated that she would attempt to do so for her next lecture and in the development of her next course outline. I was quite amazed and impressed by her actions. She had not only listened open-mindedly about my concern, but was willing to do something about it.

The same heterosexist belief held true for a course entitled the "Psychology of Adjustment," whose goal was to discuss various life stressors and events that humans encounter and must adjust to in order to survive as a healthy adult. According to Evans (1999, p. 9), "one place to look for the positioning of heterosexuality as the dominant framework is within curricular materials." So, I counted the number of lines of information in the course textbook that related to homosexuality. In a book comprised of approximately 350 pages, there were only two paragraphs of information that referenced homosexuality issues. Fontaine (1997) appropriately observes that most LGBT students are "lead to believe by the current curriculum content that homosexuals have never existed or significantly contributed to the nation's history" (p.103).

As a mature student in a university environment, the belief that I held then and still maintain is that if LGBT students cannot be represented in the education environment, a place where they are mandated to be until they reach the age of 18, where else will they be rendered visible and equal? If high schools within some communities in Alberta do not yet have an environment in which students feel safe, then a transitional step up to a university should be a journey that many young adults are anxious to execute as soon as their high school experience is over.

My ideal of the mission of a university is to attempt to offer academic freedom for all, and to allow each individual to express beliefs, values, ideas, research, critical thinking, and seminal works of knowledge. Yet, I felt that hypocrisy existed between my ideal precept of a university's mission and the fact that LGBT educational information did not appear to be included in this objective. I felt that the university might be missing an invaluable opportunity to provide LGBT students with recognition of them as mature young adults, and people whose sexual orientation was not an issue. I believe that a university setting provides opportunities for critical analysis in which controversial issues are normalized. The APA Task force on Diversity Issues asks how we might think differently about relationships, attraction, family dynamics or sexual expression if LGBT experiences were open for discussion (*APA Monitor*, 1998).

Completing a practicum at a local high school in a moderately sized southern Alberta city highlighted the necessity of doing research about gay and lesbian students' experiences within the Alberta education system. During my second term at the high school, I displayed a few posters on the high school Counselling office bulletin board. The posters indicated that the Counselling office was a gay positive space, meaning that it

employed counsellors who were open to discussing various issues and concerns. Three sets of posters were removed from the bulletin board, broadcasting a strong message to me that the high school population was not accepting of a gay positive space.

When it was arranged for a local community gay and lesbian youth group to come in to a high school staff meeting to answer questions that teachers may have about the needs of gay and lesbian students within the high school and the community, 15 minutes was allocated to the agenda for the group to present their program. After discussion with the entire administrative staff, the decision was changed to allow only five minutes for the students' group presentation. Therefore, despite the fact that the Principal of the school recognized the importance of inclusion of gay and lesbian students in all aspects of the school environment and curriculum, it appeared to me and to the youth group that she was dissuaded from providing too much time on the agenda for the youth group to promote themselves. This behavior fell in line with the conclusion reached by Sears (1992) in a study about educators' personal feelings being related to professional beliefs. The results of his study indicated that while classroom teachers often expressed the feeling that they should be more proactive and supportive of LGBT students they felt that their professional intervention was negligible because of personal prejudice, ignorance and fear. Nonetheless, the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA) Code of Professional Conduct has published documents that act as a reminder that teachers are responsible for protecting students from discrimination based on sexual orientation. A teacher's guide published by the Alberta Teacher's Association and entitled "Safe and Caring Schools for Lesbian and Gay Youth" is available as a resource, as well as a website published by the

ATA that can be accessed at

[http://www.teachers.ab.ca/diversity/Sexual\\_Orientation/Index.htm](http://www.teachers.ab.ca/diversity/Sexual_Orientation/Index.htm)

Therefore, based on my personal experience I did not feel that I would be unbiased or successful in collecting research data about faculty attitudes at this particular school, and was advised by several staff that no one had been successful in changing homophobic attitudes in that environment in the past.

In Canada, youth (for purposes of this study, youth are defined as 15-18 years old) of all sexual orientations are mandated to attend school. Students who do identify with a homosexual sexual orientation, or who are struggling with his or her identity as non-heterosexuals, may find themselves grappling with a nonflexible mandate to attend a school where the curriculum may express a growing emphasis on diversity. However, the conception of “diversity” may not necessarily include sexual orientation amongst its discourse. The subject of homosexuality is virtually taboo as an issue of serious discussion in educational settings, proclaims Miller (1999). The result is that many LGBT who are obligated to attend Alberta schools feel trapped in an environment that possibly could reject them overtly, or through omission in the curriculum.

Several students in a LGBT student youth group that I co-facilitated validated my belief in this truism. More than half of the students disclosed that they had dropped out of high school because they had been either harassed, did not feel safe in the school environment, or felt invisible. Two thirds of the group had been hospitalized for suicide attempts, substance abuse, or depression. Rejection by family, friends, and education has created a psychological death for many of them, an almost literal death for others. They suffered physiological illnesses, sociological isolation, and economic despair. Their



attempt to find a group identity appears to me to be a similar framework of stages of grieving outlined by Kubler-Ross (1969). In other words, gay and lesbian youth experience denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally self-acceptance. Eventually they may engage in hope that world attitudes will change to one of acceptance and even celebration of all of our human differences.

This research study hopes to provide some thoughts, feelings, and personal voice from instructors at three Canadian universities by securing a glimpse into their views about gay and lesbian issues within university Gender course curriculum. I do not delve into the limited research that relates to the many possible correlates of attitudes towards LGBT persons, the relationship between attitudes and stereotypes, or the implications that these associated constructs may produce. I define the word “perceptions” synonymously and interchangeably with “attitudes,” and according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (Eighth edition, 1990). The meaning refers to how a person understands through observation and/or reaches a settled opinion, or way of thinking. I have followed the concept of Sears (1992) who suggests that attitudes and feelings must be treated as separate constructs. He clarifies that “attitudes have been conceptualized as a set of cognitive beliefs whereas feelings are defined as a set of deep-rooted emotive reactions to homosexual situations or persons (p. 40)”. Parallel to that, a person’s behavior may or may not reflect those perceptions. A study conducted by Simon (1998) concludes that there is a relationship between stereotypes and attitudes towards lesbians and gays, but also suggests that it is possible to possess positive attitudes towards a group despite holding negative stereotypes. Greene & Herek (1993) agree that not only does there appear to be a straight forward relationship between stereotypes and attitudes toward

minority groups, but it is also possible for people to hold similar attitudes but for very different reasons (p. 31).

This study does not review attitudes of LGBT students' about the curriculum, although their needs form part of the call for further research in the area of curriculum development. I also did not focus this work on curriculum theory or development and its related dimensions, academic training of teachers, or Queer Theory. However, it is noteworthy to mention an interesting result documented by Bernhard, Lefebvre, Chud, & Lange (as cited in Fast, 2002), who reviewed Canadian teachers' attitudes and challenges associated with diversity. It was found that Canadian university faculty did not believe that graduates of education programs had the skills, knowledge or attitudes to teach diverse populations. Sears (1992) concurs with this observation that "educator's lack of knowledge, skills and sensitivity to address same-sex feelings is a problem with educators in general "(p. 39).

The title of this document illuminates and summarizes key words that form the meaning and the content of what is being investigated in this study. What do I mean by asking if the Gender curriculum is in the closet? I wish to find out through data collected in this study if the perceptions of university Gender course instructors will provide a glimpse into how open or silent the curriculum is to LGBT course material and discussions.

A particular focus of this study is on the internal and external factors that influence the instructors' overall perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about including LGBT issues in the curriculum of a Gender course. These may include but are not limited to personal opinions, lack of training, lack of academic freedom, lack of interest by the

student body, complaints by faculty, staff or students, or unavailability of resources. I intend to discover how much information is being currently taught in the Gender course curriculum at the university level in Alberta.

Although Fletcher (2001) believes that opportunities for incorporating sexual minority experiences and concerns within existing courses abound, I decided to focus on Gender courses because I felt that this would be the most relevant and fitting course that could smoothly integrate LGBT issues into its curriculum. Sexuality is often but not exclusively taught under the purview of a Gender course, but is taught as an interdisciplinary subject in some institutions. However, I felt that a Gender course would also be an ideal place to embed theory into practice. Students voluntarily choose to enrol in a Gender course as part of any number of electives offered within their faculty. The content of a Gender course presents a broad menu of discussion opportunities about the study of Gender. It may include neurological, biological, psychological, or sociological perspectives of Gender differences, Gender stereotypes, Gender and the experience of emotion, relationships, sexuality, health and fitness, careers and Gender, and school. Students are exposed to interdisciplinary food for thought about Gender that allows them to expand their boundaries of discourse. In general, I made the assumption that students who elect to take a Gender course tend to belong to an open-minded populace of students who have a cognitive and affective readiness to learn about “the other.” Discussions by a group of liberal arts students within a Gender classroom have potential to give the maximum effect of cultural literacy to the discourse. Instructors who teach Gender are generally those who are also thoughtfully and actively engaged in escalating the awareness of diversity and broadmindedness. For example, the University of Toronto,

Faculty of Arts and Science, offers students the opportunity to major or minor in a degree program entitled “Sexual Diversity Studies.”

Fisher (1999), Herr (1997), and Evans (1999) support my personal observations and beliefs that heterosexual sexuality often is the main frame of reference for discussions about sexuality in a Gender course. Brannon (1999) explains that Gender research focuses on the issues of both men and women as a factor in behavior, biology, and in a social context in which behavior occurs and men and women function. The word “Gender” is often used to distinguish biological sex from psychological sex, as well as to emphasize that masculinity and femininity are multidimensional concepts. A view taken by Herek (1998, p. 62) is “that investigations have shown that negative attitudes towards lesbians and gays are associated with traditional views regarding the roles and behavior of women; conservative, non-permissive attitudes toward sex; the belief that homosexuality is caused by social or environmental factors; religion; lack of homosexual acquaintances, and little education.” Brannon (1999) further postulates that Gender research is incomplete if either men or women are excluded from the research. Research on Gender cannot provide an understanding or knowledge of Gender unless both sexes are researched. I suggest that the same is true for sexual orientation. Research on heterosexuality cannot provide an understanding or complete knowledge of heterosexuality unless it examines alternate sexual orientations in its review.

Concomitantly, how instructors define *curriculum* bears importance on how they approach LGBT issues within the curriculum. Harden (2001) explains that the term *curriculum* means different things to different people. He clarifies his statement by saying that instructors either take a narrow dictionary view of what curriculum means, or a broad

view which includes a hidden curriculum of values and patterns of behavior that are acquired or encountered by students in the learning environment. I would speculate that instructors at the university level of education tend to adopt a broad view that is described by Miller (2001) as *holistic curriculum*. A position that Miller takes and I support is that instructors who adopt a narrow view of curriculum are mere technicians who neglect the whole person in their human experience. Miller (2001) optimistically philosophizes that “human life is fulfilling and meaningful only when we experience ourselves as being connected to the world, connected to the land, to a cultural heritage, to a living, striving community, to archetypal spirits and images, to the Cosmos as a whole” (p. 31). He then clarifies that a holistic curriculum is not a single method or technique that best represents a holistic worldview. Instead, we need to recognize “two principles of holistic education: first, an education that connects the person to the world starts with the person—not some abstract image of the human being, but with the unique, living, breathing person, or young human being who is in the teacher’s presence” (p. 31). Furthermore, he states that if education starts with a predetermined curriculum complete with standards, government mandates, lesson plans, and books then it loses the reality of the living human being.

Second, Miller (2001) denotes that a holistic teacher must respond to the learner with an open, inquisitive mind, a loving heart and an awareness of the meaning derived from the reflective engagement with the world in which they live.

Uribe and Harbeck (1992) further assert that one of the major roles of educational institutions is to foster a student’s growth of autonomy and sense of self as a social individual. This developmental process is complicated for gay and lesbian youth who

during times of physical, social, emotional and intellectual changes find that they have to learn to hide from societal stigma and thus their own identity.

Miller (1997) sums it up nicely by stating:

Education has always been seen as the light that shines in the darkness and drives out ignorance. Yet somehow that light seldom reaches those shadowy corners wherein lie matters of culture—particularly those of race, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality? When it comes to teaching and learning about these issues, a policy of silence has ruled (p. 260).

It is anticipated that the information gathered in the study may facilitate recommendations for changes or improvement of the university experience for LGBT students, and for teaching.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

As a long time resident of the province of Alberta, I am aware that the people of the province have a reputation for being “conservative” in their views. As a researcher, I wondered how educators at the university level fit their academic and/or personal opinions into this apparently predetermined conservative framework for purposes of curriculum.

All of the participants selected for this work are university professors or instructors who are highly educated. In this regard, an assumption (or bias) that I had is that they would be liberal minded and critical analyzers of the subject matter. I made this assumption simply by virtue of the fact that they teach Gender courses, which by their very nature have a reputation of being of interest to liberal thinkers. Therefore, I wanted to know how liberal minded educators in a conservative political and social environment

would respond to the research questions. For that reason alone, my intent for conducting the study was simply to satisfy a curiosity about what participants perceptions are about the subject matter and to see how or if the information they proffered had any significance for future research.

I believe that research into this issue will eventually open up new perspectives that will give a voice to the gay and lesbian student population. Drawing on Kinsey's (1948) ballpark figure that 10 percent of the population is LGBT, there may be approximately between 600 and 4,000 LGBT students whose voices may generally be quiet at the three universities subject of this study. If we use the estimates provided by Banks (2003) relating to the Canadian population base rate being as high as 37 percent, depending on which operational definitions of LGBT are used, then there may be anywhere from 2,200 to 11,000 LGBT university students in each of the main universities in Alberta. The ripple effect of giving voice to issues unique to the gay and lesbian student body in a positive way may hopefully enhance tolerance and reduce discrimination within the educational system at all levels, hopefully beginning with elementary age children. Students' suicide rates may see a decline once gay students begin to realize that there is hope for the eventual acceptance of their diversity from their peers.

My intent in conducting the research was to use inductive reasoning to formulate some understanding of how higher level educators perceive this area of diversity within their specialized fields of study. Moreover, I do hope that academic light is shed on a topic that appears to be unexplored in general, and particularly in Canada. The purpose of this study is simply to explore faculty perceptions, beliefs and attitudes toward offering Gender courses in Alberta universities that include or integrate discussions and material

relevant to LGBT students. Stimpson (1993) claims “higher education will never exempt itself from prejudice until we dig up its roots” (p. 79). She describes those roots as theological, legal, medical, social, or psychological and that all of the roots share two features: ignorance that fertilizes them, and the practice that humans set up “my group, and the other group.” This study does not research the roots of prejudice in detail, but may review participants’ perceptions that may be based in certain roots.

Based on the attitudes and insight exhibited by the participants, I will attempt to inductively produce a theory that best encapsulates the main themes contained in the raw data. Furthermore, an understanding of the participants’ attitudes will hopefully promote further descriptive narration and inquiry into this topic. Ultimately, further inquiry will suggest a grounded theory or produce constructive changes to the educational environment that supports LGBT students’ quest for inclusion.

#### *Significance of the Study*

The present study is valuable for several major reasons. First, it would appear based on my research that there is a dearth of literature conducted in Canada on this topic, from both instructors and LGBT students’ points of view. I performed detailed searches using several Internet search engines, and although I found vast amounts of literature on LGBT issues in journal articles that were written by American authors, less than a dozen Canadian studies were retrieved that related to Canadian education. None of the articles retrieved directly relate to this study but they nonetheless have relevance. For example, Howard-Hassman (2001) interviewed 73 civic leaders in Hamilton, Ontario on their attitudes toward gay rights. She concluded that almost all of her participants favored basic equality rights for LGBT persons in education, housing and employment. However, her



study revealed that although respondents wanted to do the right (liberal) thing by conforming to the dominant small-liberal ideology, they had conflicting views based on religion, heterosexual social norms, and fear of gay sexuality. Howard-Hassman (2001) proclaims that the respondents in her study reflect the overall Canadian public opinion regarding gay rights.

Simplico (1995) discovered that even though some individuals describe themselves as being liberal minded, moral, and socially contemporary they still shy away from or grow silent during discussions of homosexuality thereby tacitly accepting heterosexual status quo attitudes towards homosexuals.

Given that university courses present prime opportunities to carry out research work especially with students who are eager to flex their cognitive abilities and academic freedom of critical thinking, I would be interested in knowing why there is not more research conducted in this area in Canada. At present, I am only able to contribute a small portion of knowledge to the existing research.

Secondly, it is suggested that LGBT students have traditionally been rendered hidden in the Canadian educational system, thereby perpetuating the many problems associated with that perceived abandonment. The information resulting from this study on faculty perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward LGBT content in the curriculum may have incredible value for informing educators of LGBT students' potential minor or major problems and risks. It may also inform LGBT students that their sexual orientation is accepted and valued by educators. A better understanding of the entire student populations' needs and concerns will contribute to the overall education systems goal of attending to diversity as a priority, and to the overall growth and enrichment of the

student populations' world view. Sanlo (1999) summarizes the reasons for inclusion of LGBT issues in the curriculum by explaining that inclusion is necessary to remove the secrecy about and the isolation of gay and lesbians in public schools, to ensure equal opportunity in education regardless of sexual orientation, to reduce discrimination and harassment of LGBT students in the schools, and to teach a full range of diversity. Pinar (1998) further asserts, "Pedagogy must work to demonstrate how we are all bound up together, thereby moving beyond bipolar understandings of the social" (p. 22).

Thirdly and primarily, LGBT students who are acknowledged, included, represented, and respected in the educational environment will perhaps foster greater self-esteem, exhibit less self-destructive behaviours, and with the help of education experience personal growth within a healthier and less homophobic society. He or she will be able to contribute his or her full potential to life and to society if uninhibited by harassment, stigma, stereotyping, anger and hatred. Frankl's (1946) seminal work "Man's Search for Meaning" applies to any human who endures suffering of any kind, whether it is physical, psychological, or sociological. Frankl (1946) wonders:

Is that theory true that would have us believe that man is no more than a product of many conditional and environmental factors--be they of a biological, psychological or sociological nature?

Dostoevsky said once "there is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings. I became acquainted with those martyrs whose behavior in camp, whose suffering and death, bore witness to the fact that the last inner freedom cannot be lost. It can be said that they were worthy of their sufferings: the way they bore their suffering was a genuine inner achievement. It is this spiritual

freedom which cannot be taken away that makes life meaningful and purposeful...if there is a meaning in life at all then there must be meaning in suffering. The way a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity even under the most difficult circumstances to add a deeper meaning to his life (pp. 87-88).

In other words, Frankl (1946) declares we can be stripped of everything else, but we cannot be stripped of our spirit or our attitudes. For this reason, Greene (1999) concurs by commenting that although LGBT persons routinely negotiate a hostile social climate we do not see great ranges of pathology, but a special kind of resilience that is found among many marginalized groups (p. 5).

It is anticipated by Brannon (1999) that if sexual orientation were made a routine part of the curriculum just as Gender research is a routine part of psychological research, celebrating diversity within education would be an accomplishment that many LGBT students would be more eager to pursue at all levels.

Finally, LGBT students will not be the only stakeholders that benefit from the reduction of heterosexism in the educational system. If LGBT students are happier and healthier people as a result of feeling accepted, valued and acknowledged, the effects will gradually ripple into the family unit, the community, and society in general as homophobia becomes a word of the past.

#### *Definition of Terms*

Some terms used in this research study may be alien to the reader, therefore to avoid confusion and misunderstandings regarding central terms, some words are defined so that the experiences of LGBT persons are understood. All definitions are reproduced

from the online reference at the University of California in Los Angeles, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered resource center: [http://www.lgbt.ucla.edu/findout\\_gloss.html](http://www.lgbt.ucla.edu/findout_gloss.html) or online at <http://www.clgs.org>. I was unable to find a Canadian source for definitions and terms.

In this study, a *bias* refers to a prejudice; an inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment. A *Bisexual* is a man or woman with a sexual and affectional or emotional orientation toward people of both sexes; bisexual men and women have sexual and romantic attractions to both men and women. Depending upon the person, his or her attraction may be stronger to women or to men, or they may be approximately equal. A bisexual person may have had sex with people of both sexes, or only of one sex, or he or she may never have had sex at all. It is important to note that some people who have sex with both men and women do not consider themselves bisexual. Bisexuals are also referred to as “bi.”

If a person is *closeted* he or she is not being open about his or her sexual orientation or Gender identity. *Coming out* refers to the experiences of some, but not all, gay men and lesbians as they explore their sexual identity. There is no correct process or single way to come out, and some LGBT persons do not come out. The process is unique for each individual, and it is the choice of the individual. Several stages have been identified in the process: identity confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and identity synthesis.

*Curriculum* in the context of this paper is defined by the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (reference) as the “courses offered by an educational institution.” The word *community* in this research refers to the gay and lesbian community, or the

educational community. *Discrimination* generally means the act of showing partiality or prejudice. In the context of this paper it normally refers to acts against a *Gay* person.

*Gay* refers to: i) a self-label for a man whose sexual and emotional attractions are for other men, ii) a term sometimes used to refer to a homosexual person of either sex. For example, some lesbians identify as “gay,” however, “gay” most commonly refers to men who primarily have emotional and sexual attraction to men. Self-identified gay men do not necessarily have sex only with men, but may occasionally engage in sex with women, or iii) an inclusive term encompassing gay men, lesbians, bisexual people, and sometimes even transgender people. In the last 20 years, this has become less and less common and “gay” is usually used currently to refer only to gay men. The term is still often used in the broader sense in spoken shorthand, as in “The Gay Pride Parade is at the end of June.”

How “masculine” or “feminine” an individual acts is called a *Gender role*. Societies commonly have norms regarding how men and women should behave, although the argument is made that dominant normative behavior is a dynamic, often evolving, process. *LGBT* is the acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. I often refer to the term *heterosexism*, which is the belief that heterosexuality is the only “natural” sexuality, and that it is inherently healthier or superior to other types of sexuality. Many homosexuals claim that heterosexism is an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior. It condones discriminatory practices and violence against LGBT individuals and creates unique developmental challenges otherwise not present such as overcoming internalized homophobia and coming out.

*A heterosexual* is an individual with a primary sexual and affectional orientation or emotional attraction toward persons of the opposite sex. Heterosexuals are sometimes referred to as “straight,” a man or woman whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to people of the other sex. She or he may or may not have had sex with another person, but still realize that his/her sexual attraction is mainly to people of the other sex. Some people who consider themselves heterosexual have or have had sexual contact with people of the same sex.

The LGBT Resource Center at UCLA describes *homophobia* as an irrational fear or hatred of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people; the responses of fear, disgust, anger, discomfort, and aversion that individuals experience in dealing with gay people; often it is manifest in the form of discrimination and prejudice. A *homosexual* is an individual with a primary sexual and affectional orientation or emotional attraction toward persons of the same sex. Historically, the psychologically appropriate and sensitive terms to identify individuals who were primarily sexually aroused by others of the same sex are that male homosexuals are often referred to as “gay,” whereas female homosexuals are referred to as “lesbians.”

*Lesbian* is a self-label for a woman whose sexual and emotional attractions are for other women. Sometimes a lesbian engages in sexual behaviors with men, even though she may self-identify as lesbian but generally a lesbian is a woman whose primary sexual and romantic attractions are to other women. She may have sex with women currently or may have had sex with women in the past. A smaller number of lesbians may never have had sex with another woman for a whole host of reasons (age, societal pressures, lack of opportunity, fear of discrimination), but nonetheless realize that their sexual attraction is

mainly to other women. Some lesbians have sex with men and some do not. It is important to note that some women who have sex with other women, sometimes exclusively, may not call themselves lesbians. The reasons for self-labeling are albeit interesting, but not the scope of this paper.

*Sexual identity development or formation* is the process of coming to recognize one's attraction to members of one or both sexes and to define or label oneself on the basis of that attraction; a process that evolves over time rather than a decision one makes at a particular point in time. The way in which one views oneself as a sexual being and chooses to present oneself may change significantly over the lifespan, particularly for individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Individuals born in this society are presumed to be heterosexual, learning the norms and expectations related to heterosexuality. Thus, developing an alternative identity requires two processes: letting go of an ingrained heterosexual identity and learning what it means to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Given the heterosexist and homophobic society in which we live, neither process is easy. Because the relative anonymity of the post secondary environment presents an opportunity to redefine oneself away from family monitoring, the two tasks of exiting heterosexuality and developing a new identity become real possibilities for the first time in many students' lives.

The term *sexual orientation* is used in this composition to describe a person's self-concept as based on sexual or emotional attractions to other persons who are of the same sex (a homosexual orientation), the other sex (a heterosexual orientation), or both same and other sex (a bisexual orientation). Realization of this concept may be outwardly

expressed as sexual identity, it may be privately acknowledged but not publicly expressed, or the individual may be unaware of it consciously.

All or most of the above terms may be found in the next section that contains a literature review. The literature review serves as a framework to share the results of other studies that are closely related to this one, demonstrates the importance of the topic, and provides a yardstick for comparing this study with other findings. It is very likely that expectations or recommendations for change that evolve from this study may come from sources outside of the post-secondary environment. I am mindful that the preparation of open-minded teachers takes place at the post-secondary level and perhaps even more specifically in a Gender course. The professional teachers, psychologists, sociologists, scientists, and health personnel who are developed by Alberta universities are the ones who go on to inform our children, parents, families, friends, and fellow educators about diversity, individual differences and tolerance.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of related literature discussing a variety of topics relevant to LGBT persons, including the views of those who support and those who dissent from having LGBT content in the curriculum. Although I could not find any literature that specifically discusses Gender courses taught at the university level, I have included studies and articles that provide information and evidence that supports the promotion of atmospheres of tolerance, acceptance, and equality for all students. The literature reviewed illustrates the impact of educational environments on the lives of LGBT persons, and how education may make a vital contribution to students' successful or unsuccessful lived experiences.

### *Support for LGBT Content in the Curriculum*

What many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons already know about the issues of sexual minorities is that discrimination and hatred continue to prevail in Canadian society. There is no doubt that there is a paucity of knowledge and student exposure to issues relating to sexual orientation and diversity in general. Education can play a facilitative role in helping students of all ages expand their knowledge about these topics. It is also well known that there are gay students, gay teachers, gay administrators, and parents of gay children, straight children of gay parents, and many more diverse members within Canadian school communities. However, Andrews (1990) puts forward that LGBT persons are not readily identifiable as lesbian or gay in the same way that people of different races are, therefore the significance of the experience and existence of LGBT persons is more difficult to make visible. In other words, LGBT persons are largely invisible. For that reason, Andrews (1990) specifies that there should be clear

references to LGBT persons as an integral part of all equal opportunity policies in schools and colleges rather than those that are merely appended to gender, race, or class clauses.

Riddle (1996) optimistically proclaims that changes that for the most part require little effort, time, or money can occur in just about every area of school life. As an example, Riddle says that teachers can acknowledge the homosexuality of major contributors to almost any field thereby providing necessary role models. He further adds that openly gay administrators and teachers can serve as powerful role models for gay and non-gay students of diverse backgrounds and cultures. An investigation by Harbeck (1992) revealed that unlike the past where a teacher's credentials could be revoked on the basis of homosexuality school boards now "look the other way with respect to a teacher's sexual orientation unless there is reason to believe that indiscrete acts have occurred" (pp.131-132). Otherwise, the cost of litigation is too high for school boards to take such action in today's society. In addition, teacher dismissal is no longer a threat as a result of radical social changes conquered by activists and unions, thereby leaving room for educators to role model positive behaviors to all students. Nevertheless, the cost of personal threat and condemnation by the religious and moral right are consequences that teachers in contemporary society still take when considering if they want to be advocates for LGBT students.

A groundbreaking study conducted by Sanlo (1999) documented the lives and experiences of sixteen lesbian and gay public school teachers in the United States. The study ascertained that not only do LGBT teachers perceive themselves to be invisible and isolated there are few support systems that exist for them in the public school system. Sanlo (1999) argues that inclusion of gay and lesbian issues in the curricular content is

therefore necessary for students, staff, and faculty who feel that they have “unheard voices” (p.xviii).

Many published articles support the suggestions that there have to be more issues of sexual orientation incorporated into classroom discussions. The reasons for the support of more inclusive education vary, as do the challenges noted in the research articles. For example, it was discovered from research conducted by Quinlivan and Town (1996) that it is necessary for schools to create environments where heterosexuality is discussed and explored in an effort to deconstruct it. It is emphasized by Quinlivan and Town that there needs to be “an alternative to move beyond the limiting homo/hetero binary, a place which leaves no room for movement or change” (p. 519). Support for this idea is expressed by Athanases (1996) when he states “a careful selection of text, a classroom climate that welcomes thoughtful discussion of diversity and sensitive treatment of gay and lesbian concerns can deepen students understanding about identities and oppression” (p. 231).

The American Psychological Association (APA) Division 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues) published their views in the association’s *APA Monitor* proposing that it is not that difficult to integrate sexual orientation issues into many classes. The APA further suggests that making such issues central to students’ thinking will encourage them to think differently about things like interpersonal relationships, attraction, family structures and sexual expression. Bahr, Brish, and Cotreau (2000) agree that the APA strongly advocates a broad agenda that promotes the psychological and educational well-being plus the dignity of individuals in sexual minority groups. This need is supported by Waxman and Byington (1997) who

observed that students easily tolerate differences of gender and race, but not of sexual orientation. They believe that the obvious reason for this is that students may experience feelings about anxiety and ambivalence about their own sexuality, combined with a lack of understanding of homosexuality.

Support for inclusion of sexual orientation issues in the classroom is given by Fletcher and Russell (2001) who discuss six challenges and solutions involving the incorporation of sexual orientation issues into the classroom. However, despite any perceived challenges, they emphasize that educational faculties at both the undergraduate and graduate level not only have opportunities to do so but have a responsibility to address such issues. They also maintain that by doing so, “attention to these issues is consistent with a teaching philosophy that emphasizes the overall diversity of human experience” (Fletcher and Russell, p. 35). According to Andrews (1990), the fact that incorporating a lesbian and gay perspective into all aspects of the curriculum appears to be trivial is a result of extensive oppression. That is, a heterosexist curriculum has enforced silence about the topic. Fontaine (1997) agrees that homosexuality in educational curricula is almost non-existent. The outcome of this silence surrounding the topic is that when asked, many gay and lesbian adults will disclose the pain of feeling non-existent at school (Reiss, 1997).

A good start to the process of integrating LGBT content into the curriculum is described by Bauman and Sachs-Kapp (1998) in their article about an alternative high school in Colorado that promotes tolerance of diversity through sexual orientation workshops by counsellors. These researchers focus on the fact that counsellors have a responsibility to promote a school climate that is safe and nurturing for all students. The

goal of providing such an environment in mainstream educational facilities is easier said than done. Therefore, in 1985 in Toronto, Canada, the board of education developed the Triangle program, with the intent of providing a safe and caring environment to learn for gay and lesbian students who could not cope in traditional schools. (Dwyer & Farran, 1997; Fisher, 1999)

An article written by Rodriguez (1998) elucidates that diversity training in public schools actually brings staff closer. Some schools have actually taken affirmative action by developing courses and workshops on sexual orientation. Additionally, Bohan (1997) describes that the aim of a course offered by the Metropolitan State College of Denver is to provide a serious scholarly look at the experience of lesbian and gay people, to enlighten heterosexual people, and to provide a locus of affirmation for lesbian and gay students who rarely if ever see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

Waterman, Reid, Garfield, and Hoy (2001) examined the impact of a course, the Psychology of Homosexuality, on heterosexual university students' attitudes toward and knowledge about sexual minorities. The results indicated that students held significantly less homophobia post-class than pre-class measurements. These authors noted from their research that when students are given the opportunity to discuss and explore diversity, their increased knowledge often changes attitudes and breaks down stereotypes.

Sanders (1997) has the same opinion because of his experiences at the University of Calgary, Faculty of Medicine, where he claims that gay and lesbian issues have been on the curriculum for 25 years. It has been observed by Sanders that sessions that discuss gay and lesbian issues are one of the most meaningful of the students' learning opportunities in the entire core curriculum. On the other hand, O'Neill (1995) inquired

into the discourse within Canadian Schools of Social Work and found a lack of accurate curriculum content regarding gay and lesbian issues. He also found evidence that “the silencing of gay-related issues within social work education is supported by the general university environment and the values of social agencies regarding sexuality and the family” (p. 161). In addition, O’Neill points out schools of Social Work are not required to address sexual orientation in their policies, programs, or curricula. Of course, a decade has passed since O’Neill investigated the issue and it may very well be possible that changes have been made, or it may simply be time for a second look at the roles that schools have adopted in their policies.

#### *The Roles and Responsibilities of Schools*

MacGillivray (2000a) purports that in order for us to examine discrimination it is necessary to examine the role that educators and schools play in its perpetuation and creation. He suggests that the fact that schools are generally silent on the issues leads to a general fear of gay and lesbian persons. Allen (1995) comments that the “major instructional aim is to help students unsettle essentialist categories of social location, and to assist them in understanding the ways in which identities and structures are social products” (p. 137). According to Simplicio (1995), if we as a society and a culture truly wish to reduce discrimination against sexual minorities, we must take a serious look at the role that schools play in promoting or reducing harassment, hatred, and violence directed toward gay and lesbian students. One way to do this is through the curriculum.

Instructors must consider many broad categories when developing a course. These may include course goals, structure, content, activities and assignments, student assessment, instructor evaluations and instructors’ knowledge, skills and experience

(Browning & Kain, 1999). The aforementioned authors also state that whether or not an instructor decides to offer an entire course versus several lectures on LGBT issues has implications for syllabus design, learning activities and evaluations. The intended learning goals of the instructor also vary from simply exposing students to all areas of diversity to the development of competencies needed to work effectively with LGBT students (p. 47). The fact is that all students will be bombarded with hundreds of human interactions throughout their life, so opportunities abound for educators to assist students in taking their first step to understanding the melting pot of society in which they live. Most importantly, underlines D'Augelli (1992), "when LGBT young people look to their undergraduate curricula for insights they find themselves deleted from most relevant courses. At a time when accurate information and supportive experiences are critical to their development, young lesbians and gay men find few, if any, affirming experiences in higher educational settings" (p. 214).

MacGillivray (2000b) emphasizes that the basic democratic principles of social justice, equal representation, and developmental support should be afforded to all students in all schools, yet it would appear that LGBT students are denied the same privileges offered to heterosexual students in the curriculum. As examples, MacGillivray (2000b) states that LGBT students are denied discussions about homosexuality, identity, LGBT persons in history, arts, drama, literature, LGBT civil rights movements, as well as denied peaceful access to a safe educational environment free of verbal and physical harassment. It is explained by MacGillivray (2000b) that curriculum development and school policies are not subject to any prohibitions imposed by Federal laws, and therefore schools are free to decide what can be included or excluded in classroom instruction.

Moreover, MacGillivray (2000b) states that when the classroom discussion is silent about specific groups of people, school staff and administrators communicate an implicit message that oppression of that group is condoned.

The fact that any heterosexist society recoils from the issue by omission in any or all discussions will not make it disappear. It does successfully ensure that its gay and lesbian youth may disappear via acts of suicide. It was suggested by Quinlivan and Town (1999) that it is necessary to make the pervasiveness of heterosexism transparent as a means of addressing the threat to the well being of any person in general who feels that his or her sexual diversity or fluidity is constrained by societal constructions or representations of “normal” masculine and feminine gender identities.

Individuals who would describe themselves as liberal minded are described by Simplico (1995) as those who still shy away from the idea of homosexuality when it is mentioned. Meyers (2000, p. 47) makes the supposition that “we are unable to clinically comprehend what we do not culturally comprehend. She states that the cultural, like the psychological, is rarely manifested: it must be made visible before it can become comprehensible.” One way to make it visible is by offering open discussions, lectures or courses to students.

Many high school graduates assume that a university represents an institution of higher learning, and greater opportunities. It is in a setting of higher education that many gay and lesbian students hope to develop the self, to find meaning in their lives and to examine and self-reflect on their existence in relation to others (Schultz, 1997). It is within a university environment that students of all sexual orientations may hope to find peace with their conscious and unconscious selves. Faculty and students alike hope that



all students learn to be critical thinkers, and to have an open mind to diversity. It is unfortunate if these expectations do not happen within the higher education provided at any Canadian university. Having said that, Zine (2001) specifies that the “social processes for change confront multiple resistances not only from within the dominant society, but also from minority groups with often conflicting goals and interests vying for with each other for limited spaces of inclusion” (p. 239).

*The Problems that LGBT Persons Encounter*

The topic of sexual orientation is a very controversial issue (Bahr, Brish, and Croteau, 2000; Harris, 1999; Quinlivan and Towne, 1999; Reiss, 1997; Rofes, 1997; Simplicio, 1995; Tierney and Dilley, 1998). It is so controversial that Reiss (1997) goes so far as to claim that “there are few if any areas more problematic to deal with in a teaching environment” (p.343). A study conducted by Elze (2002) asked if risk factors associated to sexual orientation contribute to youths’ mental health and behavioral problems. After ruling out other variables that contribute to mental health and behavioral problems shared by all youth, Elze (2002) found that LGBT youth scored higher on both internalizing and externalizing problems than non-LGBT youth. This study revealed that LGBT youth face “psychosocial challenges that are unique to their experience as a member of a stigmatized group” (Elze, 2002, p. 96).

The operation of schools is described by Quinlivan and Towne (1999) as “hetero-normalizing” the institutions, meaning that educational institutions implicitly or explicitly promote that heterosexuality is the “norm.” Consistent with this view, Andrews (1990) would add that hetero-normativity goes so far as to assume that heterosexual relationships are intrinsically superior to LGBT relationship. All of the authors agree that to teach

about sexual orientation is to teach students to have tolerance as well as an understanding of their own values, attitudes, and acceptance. For a person who has identified as LGBT, the identity itself is not the inherent problem. According to a literature review conducted by Banks (2003), the data shows that “there are no differences between LGBT and heterosexual people in levels of maturity, neuroticism, psychological adjustment, goal orientation, or self actualization” (p. 23). Society’s negative treatment of their identity is the problem.

Therefore, the ultimate aim, according to Simplicio (1995), is to help students understand the daily lives and problems of homosexuals. In addition to problems encountered at heteronormative schools, researchers report that LGBT youth are at increased risk for low self-esteem, suicide, substance abuse, harassment, rejection by family and peers, dropping out of school, depression, running away from home, identity confusion, prostitution, sexual promiscuity, isolation, unemployment, and developmental challenges (Allen, 1995; Banks, 2003; Brookins-Fisher, 1996; Bohan, 1997; Fisher, 1999; Roffman, 2000; Walling, 1993; Wells, 1999).

#### *Verbal and Physical Harassment*

Anyone who has ever attended a high school can attest to hearing pejorative terms slung at students who are gay or lesbian, or suspected by others to be a LGBT person. Many of those same witnesses observe blind eyes or deaf ears from administration or faculty to what appears to be endorsed verbal abuse. Many students who participated in a study conducted by Sears (1992) disclosed that although teachers were intolerant of racial slurs, little attention was paid to someone being called a “fag” or other pejorative names, and LGBT students learn all too quickly from direct exposure to name calling, gay

bashing, threats, jokes, or other overt verbal abuse that homophobia appears to be rampant in some school environments. Not taking action against verbal abuse, and not including LGBT issues in the curriculum, is a betrayal by teachers of the fundamental principles of non-oppression, proclaims Petrovic (2000). It is no surprise then that any student who is gay or lesbian, or even perceived to be gay or lesbian, learns to be invisible (Malinsky, 1997). For anyone who has experienced it, hate hurts.

Regardless, there are few people or resources for LGBT students to turn to for help, despite the fact that it is compulsory for gay and lesbian students to attend school. Be that as it may, little is done to protect them against verbal and physical harassment, or being rendered invisible by the school's curriculum and/or student activities. Fisher (1999) spells it out very clearly when he states that adults, educators, and others must ensure that policies protect young people from harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation. Students who are frequent perpetrators should even be punished, assert Lindley and Reininger (2001).

If educators do not create more supportive and inclusive environments, it is suggested by Pohan and Bailey (1998) that the school environment for LGBT students has not progressed much beyond the experiences of 40 years ago for students of color, the poor, women, and students with disabilities. The schooling enterprise has never been known to take the lead or shape visions into the future, comments Kozik-Rosabal (2000), and more often than not schools respond to the political dictates of the group in power. I add to that by saying that segregation of LGBT students does nothing but cause harm, and teaches even less. However, Henning-Stout (2000) points out that since we cannot blame

any one individual or group who originated these social rules of discrimination, we must take remedial action as individuals.

Recently, an article in the *Gala Occasion Newsmagazine* (2004) reported that the San Jose school district agreed to pay \$1.1 million dollars to six gay students who sued the school district because they were “beaten, harassed and received death threats” at school (p. 7). The plaintiffs claimed that teachers and administrators ignored their complaints about the abuse. It is unfortunate that litigation was the means of getting their attention.

#### *High Drop-Out Rate*

Frankfurt (2000), affirms that the high drop out rate of gay and lesbian students can be directly attributed to the extremely hostile climate that gay and lesbian students encounter. The antigay violence within the schools does not make them feel part of the school community. Russell, Seif and Truong (2001) expand on this issue with respect to school outcomes, by stating that “the four domains of family, teacher, society, and peers plays a role in the negative attitudes sexual minority students hold about school. How sexual minority students feel about their teacher also plays the most important role in explaining school troubles. That is, students who have positive interactions and feelings with supportive teachers do better in school than those who do not” (p. 124). Fast (2002) concurs with this concept by expressing that “given the volatility of identities (especially through adolescence), it is likely that teachers’ attitudes continue to influence students’ attitudes through to the end of high school” (p. 15). Yet, in the United States less than one in five LGBT students could identify someone who had been very supportive of them (Telljohann, Price, Poureslami, & Easton, 1995). Fortunately, elementary teachers in

Ontario are trying to address the Violence-Free Schools Policy implemented by the Ontario Ministry of education in 1994 by recognizing that staff needs to be supplied with the necessary materials to eliminate bias and discrimination based on sexual orientation (Flowers, 2001).

Not all studies point to bleak experiences of LGBT students in the school environment. Jordan, Vaughan, and Woodworth (1997) surveyed a small sample of high school students who reported that they had some positive experiences at school because they had supportive staff and peers, did well academically, and even held leadership positions.

#### *Depression, Suicide, Drug Abuse, Behavior Problems*

A statement that nicely sums up the outcome of oppression experienced by LGBT is expressed by Alderson (2000) when he says, "You can only throw rocks so long before a child's spirit is shattered... and the rocks thrown at gay people have struck their targets" (p. xi). It is no surprise then that researchers posit that gay youth suicide rates are as high as 3-4 times that of the heterosexual population, or range anywhere from 30-40% of the adolescent LGBT population (Alexander, 2000; Fair, 2002; Grossman, 1997; Lindley, 2001; Nichols, 1999; Miller 1999b, Russell and Joyner, 2001). Canada has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world and one third of the teens who commit suicide have an LGBT orientation (Fisher, 1999). In a study conducted by Banks (2003), it is suggested that 30 percent of all suicides are LGBT; the attempted suicide rate is 28 percent, placing it at a mean rate of 6.5 times higher than the heterosexual population. Although studies have examined other populations, Westefeld, Maples, Buford, and Taylor (2001) report that virtually no research has examined suicide prevalence with

reference to sexual orientation among college/university students specifically. However, Rey (1997) attempted to identify the frequency and context of interpersonal heterosexual discrimination in the college environment. Self-reports given by heterosexual college students indicated that almost 95% disclosed that they had perpetrated some form of discriminatory behavior. It is no surprise that when Westefeld, Maples, Buford, and Taylor (2001) compared a control group of 154 college students with 70 LGBT college students they uncovered that LGBT students were more depressed, lonelier, and had fewer reasons to live than the heterosexual sample.

Suicide, depression, and substance abuse are just a few of the many problems associated with adolescent development of both heterosexual and homosexual youth. However, homosexual youth may feel that they cannot turn to either their families or the school for support to deal with these overwhelming problems, thereby making them more likely than heterosexual peers to contemplate or attempt suicide.

MacGillivray (2000a) also postulates that the rates of depression, suicide, and behavioral problems among non-heterosexual people surpass any other group. According to a small quantitative study conducted by Lindley and Reiningger (2001), research has demonstrated that those who do not receive adequate support from family, school, and community are in jeopardy of emotional, social and physical difficulties. A similar article by Henning-Stout and James (2000) relays the sentiments of Savin-Williams (1994) that the culture of many schools, communities, and families ostracize these students and present them with the real and continuous struggle of being treated as if they are somehow unfit, or undeserving of respect and support. As a result, a number of studies (DeBord, Wood, Sher, and Good, 1998; McFarland, 1998; Telljohann, Price, Poureslami,

and Easton, 1995) have found that a high level of substance abuse is common among LGBT youth and adults.

### *Adolescent Development*

“Adolescent development and sexual identity formation is a multistage developmental process that comprises a significant part of total identity formation” (O’Reilly, Penn, and deMarrais, 2001, p. 55). While many youth are making efforts to transition into adulthood by becoming social, others who feel different than their peers because they do not identify as heterosexual are becoming skilled at hiding from social activities. Aside from the social, emotional, and physical processes of teen development, Vare and Norton (1998) point out that misconception, myths and stigmas regarding sexual orientation complicate matters further for LGBT youth. Radkowsky and Siegel (1997, p. 193) discuss that “gay and lesbian teens really only have three options when dealing with the emergence of sexual feelings: hide them, try to change them, or accept them.”

It is pointed out by Walling (1993) however, that in a typical high school only a minority of adolescents questions their sexual orientation. Harris and Bliss (1997) obtained evidence of this when they collected questionnaire data from 262 gay men and women in the United States. Harris & Bliss claim that many of their respondents indicated that they did not realize they were homosexual when they were in school, or were simply unsure. Furthermore, Madson (2001) states that many students’ “a priori understanding of sexual orientation tends to be limited to who you have sex with, failing to consider psychological-emotional attachment, identification with a community, erotic attractions, or changes in identity across the life-span” (p. 33).

However, for those LGBT youth who do realize that they may be homosexual, unique challenges are encountered that relate to the recognition of his or her sexual orientation. These challenges include finding the way through and around intimate and same-sex relationships as well as the ensuing reactions of parents, family, peers, school, community, and society at large. It is no surprise then that after monitoring the reactions of various people LGBT youth often learn to behave as if they were straight in all aspects of their life such as speech, dress, walk, and whom they choose as friends (Black & Underwood, 1998; Cates, 1987; Tharinger and Wells, 2000).

In a study completed by Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, Crouse, and Rounds (2002) the researchers found out how much perceived support LGBT students reported in high school environments. Participants reported that they received limited support from family and friends, but did receive valuable support from peers and other LGBT students. Based on their findings, the researchers suggest that schools provide comprehensive sexuality education, including information about sexual orientation for all students (p. 98).

MacGillivray (2000a) reasons that “institutionalized heterosexism” is legally forced upon students within educational settings, thus limiting development of their human potential. Schultz and Delisle (1997) observe that children in the United States spend more than 13,000 hours in school during K-12 years, and a great deal of children’s identity development takes place there. When it comes time to establish serious relationships, many individuals become aware of their orientation in late adolescence or in their early twenties (Evans and Levine, 1990). On the contrary, Galatzer-Levy and Cohler (2001) claim that sexual identity emergence may occur at any point in life. For this reason, Schultz and Delisle (1997, p. 99) take this further by stating that “educators



must not only help students achieve academically, but also provide for emotional growth through the development of an inner voice.” Uribe (1992) concurs that the growth of a child includes development of the sense of self, and the school has a major function assisting the individual with this task. Surprisingly, a survey conducted by Kadin (1999) found that there was no relationship between a student’s perception of inclusion in the school curricula and her or his self-esteem. The author of the study admits that a limitation to that study was that many of the students who do perceive themselves as less included in school curricula had already dropped out of school in high school or chose not to attend a post secondary institution.

Young people are faced with a plethora of complex positive and negative messages from the media, society, religious institutions, academia, peers, and family. All of these messages can be an overwhelming and powerful pressure that requires strong and healthy coping skills. At the very least, Elze (2002), Evans and Levine (1990), Jackson and Sullivan (1994), and Nichols (1999) insist that well informed educators should be providing support to LGBT students who face sexual orientation confusion. Most often it does not occur to LGBT adolescents struggling to decipher the multitudes of mixed messages that they may be healthy but society is not. Frankfurt (2000) explains that many school administrators believe that if the topic of homosexuality is not raised or talked about students will be less likely to be LGBT. Unfortunately, students are already talking about it and passing along a lot of misinformation.

It is suggested by Tharinger and Wells (2000) that the major task of adolescence is identity formation, a task that is greatly complicated by the guilt, shame, loneliness, fear, abuse, humiliation, denial and stress of identifying as a homosexual. Not only is

identification as a homosexual a process that demands extensive psychological processing, but also the processing of parents, peers, family, school mates, religious leaders, and the community in general. However, Grossman (1997) states that many LGBT people do not experience interpersonal peer group interactions that are critical to psychosocial development. Therefore, psychosocial skills that would normally be developed are not learned by gay and lesbian youth or are at the very least delayed. Grossman goes on to say that in the absence of role models to speak with about their experiences, the youths experience even further developmental delays.

Tharinger and Wells (2000) also explains that while heterosexually identified students do not require that their sexual orientation be “approved” by society at large, homosexual students almost “expect” to be alienated by many of those with whom they have a connection. As these students mature and plan to attend a post secondary institution, they must pack up their sexual orientation and transition it and all of its related challenges to another level, within a new environment.

#### *Developmental Stages of Identity Formation*

“Adolescence is a transitional stage characterized by becoming, not being” (Berg-Kelly, 2003). The stages of adolescent development are challenging enough for most teenagers, without the unique additional barriers to survival and growth imposed by a predominantly heterosexual society, complete with its own stigmatized ecology (Tharinger and Wells, 2000). There are several models proposed by various researchers of how gay identity is developed, according to Evans and Levine (1990). Each model focuses on different processes and offers a varied number of stages of development. A review of the literature conducted by Elze (2002, p. 52) indicates that many writers

suggest that gender, social context, degree of peer and family support, and psychological adjustment of the individuals involved affect the timing, duration and outcome of identity development and coming out processes.

The most popular and most comprehensive model discussed in the literature (Elze, 2002; Evans and Levine, 1990; Hollander, 1990; Nichols, 1999) appears to be the model of LGBT identity development designed by Cass (1979) who suggests that there are six stages of development. Cass (1979) does not suggest that all LGBT persons go through all of the stages of awareness, acknowledgment or acceptance, or that they go through them in any specific order. The stages that Cass describes are identity confusion (Who am I, or could I be gay?); Identity comparison (I am different or could I be gay?); Identity tolerance (lots of people are gay, maybe I am gay?); Identity acceptance (its okay that I am gay); Identity pride (I am proud of who I am); Identity synthesis (being gay is just one part of who I am).

Nichols (1999) explains that this model assumes that identity is acquired throughout the developmental process, and that there is interaction between an individual and his or her environment. What this means is that because society is constantly changing its perceptions of homosexuality throughout time, the identity development of teens becomes a very chaotic and muddled process. Durby (1994) asserts that not only is the affirmation of a positive sexual identity possibly the biggest developmental challenges that LGBT may encounter, but it consumes an immense amount of energy, time and resources.

Troiden's four-stage model (1989) is explained by Hollander (2000) and begins with a stage that Troiden calls the "Sensitization" Stage. Many personal stories relayed by

LGBT people will contain statements that he or she felt different from other kids growing up. In this stage of Troiden's proposal, an individual has not yet related his or her identity with sexuality, but with an overall experience of feeling different than others. Taylor (2000) gives examples that feeling different for males may include being disinterested in sports, lacking interest in girls, or enjoying solitary activities. Girls may feel different than others when they do have a strong interest in sports, feel more masculine than feminine, and have no interest in boys. It is at this pre-puberty stage that Troiden (1989) claims that a negative self-concept is internalized, and therefore leads to incongruent identity confusion (Stage 2). During the identity assumption stage LGBT persons become more involved in community, and as a result finally move into the final stage of commitment to their accepted identity and lifestyle. Developmental models become more and more obsolete and irrelevant as society changes its perceptions. At the very least, Garnets and Kimmel (1991) suggest that for LGBT persons whose identity is not consistent with social expectations "there is often a time lag between the discovery and owning of one's identity" (p. 148).

While the numbers of stages proposed by different researchers vary, Evans and Levine (1990) postulate that there are generally four steps of identity formation where individuals gradually accept that he or she may be gay or lesbian, move away from negative feelings to more positive acceptance of self-identity, have an increased desire to come out, and eventually engage in more frequent involvement with the gay community.

Alderson (2000) has further narrowed down the stages of identity development for positive gay men to three phases: before they come out to themselves, while they are coming out, and during their establishment of a positive gay identity (if developed).

Alderson (2000) sums it up by saying that “positive gay identity is about liberation, inspiration, courage, strength, nonconformity, acceptance of self, acceptance of others, uniqueness and love” (p. 193).

*Dissenters of LGBT Content in the Curriculum*

Not everyone agrees that more content about sexual orientation issues should be included in school curriculum. Both teachers and parents alike are concerned that the school may not be the most appropriate place to teach about gay and lesbian issues. Foulks-Boyd (1999) expresses a legitimate point when she explains that the beliefs of parents on this matter may conflict with those of the teacher, and teachers may be torn between academic responsibility and personal beliefs. Other researchers (Lipkin, 1994; Rodriquez, 1998) state that teachers also do not want to be accused of teaching students how to be homosexual as is often the case. All of these considerations may influence the education of the student. Browning and Kain (1999) write that even the APA Division 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues) claim that courses on sexual orientation diversity are still rare in most post secondary institutions in the United States. Furthermore, if they are offered they may be subject to intense scrutiny by both administration and community.

Reiss (1999) argues that although he agrees that teachers need to teach about both heterosexuality and homosexuality in a balanced way, he does not promote the concept that teachers should be forced to portray homosexuality in a positive way. By doing so, he believes that this “involves the intent to impose one’s own moral codes on others” (p. 212). The end result could be that many teachers withdraw from the teaching profession, rather than present homosexuality in a positive way. Halstead (1999) takes this idea a step

further by stating that if schools present homosexuality as morally acceptable, it is indistinguishable from saying that those who maintain that it is a morally unacceptable way of life are wrong, i.e. that Islam and all other religions that teach it are wrong.

A review by Batelaan (2000) of one of the United State's richest communities near Washington D.C. points out that despite an educated and wealthy population within the community, the school system still deals with gay and lesbian issues with cautious neutrality. Although school policy supports that all persons deserve to be treated with respect, teachers reluctantly discuss homosexuality in their classroom lectures. The findings of studies conducted by Fast (2002) at the University of Toronto, and Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) at the University of New South Wales, Australia, revealed that pre-service teachers are not committed to teaching about sexual orientation in their classrooms. Some of the reasons why students felt discomfort in discussing sexual orientation or religion were lack of knowledge, fear of imposing personal beliefs and biases, lack of time, student resistance, and the belief that social justice issues are not their concern. Meers (1997), on the other hand, suggests that there seems to be no shortage of scholars who are eager to teach gay-studies programs, but it is difficult to find students to enrol in the classes. Meers seems fairly secure in his belief that undergraduates do not major in gay studies programs even if they are made available, because it is assumed that no one is going to hire students with a degree in gay-studies.

Batelaan (2000) further states that counsellors and social workers are instructed, "the turmoil around sexual orientation would impact a student's school performance, as would family issues such as divorce and substance abuse" (p. 161). It is therefore necessary for the helping professions to obtain parental written permission before such

discussions take place. Harrington-Lucker (1996) writes about policies in the state of California which insist that parental permission is necessary for student's involvement in sexual orientation discussions, and in New Hampshire the school board policy dictates that districts shall "neither implement nor carry out any program or activity that encourages or supports homosexuality as a positive lifestyle alternative" (p. 56). Brasor (1992) discusses the beliefs that some college presidents have merely "caved in to" the demands of politically active gay and lesbian students, for the mere sake of proclaiming that the institution supports diversity. Brasor also believes that these bodies of students should be disciplined for obstructing the freedom of the majority student population.

Galloway (1999) writes that efforts by the Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada) board of education to strike a committee to examine ways to foster understanding of different sexual orientations as part of the curriculum was condemned by a group called Parents against Heterophobia. On a more positive note, however, the Supreme Court of Canada recently rejected the British Columbia school board's decision to ban three books depicting same-sex parents from kindergarten and grade one classrooms. The Surrey School Board banned the use of three books in 1997 because the books introduced homosexual parents to elementary school pupils. The Supreme Court ruled that the public school system must be strictly secular and non-sectarian. Lena Sin (2003) reports that despite six years of controversy, more than \$1 million in legal costs and a Supreme Court of Canada ruling against them, the Surrey School Board continues to ban the books based on reasons for exclusion that include poor grammar, inappropriate content, scope and depth.

### *Studies Compared and Evaluated*

Although the themes of these articles vary slightly in why they do or do not support this topic as one that is important to the students of our society, it appears that all agree that the subject needs to be addressed more seriously. Researchers do not discount discrimination and problems related to it. Those who disagree that open discussion and introduction of issues relating to sexual orientation should be included in the classrooms of schools are those who either reject homosexuality as a positive way of living based on the constructs correlated with their attitudes, or those who reject entertaining “special rights” for any minority group. Those who do support it argue that the power of having one’s life acknowledged and the opportunity to vocalize issues and concerns is invaluable (Brown and Kain, 1999).

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical perspectives that I follow for this study are based on Humanistic-Experiential theory, Existential theory, and Social Constructivist theory. A short explanation of their basic tenets follows, and why I feel they are relevant to this study.

I had the principles of these theories in mind as I read all of the relevant literature for this study, as well as during the interviews of the participants to obtain the data for this study. Although research is generally assumed to be scientific in nature, the qualitative pursuit of information makes it easy to be mindful that humans were the central focus of the research. As I read the literature, I was reminded constantly through the tugging of my heart strings that there are real, hurting, lovable, vulnerable youth or adults that are the victims or champions being discussed in these writings.



Consistent with the writings of many researchers, the messages that I heard from the LGBT youth in the weekly support group that I attended in my small community were straightforward. The LGBT youth in that group expressed over and over again that their needs are simple. They just want family, friends, peers, school administrators, church leaders, and their culture in general to know that sexual orientation was only one part of who they are. They are no different than youth of any other sexual orientation who need to coach their body and mind muscles to jump over the hurdles that life, and growing up, place in front of them. Like others, they too struggle to navigate the complexities of life, the meaning or significance behind war, hatred, poverty, crime, suffering, or love. They want people to know that they do not choose to be gay: why would anyone choose a life of isolation, discrimination, and abuse. They want people to know that they are intelligent, motivated, energetic, and eager to learn about life, just like any 'normal' young person exploring the vast world and all that it potentially offers. They want people to know that they are confused about why society hates them for being different, and want to ask society why they will not celebrate their differences. They want people to know that when you are not accepted or respected by your family, your friends, and your community, there is sometimes no reason to live.

As a new Counselling student, I will always remember one of the members of the youth group, in particular. The youth was 14 years old at the time. His or her parents discovered that the youth was not heterosexual, and because of their very strong, fundamentalist religious beliefs the adolescent's mother reported to the child that he or she was disowned. The child was informed that the family did not want them to live in the family home. The parents were in the midst of a divorce, so the adolescent and father

moved out. Between trying to deal with parental abandonment, the break-up of the family, and the struggles of accepting a homosexual identity, the youth had attempted suicide at least three times. The 14 year old explained that acknowledging a homosexual identity was the easiest part of all of the situations he or she was confronted with. He or she had always known and accepted being gay or lesbian, but it was never expected that his or her own parents and religion would be so eager to abandon their child.

The youth's attempts at suicide threw the adolescent into various mental health pathological classifications, and when he or she was not being tossed around to numerous psychologists, the adolescent made efforts to continue with high school courses. The faculty, staff, or students in the high schools that were available to attend were filled with more fundamentalist religious people, and a lack of support groups or counsellors that any gay or lesbian youth could speak with. There were not any counsellors who either had the time, the desire, or the knowledge to support the LGBT population in the schools. Eventually, administrators and parents decided to place the youth in an alternative school where he or she could work at their own pace, and with a tutor. This succeeded in ensuring another suicide attempt, and another lengthy stay in the psychiatric ward.

For me, the hardest part of being an outside observer into this youth's life was the anger I felt towards society as a whole, not just the parents, or the communities in which the young person lived. This child was a prisoner of homophobia no matter where he or she went. I saw this 14-year-old youth as one of the most intelligent, compassionate, loving, humorous, and creative young adults that I had ever met. The student was totally aware and accepting of a gay identity, and spoke with pride of knowing that part of his or her identity so well. The elements that could not be understood were about hatred, and

discrimination, and rejection by others. The part that would never be forgotten or possibly forgiven was the abandonment by his or her family. The part that he or she could not live with was the shame that was felt, but it was not shame about being homosexual. It was shame that society seemed to be able to hate without any guilt or remorse.

Therefore, psychological theories have much to offer in persuading LGBT youth that there is good reason to live, and to celebrate the efforts that are being made to dispel oppression and discrimination.

#### *Humanistic-Experiential Theory*

Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Fritz Perls, and Rollo May developed their contributions to psychology in reaction to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. According to Gelso and Fretz (2001), contrary to Freud's belief that humans are mostly guided by intra-psychic forces outside of their control or individual consciousness, humanistic thinkers believe that individuals have opinions, thoughts, dignity, worth, and the right to control his or her own growth and destiny. Humanistic thinkers believe that humans are not passive recipients of primitive drives or motivations, but active in their own sense of wholeness and self-actualization. When there is incongruence between one's attempts to attain wholeness or self-actualization and the individual's inner experience, humanists believe that maladjustment occurs. If the individual is subjected to numerous conditions placed on their worth incongruence between self-concept and experience usually follows.

Gelso and Fretz (2001) state that humanistic theory is based on phenomenology. This means "individuals' behavior, experiences and reality are guided by his or her subjective perceptions of interactions of the self, either alone or with the environment"

(pp 373-374). Self-concept is thereby attached to and structured to those perceptions, and once formed guides behavior. As Phares and Trull (1997) proclaim, the phenomena are everything experienced by a person at any given point in time.

### *Existential Theory*

The Existential theory of psychology is similar to Humanistic theory and finds its major contributions in the works of philosophers such as Frankl, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and others. It is written by Corey (2001), that the existential movement “grew out of an effort to help people resolve the dilemmas of contemporary life, such as isolation, alienation, and meaninglessness” (p. 143). Such feelings are very familiar to LGBT youth.

Existentialists would say that youth could derive strength from the experience of looking inside themselves, sensing their aloneness and acknowledging that it is part of the human experience, despite the fear that it may create. We must learn to listen to ourselves, find our meaning in life, embrace the aloneness and the relationship we have with ourselves. We must stand alone and recapture our identity that we have surrendered to society before we can relate to others (Corey, 2001).

Existentialism sees people as engaged in a search for meaning, away from the manacles of a conformist society. People who search for meaning inevitably do not choose to be stuck in the past, complete with its guilt over missed opportunities, nor to live in the present, which represents lack of change. However, the search for meaning from the future produces anxiety as a result of unpredictability and lack of control of the unknown. The anxiety is created as a condition for living, and is tolerated as they move forward toward change and take responsibility for their own decisions (Phares and Trull, 1997). Furthermore, according to Corey (2001), we are constantly re-creating ourselves,

evolving, transitioning, discovering, becoming, and making sense of the significance of our existence so that the answers to the question of “who am I” is never fixed once and for all.

Victor Frankl encouraged his clients to find meaning in what can sometimes appear to be a meaningless world, especially when individuals encounter suffering as many LGBT youth do during development of his or her personality. Corey (2001) reports that Frankl and his existential colleagues would suggest that LGBT youth are free to make what they will of their circumstances, and responsible for the choices they make and the behaviors they enact. In other words, they can shape their own lives and be what they want to be.

#### *Social Constructivist Theory*

The task of shaping one’s own life can be very daunting for youth and adults alike, but especially difficult when there is tremendous pressure from culture and society to conform to tradition and norms. How, or why, culture and/or society influence any individual’s cognitions, beliefs, emotions, or behavior is far beyond the scope of this paper. I shall leave the discovery of universal truth up to the Social Psychologists and philosophers to figure out, but suffice it to say that for purposes of this topic, it is fact.

Social Constructivist theory is “merely an excuse for cranky anti-science polemics” (p. 200) for some academics within the psychological sciences, according to Schaller (2002). Social constructivist theorists are not consumers of empirical data or results but believers in a theory of cognitive development in which the individual internalizes cultural norms and knowledge to make meaning as part of a collective whole. In other words, an individual is not the sole meaning maker of his or her interactions with

the environment, states Sivan (1986). "Social constructivism can be described as socialization, a process of acquisition of skills, knowledge and dispositions that enables the individual to participate in his or her group or society," explains Sivan (1986, p. 211). His or her membership to that society thus depends on the acquisition of beliefs, behaviors and norms that are valued by the culture. Clarification of the theory is provided in a definition proffered by Duffy, Gillig, Tureen and Ybarra (2002) that says that "social constructionism is a belief in the construction of reality, particularly social reality, through the coordination in time and space of people interacting in language and generating consensual agreement about the nature of things and their meanings" (p. 364). That is, truth and reality are subjective.

The acquisition of behaviors, beliefs and norms are constantly evolving as the individual develops and interacts with the environment. One place where many hours of interaction takes place is in the classroom. Teachers engage students in discussion and challenge their beliefs, thoughts and feelings at various levels. At the same time, the individual applies his or her own previous learning, religious beliefs, values, assumptions, morals, and cognitions to filter out or analyze what fits and what does not.

Greenberg, Watson and Lietaer (1998) explain that "the core process by which individuals make meaning is a cyclical one of conceptualizing-experiencing-exploring, and the cycle can be entered at any one of the three points...in experiential therapy it is often neglected feelings, emotions, and values that come to the foreground and facilitate a shift in perspective leading to the emergence of new solutions "(pp. 187-188).

And, just when a student thinks they have found a good fit between what the society dictates and how they perceive their world, society changes its perspective.

The construction and reconstruction of the world as individuals learn new information and make sense of it can be a big challenge for educators, claims Noel (2000). However, it is possible to create an educational environment where instructors support each student's reconstruction of pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, Noel (2000) asserts that the classroom is its own socio-cultural civilization, and curriculum can be based on the needs, personal meanings, and context determined by the classroom community. From a Counselling Psychology perspective, and in particular from a Humanistic Counselling perspective, it means that the counsellor unconditionally supports the construction of who they are, what they believe, and what they value without judgment, with respect, and without conditions placed on their worth. But, as stated by Carlson (1999) "teachers, at whatever level, are imposers in one way or another" (p. 214), so questions must be asked about how much imposition takes place by the teacher, and how much of the student's world is a self-created construction.

#### *Summary of the Literature*

The findings in the literature demonstrate the need for integration and inclusion of LGBT students' interests in the curriculum. The prevalence of hetero-normativity and heterosexual privilege continues to prevent awareness of gay and lesbian issues. In the words of Andrews (1990), who supports the idea that all children have a right to be informed about all aspects of life and human relationships, "an awareness of lesbian and gay issues ought to enrich the whole curriculum at every phase" (p. 353). Research conducted by Diehm and Lazzari (2001) revealed that the ultimate goal, but one that requires administrative leadership, is to "create an atmosphere in which differences among people can be nurtured" (p. 175). However, it was emphasized that the

responsibility for a diverse and nurturing environment is not the sole responsibility of administration, but lies with each member of any university community. Furthermore, the research participants in that study agreed that rhetoric about diversity is not enough and “words must be put into action” (p. 179).



### Chapter 3: Method

As previously outlined in the introduction, this study investigated faculty perceptions toward offering courses that include and integrate discussions and material within the curricula concerning issues relevant and perhaps specific to gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender students (LGBT). Particularly, the study attempted to identify factors both internal and external to the course instructors' control, such as academic freedom, societal influences, government influences, and/or personal opinions that restrict or prohibit the content of the curricula.

#### *Research Design*

Consideration of various research approaches resulted in the conclusion that a qualitative research method would be the best method to achieve my objective of obtaining data that is naturally opulent in meaning, information, and personal truth. And, since this study examined perceptions, the research employs a qualitative design that is intended to capture a snapshot of the participants' reality about LGBT issues in the curriculum. The trend in the studies that I have reviewed is that a similar question to this research question is generally reviewed in a qualitative manner. Furthermore, since social constructivist theory is a consideration of this study, I conceived that a quantitative method of inquiry would be a dissonant approach to this subject matter.

A concern for me as a researcher was that of avoiding inserting my own values, beliefs and preconceived notions into the research data, and in particular avoiding compromising the participant's intentions, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs with overlays of my own. When my thesis committee asked me about my hypothesis during the thesis proposal, I obstinately insisted that I didn't really have a hypothesis to pursue. I was

hoping that my simple goal of the research was to find out what university professors think and feel about teaching gay and lesbian content in their courses. Secondly, since I do not consider myself to be an accomplished writer I was concerned about being able to adequately represent their viewpoints or accurately narrate their stories.

I have lived with LGBT issues and concerns for many years now, and was not expecting the education system to rescue me from society single-handedly by providing solutions to the problems. However, after living with this work for months on end, I came to realize that even though it is difficult at times to step back far enough to see my own biases and intentions within the work, I am indeed implicated by my own values, meanings, and socially constructed concepts. In other words, I am a subjective researcher with an emic point of view who has had to be cautious throughout the entire process about projecting subjectivity into the final results. Furthermore, I am cheerfully optimistic that education can provide some resolutions to the topic of concern.

One way in which I tried to avoid imposing my own agenda into the work was to adopt a role as a student rather than a researcher as I conducted the thesis interviews. Despite the fact that I was technically and theoretically in a role as a researcher for purposes of collecting data for the thesis, I did not feel that this was a transition for me at all. In essence, I am situated in the academy as a student, and my participants are educators. Glesne (1992) discusses the role of researcher as learner, who plays the part of a curious student who comes to learn from and with the research participants. The researcher does not portray that he or she is an expert or authority on the research topic and listens to what the participants have to offer, rather than attempts to teach them his or her knowledge. In this way, Glesne (1992, p. 65) explains that rather than the researcher

injecting pre-existing knowledge into the interviews, the researcher has the “opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see.” Accordingly, Glesne (p. 65) comments that this is the “special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry.”

Jankowsky, Clark, and Ivey (2000) assert that “social constructionist theory can be applied to the processes of data collection and analysis in a qualitative approach to research” (p. 242). In addition, if the researcher assumes a “not-knowing” stance, it addresses the frequent methodological concern of validity by equalizing any perceived power differentials between researcher and participant. According to Jankowsky et al, a researcher’s preconceived biases, knowledge of the phenomena, previous experience, and assumptions force data into pre-existing categories and theoretical frameworks, unless you are very good at distancing yourself from the work. Although it is not a fail-proof technique, I found that using a Humanistic theoretical perspective of stepping into the participant’s shoes and out of my own helped to create a certain level of distance when I was aware that I needed it during the interviews. Considering that I had little or no previous knowledge of how academics felt about teaching LGBT issues, it was easy to adopt a “not-knowing” stance. The power differentials between the participants and I were probably reverse to what most researchers would experience. It is suggested by the literature that the researcher is the one who has the power in the research process, and that participants may be prone to trying to provide responses that the researcher wants to hear. In this study, because I was interviewing a population of experienced participants who all had Doctorate of Philosophy degrees and whom I felt were not vulnerable to manipulation of ideas, I often felt like I was the student who was learning from a mentor.

For this reason, I was able to maintain a somewhat greater distance and objectivity from their responses than would otherwise have been possible because I was “learning” from their knowledge.

It is suggested by Jankowski et al (2000), that in order to battle concerns of validity researchers make their biases explicitly known, engage in self-reflection of the phenomenon throughout the research process, and use multiple sources of data. Unfortunately, I did not rely on triangulation of data as suggested by writers of qualitative research, but I did do extensive self-reflection throughout the process.

Adopting a “not-knowing” stance according to the aforementioned researchers does not mean that the researcher is devoid of information or experiences with the research topic. It means that the researcher is curious about how the participants can add to the knowledge of the researcher, and enhance the understanding of what is not yet known about the topic being studied. A researcher therefore makes every effort not to lead participants into particular responses that she or he wants to hear, but to add to that pre-existing knowledge. The interaction between researcher and participant thus creates an understanding of the topic through an egalitarian and collaborative process. Furthermore, “a collaborative knowing process involves researcher and participant experiencing change through making one’s self known, and being understood” (Jankowsky et al, 2000, p. 246). Glesne (1992, p. 6) explains that the “researcher becomes the main instrument as he or she observes, asks questions, and interacts with research participants. The concern with researcher objectivity is replaced by a focus on the impact of subjectivity on the research process.”

One of the reasons for using a qualitative research design that is discussed by MacGillivray (2000a) is that it is nearly impossible to obtain accurate quantitative data on the gay and lesbian student population. Many students are confused about their sexual orientation, or do not want to disclose if they are certain of their sexual identity because of discrimination potential. The American Psychological Association (1998) purports that research biases dictates the questions that are asked and are related to heterosexism and homophobia. The limited empirical data and non-generalizable samples of self-identified gay and lesbian students is a concern to educators, parents, and policy makers according to Russell, Seif, and Truong (2001). However, how does one collect empirical data from or about a “closeted community?”

The research hypothesis put forth by all of the researchers reviewed in the literature appeared quite specific as to why this research is an important area to study, i.e. that prejudice in schools is creating a high drop out rate, suicide rate, substance and alcohol abuse, and emotional and physical problems with students. In my opinion, it does not appear that the researchers have vested interests in their viewpoints, other than a concern for those who are prone to unfairness. They make it clear that it is not an easy population to gather data from, due to reasons of fear of disclosure or discrimination for those who participate in such studies.

Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997) explain that qualitative research allows for describing, making sense of and interpreting the subjective, perceptual, and holistic experience of the research participants, as well as understanding the meaning, complexities, and importance of their stories. In addition, qualitative research may

identify information and questions that can be addressed in subsequent studies using a quantitative research method, if preferred.

This chapter will describe the method used to gather data that is intended to answer the research question noted above. Information will be provided about the participants in the study, the procedure, development of the interview questions, the form of qualitative research used, and the means of analyzing the interview data.

### *Participants*

The researcher selected a total of seven participants for this study. The main requirement for the selection of the participants was that they are currently teaching, or have taught a Gender course within a post-secondary Social Sciences Faculty or Faculty of Education, or its equivalent, in the province of Alberta, Canada. One of the three universities involved in this study does not offer a Gender course at the undergraduate level within the Faculty of Education; therefore participant's responses are based on teaching graduate students only.

### *Identification of Participants*

Participants were recruited from the University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta, the University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, and the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Alberta using a "snowball non-probability sampling" technique, also known as convenience sampling. That is, the researcher selected two participants whom she knew and asked those participants to provide referrals to other persons to contact. The researcher also asked other educators to provide referral information for potential participants.

I initially proposed that I would interview six instructors for this study, and concluded the interviews with seven participants. I originally contemplated writing a biography for each participant so that the readers of this work would have a richer image of the people behind the study. However, after realizing that almost all of the participants chose to remain anonymous I decided that a biography on instructors who work in a very small university population, and who have already been identified as those who teach a gender course, might easily reveal their identities. Therefore, the only information about the participants that I have included is that relating to the demographic data shown in Appendix E, with pseudonyms.

Once potential participants were identified, I sent via email and regular Canada Post an invitation to participate in the research study to all of the participants whose names had been referred. I began petitioning for participants at the University of Lethbridge. Once the interview dates were agreed upon for those participants, I repeated the process at the University of Calgary, and finally at the University of Alberta. Participants were advised in the invitation to participate that they may respond via email, if they chose to participate. Agreement to participate was received from most of the initial contacts within a few days of sending out the invitation to participate. There were four contacts from the same university who advised that they were unable to participate due to academic or personal commitments.

The invitation to participate included the following information: the purpose of the study, that the study location, time, and date could be determined by the participant, method of data collection as well as a copy of the interview questions, privacy and confidentiality information, the right to inquire about the research, access to material and

individual data, balance of harm and benefits, and freedom and informed consent.

Participants were also advised that the interviews would be conducted in person and permission to audiotape the interviews would be requested. None of the participants refused the request to be audio taped. The interviews were audio taped for purposes of accuracy, and to allow the interviewer to focus on the conversation as well as be attentive to non-verbal communication. The participants were given the opportunity to validate his or her individual interview data once transcription was completed. Participants were advised in the letter of consent to participate that a third party transcriber may be used, but that no identifying information will be available to him or her. A third party transcriber was used for two of the seven interviews.

#### *Instrument*

The researcher was primarily responsible for administering the same 34 question semi-structured interview to each participant (Appendix A). The questions for the interview were designed by the researcher and are discussed in the next section entitled *Interview Question Development*. The interview questions were sent to the participants in advance of the interview so that they could reflect on their responses and make an informed decision about participating in the study. In addition, each participant was given a copy of the questions to use as a guide throughout the interview. The copy of the questions held by the researcher contained additional notes that were not provided on the participants' copy. The purpose of the additional notes was to remind the researcher of subsequent questions that may be asked if the responses solicited further inquiry. Furthermore, one additional question was asked at the end of the interview that was not included on the participant's copy of the interview questions. The participant was not



given prior knowledge of Question 35; *did you answer any of these interview questions with the intent of making me believe that you are not homophobic* to avoid their response to that question alone being pre-planned.

#### *Interview Question Development*

The interview questions were crafted by the researcher, based on the ideas that were formulated by the researcher during readings of journal articles that were read for the research study's literature review. Designing questions that appropriately addressed my specific topic was a difficult process, as I could not find literature on any identical studies. Therefore, I had to identify information from similar literature on LGBT issues and assess if it may relate to the spirit and intent of my work.

The literature revealed that there are multiple system levels; from global, to community, to family, to individual, that may potentially affect how people construct beliefs and meaning in their life. I tried to develop questions that would act as a guide to conversation that covered each of these systems, with the hope that each question would inspire further in-depth conversation. Therefore, the predetermined higher-level or general themes and categories of questions were meant to be a starting point for further inquiry and in-depth responses. At the same time, I was mindful that I wanted to develop questions that could be used as prompts while avoiding those that could be leading or hold assumptions.

I began the interview question development by creating 60 questions. After reviewing all of the original questions, I heeded the advice of Glesne (1992, p. 66) who advised that "the questions you ask must fit your topic and the answers they elicit must illuminate the phenomenon of inquiry." Therefore, I pared the number of questions down

to 35 by eliminating questions that did not seem relevant to the understanding of the specific topic. I found that because this work is immersed in the interdisciplinary research of both psychology and education, developing questions that kept both disciplines in mind was very challenging. I also thought that 60 questions would make the interview unreasonably long, and therefore risk losing the interest and attention of the participants.

I had planned on conducting two pilot interviews in advance of the participant interviews, as a means of evaluating the length of time that the overall interview would take, the type of responses generated by the questions, and any necessary additions or deletions to the interview questions that were deemed necessary. In other words, I anticipated that the original questions would be tentative and subject to modification. Approval by the Ethics Committee was received prior to the arranged dates for the pilot interviews therefore the pilot interviews were used as actual participant data, rather than as pilot data. Nonetheless, the first two interviews gave me an indicator that the length of the interviews averaged two and a half hours, based on a five-minute average response time for each question

Every effort was made to construct interview questions with intentionality. In Counselling Psychology terminology, Ivey (1994) describes an intentional interview, as being concerned not with which single response is correct but with how many potential responses may be helpful. Furthermore, he states that the foundation for effective interviewing is the ability to listen and to understand how the interview participant makes sense of the world. A skilled interviewer can also develop a systematic framework for directing an interview by proper use of questions. If an interviewer uses open questions effectively, he or she can expect the interviewee to talk more freely and openly. Open

questions are those that cannot be answered in a few words, enables the respondents to answer any way they please, and typically begin with *what, why, how* or *could*. In addition, with the objective of encouraging the participants to provide the depth of the content in the interviews, I intentionally created “open” theme titles, so that the participant could define its content as they choose.

Closed questions will elicit shorter responses that provide specific information, and often require respondents to choose from a limited number of predetermined responses. Closed questions can be answered in a few words or sentences, and usually begin with *is, are, or do*. If not intentional, questions can also discourage talk. Open questions have been used as much as possible in the interview designed for this study. However, I am aware that the length of an interview can be critical to the results of the data. If the participant gets tired or bored by too lengthy of an interview process, the responses may become truncated. Therefore, some closed questions were used in the interview to limit interview length. The order or sequencing of the interview questions has no particular relevance to expected outcomes of responses.

#### *Interview Procedures*

After contacting potential participants for the study, and once a participant had agreed to be interviewed a time, place, and location convenient to the participant was set up for the interview. Six of the seven interviews took place in the participant’s office, and one interview was conducted within a library workroom. The participants all seemed to be very relaxed and comfortable within their own office surroundings, and graciously suspended taking phone calls or allowing other interruptions during the interviews.

After a time, place, and location were determined, I emailed the interview questions to the participants for review prior to the interview. I felt that if the participant had time to think about the questions in advance, more detailed, thoughtful, and genuine responses would be provided. Three of the seven participants actually read the interview questions prior to the formal interview, therefore responses to the questions were mostly spontaneous and “in the moment.”

Upon arrival at the participant’s office, introductions were made and I set up two tape recorders within close proximity of the participant. When it appeared that both participant and I were comfortable, I went over the purpose of my study, and I asked if the participant was ready to begin. Additionally, I asked if she or he had any questions prior to starting the interview. I reminded the participants that should they need to stop the interview for any reason, they should let me know. I emphasized that if the participant was not comfortable answering any question, they were not obligated to do so. They were advised that they were free to decline and/or withdraw from the interview at any time. The participant was given a separate sheet of paper that contained the demographic information prior to the oral interview, as a means of maintaining completely anonymous personal information. The participant completed the demographic information and was provided with an envelope to seal the information. The demographic information envelope was coded with an interview number that matches the audio taped interview session. The participant’s identifying personal information was not recorded on either the envelope or the audiotape.

The 34 interview questions were divided into five general themes: Part I: Demographics, Part II: Academic Freedom (Institutional influences), Part III: Curriculum,

Part IV: Personal opinions, and Part V: Societal influences. I identified the themes in advance as I read the available literature on the topic. My intent in pre-identifying themes had three purposes. One was to develop a structure within the interview questions that would allow the participant to keep their thoughts, ideas, and feelings focused to one area at a time, thereby avoiding too many digressions by either the interviewer or participant. The second purpose was to capture what I thought may be the main categories in a participant's life that may influence curriculum overall: that is, academic, personal, curriculum or social factors that may be considered in the process of deciding what the individual taught or didn't teach at the university level. The third purpose in identifying these generally titled themes was to allow the participant to include whatever information he or she felt fit into that broadly titled category. For example, the literature indicates that educators define curriculum in a wide variety of ways, so I felt that corralling the participant into a "specific" theme of questions would delimit the responses they gave. In other words, these categories were not meant to be all-inclusive, and one of the questions in the interview asked for the participant's views about other factors that may have an influence on curriculum development.

Interview questions were scrutinized very closely to avoid experimenter effects (no disclosure of my sexual orientation was made to participants), or experimenter expectancies (personal biases reflected within the questions). I found that avoiding experimenter expectancies is much more difficult than it sounds. I often found myself immersed in the participant's responses with great interest, enthusiasm, and curiosity, and many times felt in awe at the wisdom, insight, and intellect of their responses. Although it is highly recommended that a researcher express neutrality of expression during

interviews, I would suspect that I was not completely successful with my efforts during every interview. Many of the participants commented at the end of the interview process that they had a lot more to say about the topic than they originally anticipated, and that enthusiasm and passion came through in their responses. Glesne (1992) agrees that careful listening may not only provide a sense of importance and specialness to a participant but also help them to understand some aspect of themselves better. I think that this may have been true for some of the participants.

A few of the interviews lasted close to three hours, and if other commitments had not been a priority for some of the participants I am sure they could have talked much longer in the interview. In all cases, the participants' perceptions and knowledge kept me energized throughout each interview. However, I did control my enthusiasm and excitement with the responses as much as humanly possible. It is not an easy task when confronted with professional, experienced, dedicated, and eager educators. As much as I disliked the time limitations, I had to be aware of limiting the discussion to a certain time limit, as I could have engaged in much longer conversations with many of the participants.

All interviews were taped and a transcription created from the raw data. Two tape recorders were used for each interview, so that if the audio quality on one tape was not clear a backup tape was available. Participants were given an opportunity to review the transcript of their interview for accuracy, upon completion of transcription. Participants were also given full editing privileges of their personal transcripts, and advised to add or delete any information deemed necessary. One of the seven participants requested that edits be made to the original transcript. Participants were reminded of their right to

withdraw at any time during the process, including after final transcription of their own data, and that identifying personal information will not be linked to the data.

Any identifying information of the participants was not available to anyone other than the researcher and her supervisor, unless instructed otherwise by the participant. In order to maintain confidentiality of the audio taped interviews, demographic data, and transcripts, an internal tracking number was assigned for each tape, demographic data information sheet, and transcripts. A separate list of participant names and the date that they were interviewed is available in a separate database and accessible only by the researcher. All other information is being stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. No other person except the researcher has access to the cabinet. All interview data, tapes, and transcripts will be destroyed five years after successful completion of the thesis defence.

#### *Grounded Theory*

As a topic of inquiry, there are very few Canadian studies conducted in this research area, even though many researchers embed grounded theory indirectly in their work. For example, most of the researchers cited in Chapter Two (Fast, 2002; Fair, 2001; Fisher, 1996; Sherman, 2002; Shortall, 1998) who completed qualitative studies utilized an inductive reasoning approach, sometimes known as grounded theory. The intent of an inductive reasoning approach is to build a theory based on observations made from the primary data collected by the researcher. Unlike quantitative research, the data is not measured but analyzed for concepts. The analysis of the data is ongoing throughout the duration of its collection, thereby providing what Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe as a conceptual density that is rich in meaningful variation, concept development and

relationships. The researcher does not initiate the collection of the data based on a previously existent theory, but collects data for the purpose of generating a theory. In other words, the work does not begin with a theory but ends with one. Strauss and Corbin (1998) enlarge the methodology by clarifying that if existing theories are available and relevant to the phenomenon being studied, then these “may be elaborated and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them” (p. 159).

In the course of conceptualizing the data, Strauss and Corbin (1998) warn that some researchers overlook the need to review how the theoretical codes that are developed relate to each other, so that they can be integrated into a theory. Furthermore, they advise that it is imperative to conduct the theoretical coding simultaneously with constant comparisons of the data, in order to produce the richest theory about patterns of action and process in the phenomenon studied. The researcher is reminded by Strauss and Corbin (1998) that when evaluating and/or interpreting the relationship of theory to reality and truth, theories are always provisional. That is, not only is a theory subject to varied interpretations, it is usually contemporary, and may become outdated very quickly.

The sources of data used by qualitative researchers may be the same as those used in quantitative modes, claim Strauss and Corbin (1998). This could include ethnographies, biographies, diaries, natural observations, historical accounts, or case studies. In this work, data was collected using interviews.

Crabtree and Miller (1992) explain that “grounded theory seeks to illuminate social, cultural, historical, economic, linguistic and other background aspects that frame and make comprehensible human practices and events: it is grounded in the everyday practices of individuals in ongoing human affairs” (p. 111).



Trochim (2002) explains that grounded theory is an iterative process, meaning that the research methods and hypothesis are altered as the study progresses, and as information is gleaned along the way. Furthermore, he states that this complex process allows core theoretical concepts to be identified and evolve as the research data is gathered. Strauss and Corbin (1998), share Trochim's views about the grounded theory process with respect to the birth and rebirth of theory conceptualization, as the research evolves. An emergent design was similarly utilized in this study.

#### *Data Analysis*

I remember one of my managers telling me that when she wrote her master's thesis quite a few years ago that she had post-it notes all over her house. As she thought of something relevant to the work, she would jot it down wherever she happened to be at the time, and post it for future reference. As I began to do the same thing, I often chuckled at her reminiscences of that time, and tried to prepare for what appeared to be a graduate student's rite of passage when trying to remember what all of those notes meant. There were times when I struggled to remember what a particular scrawled note meant in the context of the entire study. On a more salient note, I developed a new appreciation of what a demanding task it was to imagine organizing and making sense of the masses of data, journaling, and personal notes that I had collected. I didn't want to reinvent the wheel, or recapitulate the original work of Glaser and Straus who conceptualized grounded theory in the 1960's; therefore, I analyzed the interview data using the process described by Rogers (2001) with respect to guidelines for *grounded theory* data analysis.

Three areas emerge from a consideration of grounded theory, reports Carlson (1999). These include the “constant comparative analysis of the data, the theoretical coding and theory development of the data, and finally the socio-cultural context of the data and how it is manipulated” (p. 215).

A preliminary attempt at analyzing and recording the data results sequentially, i.e., question by question, indicated that the process would have not only been time consuming but would have produced results that appeared strewn to the reader. Therefore, a thematic coding process was used. This process is described in the explanation about using a “constant comparison analysis.”

I used a continuous process of category identification and clarification that results in well-defined categories and clear coding instructions, as recommended by Rogers (2001). The first step in the process, according to Rogers (2001), is to analyze the transcripts line by line (constant comparison analysis) during a first reading. For example, I reviewed the text for question one of Part II (Academic Freedom) for each participant, and created open codes or conceptual labels for the data content, line by line. This made it possible to compare the statements made by each participant with one another, and to identify higher-level categories from the basic conceptual labels. That is, I drew up a cursory identification of any emerging categories or themes based on the interview responses. Further readings in step two allowed me to further refine the themes and to find linkages between categories that reflect similar views/themes, or common perspectives. This process was performed on each of the 34 interview questions. Upon completion of category development, a theory may then be integrated from the higher-level categories.

Step three in the process described by Rogers (2001) involves assessing the credibility of the categories and representations by a knowledgeable outsider not involved with the data reduction. In order to protect complete anonymity of the participants, as well as confidentiality of the data, my research supervisor assessed the procedures and tested for inter-coder reliability. Finally, a set of theoretical propositions is derived within and across categories that best encompass the findings. Rogers (2001) emphasizes that the researcher must then present his or her findings in ways that preserve its validity and full meaning, and that shows a better understanding afforded by the data that can be useful for readers. Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997) claim that the strength of qualitative research comes from validity as it digs deeper into the visceral truth about what is really going on. This research has identified themes that do add value and insight to the limited research currently available, improved understanding of educators' views on the importance of the topic, as well as an illumination of areas for potential future research.

#### *Ethical Standards*

Prior to collecting data for this study, a strict ethical standards protocol was required. Included in this protocol of requirements that must be met for all Human Subjects Research is the acquisition of informed consent from each person taking part in the collection of data. Therefore, prior to conducting the actual interviews for this study each participant was provided with a copy of the informed consent (Appendix D) to sign. Each participant was again advised of the information in the informed consent by me, prior to starting their personal interview and asked if they had any questions or concerns before we got started.

Although I have personal experiences and knowledge that structure my assumptions in all matters relating to gay and lesbian issues, I was aware throughout the research process that I was an implicated researcher of the topic. By implicated, I mean that it would have been easy to intentionally look for my personal biases about homophobia within the participants' responses. Therefore, I felt that because I had subjective opinions about the issues it was imperative for me as a researcher to be open and authentic concerning the information that I received from the participants in this work. Throughout the interview process, I made every effort to be non-threatening, non-exploitive, non-accusatory and non-judgmental of the participants during the responses to the interview questions. In other words, I tried to reflect a "blank-slate" affect to their responses. Additionally, in order to mitigate my own emotions from potentially being overwhelmed by their responses, I ensured that I had personal confidantes available to discuss my reactions to the work, should it be necessary to debrief. However, I did not have to utilize my confidantes because my experiences of feeling overwhelmed were purely a positive experience connected to the passion and care of the participants.

When I noticed that a participant appeared to be uncomfortable during the interview process as a result of the discussion producing potential personal issues of concern, I reminded him or her of their right to decline comment, or to withdraw from the interview at any time. I also advised participants they we could pause the process if they deemed it necessary. One person did request that we pause for a break, and many of them expressed highly charged emotions but did not want to stop the interview. At the end of the interviews, I asked participants if they would like to have contact information for the affiliated university counselling center, in case they wished to discuss matters further with

professional counsellors. None of the participants accepted the offer to be referred to local resources.

#### *Summary*

This study adopted a Grounded Theory approach to research in which an effort was made to build a theory related to instructors' perceptions about gay and lesbian content in the Alberta university curriculum. In order to accomplish this goal, analysis of data collected by the researcher was performed using a constant comparison method. The next chapter provides detailed results of the themes that emerged from the collected data.

## Chapter 4: Results

This section presents common themes of knowledge that have been identified from the qualitative responses of seven university educators who teach Gender courses in the province of Alberta, Canada. The participants in this study relayed their perceptions about LGBT content in the Gender course curriculum with enthusiasm and often with passion about the subject matter. It is my intuitive belief that participant responses were also communicated with authenticity. I will try to reproduce the passion of their ideas as closely as possible, and without mutation of its intensity or intent.

First, I will present a summary of demographic data (Part I) collected from the participants, and secondly I will present the themes and sub-themes resulting from the participants' responses to questions pertaining to each theme. In the original interview guide, I titled the "general" themes and related questions as Academic Freedom (Part II), Curriculum (Part III), Personal opinions (Part IV), and Societal Influences (Part V). For purposes of this section, I have extended the theme titles from a surface description to one that reflects the flavour and depth of interviewee responses. For example, when participants responded to the questions relating to their perceptions about having academic freedom, the majority of them spoke to the issue of balancing his or her scholarly rights with the rights of the collective.

I considered including a brief biography of each participant so that readers would be able to attach qualities of their uniqueness, their personalities, their contributions to academia, and their experiences to the perceptions they provide. However, after weighing the pros and cons of appending a biography for each participant, I realized that each person works in a relatively small community and that biographies held potential to

breach their wishes to remain anonymous. Hence, I have assigned participant pseudonyms to the demographic data to protect their identity.

#### *Part 1: Demographic Data*

There were six females and one male that contributed to this work, ranging in age from 31 to 59 years old. Five of the seven participants are teaching full time, and two are teaching part time hours. Only two participants are tenured faculty members. Participants have taught a gender course anywhere from one to thirteen times, and have experience teaching in a range of two to nine schools. Most participants have experience teaching in one or two provinces, however one person has taught in four Canadian provinces throughout her or his teaching career. The number of years teaching overall ranges from a minimum of four years to a maximum of 33 years experience. All of the participants identified as heterosexual. The complete demographic data is show in Appendix E.

#### *Themes*

##### *Part II: Academic Freedom: Balancing Scholar and Collective Rights*

Unlike elementary or secondary educational institutions, university instructors/professors are not bound to follow a predetermined or mandatory curriculum in which they must “teach to the test,” or ensure that they have included all materials that are mandated to be taught. Each university instructor is free to choose his or her own course content, without specific requirements of content inclusion or exclusion.

When asked if participants would be uncomfortable teaching about LGBT issues if the university required them to include it as a topic in their curriculum, many of the participants expressed that they could not envisage teaching a gender course without including it in discussion, or as a course goal. The reason for this is that sexual diversity

is an integrated issue in discourse about gender identity, in general. If, for any reason, a university policy requested that they not discuss the subject as part of their gender course curriculum, participants felt that not only would it be inappropriate for the university to mandate what should be included or excluded in the course curriculum, but the general principles of his or her academic freedom as a scholar would be compromised.

One participant commented that he or she would have a moral reaction to being told to teach something that was not a comfortable subject to teach, but all who took part in the interviews stated that discussion about LGBT issues is a normal part of discussion in a gender course that they were very comfortable discussing. In fact, another instructor claimed that “in a gender course, not only do I have the freedom to do it I have the responsibility to do it.” One more participant was very certain that she would not receive any “flak” from her university department if she openly supported freedoms of all people. He or she had never been advised of any restrictions about what could or could not be taught. Furthermore, if a student complained to the Dean of the Faculty that they disagree with gay and lesbian material being taught, it would not likely be supported as a valid complaint. As stated by the professor:

The only person who would complain is a student, and unless they could prove that I had done something that was academically in question they would not have a leg to stand on. To criticize that you have included something that suggests that you should respect or understand that which is not similar to you? At the end of the day that is what it all comes down to: you just disapprove of something that is not a part of your everyday life, and that is not a very easy thing to support. I would have had to do something absolutely unethical.



It was suggested by one professor that I was “preaching to the converted,” because I would be hard pressed to find an instructor who teaches gender who was not comfortable teaching about all areas of diversity. Another professor suggested that teaching the students enrolled in a Gender course is also ‘preaching to the converted’ because “they are coming in already enlightened and non-judgmental. It is the ones that are judgmental I would like to get in there, but they are not going to take the course.” I suppose an assumption could be made that enlightened students are also less likely to complain and thus threaten academic freedom. However, it does happen that students complain about the presentation of LGBT topics in class. One professor reported that “I have had somewhat wrist slapping from students who have gone to the Dean concerned about issues we have been presenting to them.”

An interesting point brought up by one participant is that although university instructors/professors have complete and total academic freedom, and that LGBT issues have never been a programmatic topic for discussion at faculty meetings, university administration and faculty must keep in mind that they are part of an institution that is funded by the public. As a result, they are required to “meet larger social goals than the rights of individual professors.” Furthermore, the comment was made that:

I am with the Canadian constitution on this one that it is always a balancing (act) between the rights of the individuals and the rights of the collective. And, I think in Canada as a whole we tend to try and find a balance between these two things, and I think we have to keep finding a balance. I think that if we only do what the collective wants we are in difficulty, and if we only pursue individual interests and the rights and freedoms of individuals, then we are also in trouble.

*Tenure: Expectation of Controversy*

I was interested in knowing if having tenure would make any difference to university instructors' comfort level about teaching topics that could potentially be controversial, so I asked them if they would feel more secure if the province of Alberta had legislation to protect them from accusations of proselytizing. Tenure did not seem to be a significant factor for them when making decisions about the course content. In fact, regardless of tenure all but one participant did not feel vulnerable whatsoever when teaching topics of controversy. For one thing, as one professor explained, "If I begin proselytizing about anything, people do not buy in, they just resist." Others felt that they were in a different position than schoolteachers who are much more open to concerns from parents. One contributor explained that it was her responsibility to be "putting things on the table and making people aware of what the issues are," so it was not necessary to need a defence against doing her job. Regardless, most professors did not feel that they needed added protection in the way of provincial legislation, other than what was available to them under university policies. One professor did say he or she would feel more protected by legislation:

My experience of being in Alberta after being out in British Columbia is that I have moved into a very distinct culture from what I'm used to. I think some of the attitudes here are a little bit more fundamentalist or provincial than what I am used to, and I would say we are night and day dichotomy in terms of the differences and the attitudes. So, if legislation were in place I would certainly feel more secure. It does not mean I would not continue, but it would make me feel more secure.

An interesting observation made by one instructor is that not being tenured had less relevance to academic credibility than being a heterosexual who is teaching about gay and lesbian issues.

If I was a gay and lesbian instructor and I started going in to classes and started talking about gay and lesbian issues I think that I would face more difficulty. But the fact is that I can speak about it because nobody will think that I have some kind of an agenda.

Surprisingly, more than one instructor bluntly commented that it is the nature of academic freedom to discuss diverse issues, and they did not care if someone did not like it or them if issues were being discussed that were controversial. Having said that, gender discourse is often controversial and expected by students who take the course.

*Collaboration: Unshared Visions*

I am not a teacher, so I was rather surprised when all of the people who took part in this study reported that the curriculum is never discussed with their colleagues who teach the same course. As a student, I naively assumed that active discussions would take place at the beginning of each term to ensure that each instructor was on the same page about the course content. I especially assumed this to be true in larger universities where different instructors offered more than one lecture for the same course. I believed that collaboration was necessary so that students were receiving the same material. One instructor stated that she could not think of any incidents where LGBT issues were discussed: the reason being that they had complete autonomy to teach what they want, without pre-approval. Part time instructors seldom, if ever, see their colleagues, never attend staff meetings, and as reported by full time instructors do not collaborate at all

when designing course outlines. Nonetheless, individually designed course outlines are available to other instructors upon request. That is, if a new instructor was teaching the course for the first time it would be possible for them to obtain a course outline from someone who had taught the course previously, and modify it if necessary.

Taking into consideration the lack of collaboration among instructors, many participants were unaware of other instructors' prevailing attitudes or perceptions about LGBT content in the curriculum, or if their colleagues held homophobic attitudes with respect to LGBT students. Many of the people interviewed for this study stated that they either do not get together with other people in their faculty or did not engage in discussions about homosexuality with their colleagues. Moreover, there were evidently no opportunities or occasions to discuss such issues, or to bring up the topic with their faculty peers. However, one person remembered an experience with homophobic responses during studies that he or she conducted at an Alberta junior high school. It was believed by the same person that homophobic attitudes from student and staff alike are more likely to appear in elementary, junior or senior high schools. In addition, some undergraduate students exhibited language of disrespect, but overall participants expressed a high level of respect for diversity in higher level university classrooms.

Social gatherings with colleagues were not common events for many of the participants in this study; however, when there was occasion to attend a social event a concern of one person was that homophobic jokes are still condoned by some people. For example, the person's observations were:

Sometimes I'm living in a little bit of a bubble because I think my colleagues are more aware than others, but its when you go to social gatherings outside that you

realize there is a lot of resentment still about the promotion of same-sex marriage, or even there's a lot of inability to understand the struggles that youth are encountering over issues of sexual orientation.

LGBT teachers did not generally make their sexual orientation known, according to one instructor's knowledge. It was explained by that professor that as far as he or she knew, any colleagues that were gay or lesbian were not out in a general way, so the environment that prevailed was heteronormative in that particular university. In that respect, LGBT issues were "non-issues" for discussion because there was no "critical mass of faculty members who were willing to make it a part of discourse." In other words, it was a "silent and invisible aspect of people's lives" both inside and outside the faculty. Overall, another instructor explained that there was a blissful unawareness of homophobic attitudes of staff or faculty.

*Policies and Benefits: Assumption of Privilege*

In order to find out if university institutions in Alberta offered same-sex benefits to employees, I asked the participants if they knew about the policies and benefits available to all staff within the institution. Two of the seven participants were quite certain that sexual orientation was written in to the university harassment and discrimination policies, whereas five people either did not know at all or were unsure. Two people were quite certain that same-sex benefits were available to faculty and staff but that they have become available only in the last few years, and the remaining five respondents did not know the answer to that. They explained that as heterosexuals they had no need to know. One participant seemed surprised with his or her own answer to the

question because he or she felt that “for me, it is so revealing that I do not even know the answer to that,” meaning that heterosexual privilege is not questioned, but assumed.

### *Part III: Relational Curriculum*

According to Harden (2001), curriculum means different things to different people. Some define it as the narrow dictionary view, while others adopt a broad view that includes a hidden curriculum of values and patterns of behavior that are acquired or encountered by students in the learning environment. Consistent with Harden’s suggestions, the responses provided by the participants in this study support both views. A view expressed by one professor and shared by many is that “curriculum is driven by the desire to ensure that it is student focused so that the students get the most out of it.”

When I asked the participants to define curriculum, it was portrayed in various ways. “My curriculum is my course outline” is how one person described it. The course outline in his or her view was as broad as the instructor wanted to make it, based on teaching experience, knowledge, or topical issues. Another instructor explained that the textbook guides him or her, and “classes are structured so that concepts from the text are discussed and illustrated with the students.” However, if additional topics arise from discussion that material is integrated into the class. Overall, it was felt by that individual that there was not much flexibility for her to change the curriculum contained in the required text.

Teaching according to the text was not how other contributors envisaged curriculum. One instructor explained “I would see curriculum as sort of my overall teaching goals and strategies within the context of my discipline.” This included “shaking

up the presuppositions in a lot of my students about things like gender, gender roles, etc. and to demonstrate the diversity of experiences that people have.”

A much more complex and philosophical definition of curriculum was eloquently described by one participant’s voice of extensive teaching experience. He or she described William Pinar’s notion of curriculum:

Curriculum is Pinar’s notion of *currere*. It is the traveling, the moving, it is the life that is being lived and the sense that we are making of it. Curriculum is the world as it is, and there is the world as we are making sense of it in relation to one another in an educational context. Most people’s common sense understanding of the curriculum is that it is a plan, that it is a designed learning experience that has activities, and resources, and an instructor, and students. I think that curriculum is really about what happens, what we experience and the sense that we make of it. And, it is also about relations between and among people and situations.

An even broader definition provided by another member of the participant group was that curriculum is a “space of negotiation...an instructor and students develop a course together, and look at issues and texts that negotiate that area of interest.”

Consistent with Harden’s opinion, the instructor believed that curriculum is interpreted in many different ways, but saw it as a “negotiation” within a university context.

#### *Curriculum Development: Stakeholder Design*

Instructors must consider many broad categories when developing a course, such as course goals, structure, content, activities and assignments, student assessment, instructor evaluations and instructors’ knowledge, skills and experience (Browning & Kain 1999, p. 46). In order to find out if participants in this study are consistent with the

suggestions about course development provided by Browning & Kain, I asked them how they would design, develop, implement and evaluate a LGBT curriculum. While one instructor half-jokingly expressed that it would be nice to have a textbook that laid it all out for you, in general their responses were consistent with the ultimate aim or goals identified by Simplico (1995). He claims that the goal is to help students understand the daily lives and problems of homosexuals.

The aforementioned authors also state that whether or not an instructor decides to offer an entire course versus several lectures on LGBT issues has implications for syllabus design, learning activities and evaluations. On average, many of the participants spend anywhere from three to eight hours per term discussing gay and lesbian issues. However, having said that, all of the participants specified that they prefer to integrate the material throughout the course content. Therefore, it is more difficult to estimate how much time is spent on LGBT content overall.

All of the contributors to this research agreed that there is not an adequate representation of LGBT topics of concern in the curriculum. For example, one participant believed that the university where he or she taught was a “fairly conservative kind of place” and therefore:

I think that the emphasis upon same-sex relationships in literature, for example, is something that is not explored as much as it should be in the curriculum. And, not having a very active or visible gay community I do not think brings those academic issues to the front, as much as they would in a larger center and a less conservative center.



It was pointed out by another instructor that there have probably been some shifts in the last few years with respect to how textbooks address the issues, depending on the various publications or disciplines that could speak to the issues. However, it was noted by that instructor that it has only been in recent years that more information has become available. In previous years, "you could easily count the number of times or pages in the text that included such data." Other instructors expressed opinions that there is still "a lot of resistance to bringing in general topics of diversity or multicultural literature," so there is probably more resistance to bringing in gay and lesbian issues. Others agreed that the subject matter is not yet adequately represented:

I would probably say no, because I think generally in education the curriculum is dominated by Psychology, which I think is a really negative thing. I think that it is historical but the idea is that what really matters is the psychology of learning, and I do not think it really attends to the fact of what affects how people learn and their experience in education. Psychology has just been the discipline in Arts and Science that has really got a stranglehold on education teacher training. And because of that things like gay and lesbian education are downplayed, because the real issue is about what cognitive factors are affecting learning. Well, being gay and lesbian probably does not have a whole lot to do with cognitive factors. It has a hell of a lot to do with your experience in schools.

What you are learning, what you are not learning, whether you belong, so all the questions around identity and belonging and all of that are not what is formulating the core of the curriculum in education. It is more at the graduate level, but at the

undergraduate level where we are actually preparing teachers, it is not. And that is a flaw.

*Course Goals: Modelling Respect*

The intended learning goals of the instructors who contributed to this study varies: the goals range from simply exposing students to all areas of diversity to the development of competencies needed to work effectively with LGBT students.

The course goals that participants have for discussing gender and LGBT issues in general includes the goals of increasing awareness of diversity and differences by helping students to think about those issues, reducing heterosexism, broadening students' knowledge base, deconstructing the kind of "personal biases that students do not even know they have," and promoting and "modeling respectfulness." When asked how early a child should or could be learning about sexuality, diversity and/or sexual orientation all respondents enthusiastically retorted that it should be "right away" or as early as three or four years of age, as long as discussion took place in "an age appropriate way" with "appropriate language." Consequently, if education did take place at much earlier ages there would potentially be less heterosexism, less discrimination, and less need to impart knowledge about diversity in university courses.

A few of the participants addressed the fact that their goal is not to change attitudes because "we do not change attitudes very easily, but what I think we do is we begin to raise awareness and hope that it will lead down the road to some changes." Two professors concurred by saying that "my goal is not to force changes. I certainly cannot force attitudes to change," and "I kind of want to create some of those moments where maybe there attitudes will not change in a day, but at least they are opening up their

antennae a bit. And I do not know because it is hard to know. I do not have any information about what their attitudes are in the first place.”

The foundations of awareness, respect for differences, and creating a safe space for both homosexual and heterosexual students alike seemed to prevail in discussions about course goals.

One of my aims is to get people to understand that gender is not just “man versus woman,” that it is a much more complex topic. Gender is one of many forms of difference that matter, so sexual orientation within gender is another one of those differences that really matters and its part of that complexity. My aim is for students to basically understand the notion of difference and that difference really matters because most of the students that I work with are “free, white and 21” My goal is also, “how do I help?” How do I make this topical so that the life of gay and lesbian students in my class, and their lived experience, becomes a visible part of the curriculum? But how do I do that in a way that protects them, and does not provide an opportunity for the other students to humiliate them, or make their life difficult.

All of the participants report that having LGBT content in the curriculum accomplishes many positive things. Aside from “challenging our conventional assumptions...it is a real heuristic kind of tool.” One participant actually had a list of things that it accomplished, as follows:

I think that it breaks down a lot of false dichotomies and stereotypes. I think that it normalizes the idea that we are all very different and as human beings we are very heterogeneous. It allows closeted or potentially confused, not-sure, LGBT

students to see themselves in some of the material, to see themselves practically in the spectrum, a sort of normal spectrum, part of the spectrum of what human beings are...and gives them enough information to form their own identity and de-repress a bit. It gives them some information that may contradict and once you contradict something then they have to examine it for themselves...It allows critical thinking.

The goal of the bigger picture as seen by one instructor is this:

I think that because in our faculty we are teaching teachers, I think part of it is to make a difference in the long term... so, in a sense I guess it is a hope that what you do here will have some larger impact on the world.

The bottom line according to another professor is that “it makes visible and audible the lived experiences of 10% of the population, or whatever figure you want to use, and I think that is really the thing.”

#### *Eager Educators: Silent Students*

What is the point of spending time developing an effective and interesting curriculum, or having dedicated and concerned instructors with authentic goals if students have neutral or negative attitudes with respect to LGBT content in the curriculum, as suggested by Meers (1997)? Meers (1997) believes that although there are numerous eager educators ready and willing to teach gay-studies programs there are a shortage of eager students willing to partake. Thus, participants in this research were asked about the reactions of students during classroom discussions about LGBT issues, as well as what kinds of discussions about LGBT issues elicit the strongest debates.

The Canadian experience in this work is somewhat similar and somewhat contradictory to Meer's suggestions, according to participants' observations of student reactions:

I think that in a lot of cases they have fairly stereotypical, knee jerk prejudices that come out about gay and lesbian issues. But, in some cases it is very liberating. I have had one student as I mentioned who came out, and she said you know, this is the first time that I have been able to talk about this in a university setting, and it is so freeing, and to know that there is sort of a whole world of discourse that helps me to interpret my feelings is very helpful, you know, and that experience is very helpful. By and large they just trot out a bunch of generalizations and prejudices, especially about lesbian issues that I find problematic, but I think that they get better as the course goes on.

In other cases, an atmosphere of silence seems to prevail, at least until the students feel that they are in a safe space to become engaged in the discussions. It would appear that a scantiness of discussion is more likely to occur in an undergraduate class than a graduate class, as stated implicitly or explicitly by many of the participants:

I noticed that the first time we taught that course a gay student was working actually as a drag queen part time and there was quite a lot of silence in the class, I think some students were kind of taken aback and it took them a little while to sort of feel comfortable with these issues because they were not expecting it at the time. And once that person had finished speaking and sharing his experiences and what that did was open up to other people to share some experiences and then the classes became comfortable. But that was specifically a class that was dealing

with these kinds of issues. And, in my undergraduate or my English curriculum courses where it is not seen as a course topic, I still think there has been a lot of silence around it. Sometimes people feel constrained from speaking because they do not know what to say or they do not have experience, whereas I have not really heard any actual homophobic remarks. The silence is interesting, it could be problematic, and it could be that just people do not want to say something.

Another instructor who predominantly teaches undergraduate classes relayed a similar experience to the one expressed above:

In class, we didn't have a lot of discussion...one of the reasons is how do you stage that in a large class? Early on in teaching the course it did come up in discussion, and I got some explosive people putting down homosexuals and I was not sure what that was really accomplishing. That is one of the reasons I had to be careful with discussions. Where it has been useful is when gay and lesbians speak out. But, I find there is just generally silence. Present the material and nobody even wants to talk about it. I think that if they say something and it sounds like they are not liberal perhaps they are afraid that I will look negatively at them. If they say something that is pro they will not know quite how the rest of the class will look at them, so I think that it is a very difficult thing. It cannot be a free for all... what do you think about homosexuality or something like that, is it good or bad, you know? You can take a specific issue or situation and get people to see it as something that could affect them in general. I do not want them to be defensive. I do not want to put anybody on the spot that does not feel comfortable

talking...because it can go against their religious beliefs and a whole bunch of stuff.

*What Sparks Interest?*

Activities that seem to peak the students' interest is when an instructor brings in LGBT guest speakers who are able to relay their lived experiences, and answer the questions of those brave enough to express their curiosity. An instructor from this study explained that there are specific areas that peak the students interest, such as Aids. Topics that generate active debate according to one instructor involve discussions about the fluidity of gender roles, and the continuum of heterosexuality in lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual kinds of relations. Many more students are interested in sexual experimentation, and so when they talk about that they get quite involved.

The experiences of instructors who teach graduate classes appear to be more positive. The following are comments provided by two instructors who teach graduate students:

I have only really brought them up in a graduate class, so the reactions are fine. There has been no sort of "why are we talking about this, and this is inappropriate," or "I am offended by this," or anything like that. And, the level that they are at makes a difference, right? I am not saying that all of the students are open-minded and interested in different topics or whatever, but in a gender course I have never had a negative reaction.

Another participant offered the following observations:

I would say that they have pretty respectful reactions without much prompting from me. Each class has its own personality but people have honest questions.

A bit of the out-there kind of questions like “we saw this in this movie,” or there are probably people who have come from rural Alberta and maybe are pretty limited in their views, and think that all gay people act like people on Will and Grace. What tends to hold their interest are stories about things regardless whether its sexual orientation issues or whatever, but I think that they are really powerful stories when they come from the person who had that experience. So far there have not been any negative comments. There have not necessarily been any positive comments either.

More than one instructor who teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses exclusively expressed that there is mixed reaction of openness or awkwardness from the students:

Some people clearly agree when I make a point because they feel strongly, some people whether they agree or not do not say anything, they just sit. And, then some people will voice an opinion when they agree.

Curriculum development discussion could be a university course in its own right, so it was difficult for instructors to provide a general précis to the question. However, many felt that LGBT information could be provided in a broader course than that offered in a Gender course, which normally focuses on many other aspects of Gender as well:

I would rather see it as part of a broader course anyway, but not a specifically gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender (course) because they are probably going to have another few letters after that added.

Other instructors provided information of specific models or visions of what he or she thought about curriculum development:



I like Iris Marion Young's model because I really like her idea that real justice is not just equitable distribution of goods and rights. She is a political philosopher. Real justice comes when people have a voice in making decisions. It needs to be designed, developed, implemented and evaluated by a team of people who are experts in the area, who have the lived experience, who have the theoretical understanding, who know what needs to be done, a place where gay and lesbian people, educators, have a voice in saying "This is what needs to be done!"

It depends if this is in a school where it is about cultural issues or whether it is in a professional school like this where we are looking at what are the programmatic implications, what we want student teachers to know, what we want children in classrooms to know. It is a little bit more goal oriented

So, it depends on the context of the curriculum. I think, for example if a teacher education program was all of a sudden going to have a gay and lesbian stream then I think we need gay and lesbian students, gay and lesbian teachers, gay and lesbian administrators involved in designing that kind of a course.

When you are designing the curriculum you are really asking the question, what is the important knowledge here? What is the important knowledge, what are the important skills, what are the important attitudes and what is it that we want these students to experience, to understand, to know, to change. Those are really big questions; I think it would be best done with a group of people.

The idea that curriculum is best designed by the stakeholders involved was supported by more than one instructor. A strategy used by most of the instructors was to make use of seminar topics comprised of student presentations or readings recommended

by students. This method allowed the students in the class an opportunity to choose the area that they felt was most important and present it to the class. One of the instructors evaluated the student presentations based on “theoretical development, presentation skills, applicability and how the student would pragmatically use that knowledge when they were in their own practice, whether it be as a teacher or a counsellor.”

The potential drawback of implementing a seminar topic is that it requires a safe environment for each student, and to the best of their ability and knowledge every effort was made by each of the participants to ensure that such an environment was provided. Each participant did acknowledge that unless a student came forward with concerns, they never really had a way of knowing if each and every student felt like they were in a safe space.

Other useful ways of assisting the instructor in designing a course as indicated by the contributors to this study, is either to speak with gay and lesbian students for assistance with course development, to bring in guest speakers from the local gay and lesbian community, or to watch movies that depict LGBT issues.

Student evaluations are conducted at the end of each term in some but not all of the universities involved in this study. For those that still use student evaluations of teaching, students are given a chance to react to the course and instructor effectiveness.

None of the participants could recall that they had ever received negative comments or reactions to inclusion of LGBT content in their course outlines, or that they were ineffective or insensitive instructors. This is not to say that all of the students had positive thoughts and feelings about the course content, but merely that they had not volunteered to disclose them.

*Diversity*

The Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act recognizes that “all persons are equal in dignity, rights and responsibilities without regard to [the protected grounds of] race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income or family status.” While not stated explicitly in the Act, the Government of Alberta agreed to “read in” sexual orientation as an additional protected ground, effective April 2, 1998 (Alberta Human Rights Commission website: <http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/diversity>).

It would appear that participants in this study hold beliefs that do more than merely “read in” sexual orientation as part of their definitions of “diversity” and how they apply it to teaching. Unlike the reports given in some literature that claim that teachers are reluctant to discuss homosexuality in their classroom lectures, participants in this study provided responses that were more consistent with other literature that noted that scholars are eager to teach gay-studies programs. Additionally, often times when students are given the opportunity to discuss and explore diversity their increased knowledge frequently changes attitudes and breaks down stereotypes.

Many of the participants talk about the fact that the definitions of diversity have continuously evolved and it is only within the last five years or more that their own awareness of diversity has increased. For example, an instructor indicated, “If you asked me five years ago, I would have spoken in terms of race and ethnicity as being my prime focus in diversity.” Today, those who teach about diversity speak to general issues of gender/sex, sexual orientation, race, class, disability or abilities, socioeconomic status, culture, psychological diversity, and ethnicity. However, as one participant pointed out,

diversity is seen “within the context of micro and macro cultures,” and undergraduate students understand diversity from a micro culture as they are “still very tied to their home and their community, their religious background, and to their cultural understanding.” However, in a broad sense of the word, diversity can even mean:

Anyone who falls outside the parameters of “we” as an individual...so, we look at always remembering that one cannot stop at a certain line. You always have to recognize that there is so much diversity around you, and it is broad sweeping.

One of the instructors who participated in this study talks to classes more about the “notion of difference” and “how that difference is manifested” rather than speaking about labels of diversity. Therefore, the question is asked, “when does a difference make a difference, or what constitutes a difference? Discussions take place about differences that are marked on the body versus invisible differences and it is the former kinds of difference that are most notable.” Overall, the goal of discussing differences rather than diversity is to create an understanding that “there are not discrete categories of diversity: these things are fluid and they are crossing back and forth, and moving and blurring the edges, and to get that idea across requires a university degree in itself.”

#### *Influential Factors*

The pre-determined factors that were built in to the interview questions were intended to be a guide to open up conversation about other factors that influence an instructor’s decision to include LGBT content in their course curriculum. As expected, the respondents were very forthcoming with other factors besides the ones suggested by the researcher.

*Course subject matter.*

The main factor of inclusion according to most of the participants was that of the course subject matter, or discipline. For example, one participant relayed:

A friend of mine who teaches French grammar does not have a real desire or need to discuss issues of gay and lesbian content. Certainly in Women's Studies it pretty much has to be addressed...because lesbian discourse has been a manner of challenging the status quo, and has been important historically and theoretically to the development of feminist discussion and theory.

Inconsistent with MacGillivray (2000b) who claims that LGBT students are denied the same privileges offered to heterosexual students in the curriculum, participants in this study had a different ideal, albeit one that is not currently reality. When asked which university course would be the most appropriate one to offer LGBT content in its curriculum, everyone thought that it should not be restricted to Gender courses but offered in all courses, to a degree. One of the participants did not think that Gender is necessarily the most appropriate course because the course is about gender, and not exclusively about LGBT people. However, the participant thought that it did not necessarily matter which course offered it as much as it did that information was put out there in any course. What some people may consider a benefit and others a detriment of offering the material within a gender course is that:

Other people do not have to handle it: they can say it is all covered in that course so they do not have to bring it up if they do not want to. So, it becomes most appropriate, because it is a sufficient easier way for the departments to still get the

material discussed without offending or causing political repercussions. It is better to get the information out than not at all.

Educating teachers about LGBT issues is best done by integrating the material into all of the courses within the Education faculty, according to many professors. For example, one person suggested “it could be taught in Educational Psychology, language arts, curriculum studies, or anything that places education in a social context.”

There was a contributor to this work who held a very strong opinion about the dominance of (Cognitive) Psychology and how it has affected teacher education. The opinion proffered by him or her about the influence of Psychology on education was that:

If it was not driven by that, and if we could have a different emphasis on what is important for teachers to know...we could ask the question “what is important for teachers to know? I think that getting to know your students and all of their differences is important to know, and here are many of the ways that your students are going to differ. It is not just whether their B’s and D’s are reversed or they cannot sit in their chair. But, we are not there because we are so driven by psychology.

Concomitant with the above opinion, an instructor whose main interests are in the social sciences felt that “technically, there should be something in the education of teachers training about talking to kids about sexuality in general, or talking about sexual orientation.”

It was unanimously suggested that almost every program could potentially incorporate material into it, or at least explore the issues to a certain degree. Gender

courses deal with a variety of issues including race and culture so it was clarified by one member of the interview team that:

My attitude towards undergraduate programs is that these issues should be integrated into all courses. It is not a matter of an add-on, 'now we are going to do gay and lesbian issues, now we are going to deal with race, we are going to deal with gender.' I think it should be one integral part. But having said that, that is not that easy and so it may be that it is necessary to have a specific course that maybe does not deal with just gay and lesbian issues but deals with a variety of issues that are really crucial to the curriculum, and actually focus on them. I would like to see it in relative context. I think we have moved out of just seeing it as related to gender.

*Personal is political.*

Concomitant with feminist discourse and oppression another contributor to the data suggested that an instructor might have personal interests or "could have a sense in their own lives of what discrimination is personally like and then you broaden that. You start seeing the commonalities in people who for other reasons do not fit into the mainstream, and then I think it makes you open." On the other hand, it was also put forth that both the climate of academic freedom and the personal awareness of the issues by the instructor are contributing factors that may determine if LGBT issues are included in the curriculum.

*Career advancement equals credibility.*

More than one participant mentioned during the interviews that professors who teach courses about gender issues lack credibility in the eyes of their colleagues, in

particular from those who teach natural science courses. They felt that the topic of Gender was labelled as a “soft science” and both the subject matter and the people who teach it are very often marginalized. One instructor who started out teaching natural sciences before moving into Psychology commented that “it is not given a lot of credibility or high profile: I had one professor say to me that I had made a big mistake.” The same person further added:

Unless you teach high theory, you are already of lesser credibility...it is marginal...somebody has got to do it. So, to choose to do that is probably going to be detrimental in a lot of circumstances. It might be neutral if you are doing other kinds of research, but there is a subtle labelling of you as an activist, or not really mainstream. Let's put it this way, I do not see any of the new faculty rushing to teach a course about gay and lesbian issues. It is safer career wise not to do it.

*Political consciousness.*

An influential factor suggested by a few of the instructors is that gay and lesbian issues could be “a current political issue that is out in the population and has struck a chord with the public, or created awareness that has to be addressed at a higher level.” For example, same-sex marriage has been a recent topic of discussion and debate in both political and religious arenas. The person who contributed that statement clarified it as following:

Gay and lesbian matters are so much a part of public discourse now when they were not even ten or twenty years ago. Every day there is something on the news, in the newspaper, it is part of what we hear in the media, if you listen to CBC, or



you read the Globe and Mail or McLean's magazine, its there, it is part of the discourse. So, I think that influences what you see as being meaningful content.

The politics of the university itself was a potential reason why gay and lesbian content may be included in the curriculum, according to one instructor. As previously mentioned, educational institutions must be aware of the sources of their funding and always trying to balance the interests of all stakeholders involved. It may be possible that curriculum may offer gay and lesbian studies in its programs in order to present a positive image, or appear to be "politically correct."

The reason why we do have women's studies, gay and lesbian studies is because of how political it is. It is hard to change the curriculum and there is sort of a quiet resistance, unless someone has a personal reason to put it in there. Often they are not going to start it, or else somebody else who wants to have a good image of the university orders them to. It does make sense to probably get the issues out...the practicality is to get the stuff out. They are still generally adhered to for white male, European, Euro centric heterosexuals. That is the way the curriculum has been for decades...the curriculum mirrors some of the changes in the issues in a broader political world. You are seeing more people coming out talking about same sex marriage. As these issues become more prominent in society people are already going to see them as issues they want to know more about. There is more acceptance of including more and more of this into the curriculum. And, of course as people learn more in the curriculum then they are going to be more aware of these issues outside, so it is a feedback. It is very much a feedback loop, and I think it is changing. But still, there is a long way to go.

*Trained and sensitive.*

Consistent with research that reviewed attitudes of pre-service teachers, some of the same reasons emerged about why there may be discomfort with teaching sexual orientation issues. These included lack of knowledge, fear of imposing beliefs, or fear of insensitivity to the topic. However, contrary to the aforementioned researchers' findings, there was no concern with student resistance, lack of time, personal biases, or that social justice issues are not within the realm of education.

Occasionally, students will approach an instructor and request that the subject matter is included in class discussions, in which case a few participants indicated that the comfort level of some instructors might determine if the request is honoured. During the interviews I felt a genuine concern expressed by all of the contributors that even though they believed that gay and lesbian issues were extremely important, they did not want to "do any harm" by being insensitive to all of the students' needs, or raising the issues in an inappropriate way. Despite these concerns, it did not prevent them from discussing the issues. Although none of the participants believed that students or staff would question their academic credibility, many were worried about their perceived authenticity. As one person explained through an example:

How can a privileged, white, middle class, educated me talk with any authenticity about aboriginal women's experiences in Canada? So, that is my concern when I am presenting material...that I am doing justice to the experiences and to the analysis, and not allowing any kind of covert homophobia of my own to emerge.

Another professor agreed with this sentiment and stated that:

My fear is that I will embarrass myself as a professor and will come off being ignorant or uninformed. This is a typical fear that we live with, that we are not going to know what we need to know about the topic. The second one is that I will hurt my students, and I think that the second one is more important than the first one.

Often, in-depth knowledge about gay and lesbian issues are self-taught because there is little or no specific training about LGBT issues available to them other than an occasional workshop offered by professionals outside of the university environment. Each instructor has generally indicated that they have taken responsibility for their own professional development, so they “teach it and catch up as they go.” It appeared that obtaining resources to teach about the subject matter was not a hindrance for any of the instructors. If their own university did not carry the needed material it was readily obtainable through interlibrary loans within a short period of time.

Many participants felt that although they may be quite informed and comfortable speaking about “the whole notion of oppression and injustice and how that affects hundreds of people,” they were not as confident teaching about gay and lesbian lived experiences because it was not part of their own experience. A very poignant and authentic display of sensitivity came from one professor, who commented:

I do not know what gay and lesbian youth are going through in a high school situation. This sort of lived experience is what I do not know. To say that I actually know and understand those experiences and how people are affected, or the legal aspects of it, or the policy implications...I am woefully unprepared. I remember watching *Forbidden Love* and thinking that is the city that my mom

grew up in. My mom grew up in Vancouver, and it was just like...it just brings tears to my eyes...I do not know why I am getting so worked up about it...people could not even go and have a drink. I do not know why it is bothering me...I just see images of those people getting beaten up in clubs and all that, and I just think how horrible it is, and how am I supposed to know?

Many instructors felt that as they gained experience teaching the course, and did more reading of available resources they could reach a certain academic comfort level, “but would never be an expert in the topic.” Drawing on the insights and experiences of gay and lesbian friends or engaging in dialogue with their students seemed to make them feel most informed academically and personally.

Another professor expressed that he or she was very comfortable discussing LGBT issues both academically and personally. She seemed miffed about why it would be an issue at all, and stated that:

As a human being I am personally comfortable. I am not under attack and I do not have any misgivings about discussing it. I do not understand why people make such a big deal of it. Academically, I do not know the literature that is out there with regard to counselling and homosexuality issues, but I do know some in terms of human sexuality. I can always get more up to speed. I have the skills as an academic to learn more about it, and I personally lend support to it. I would have poor academic integrity if I chose not to discuss it just because I was personally uncomfortable with it. That is poor academics.

*Implications of Including LGBT Content*

Without knowing which direction the responses to the interview questions would take, and not wanting to assume that the idea of including LGBT content in the curriculum would necessarily be welcomed by all participants, I asked participants to describe the implications of incorporating sexual orientation issues into their classrooms. As with most of the responses to the questions there was no hesitation by any of the professors to provide an immediate and authentic answer that came straight from the heart.

There are all sorts of implications for the students that are in the class. If there are gay and lesbian students one of the big implications is that a big part of their identity and life experience is all of a sudden validated, made topical. It is important and no longer invisible and marginalized.

For the society as a whole it too means that these subjects, the people are no longer marginalized and invisible, they also have a place, a legitimated place in the academy and that is important for the society as a whole. I am a great believer in education always having the potential to transform social situations through the education of one person at a time. So, I think the possibility of reducing oppression and violence against gays and lesbians, and marginalization of gays and lesbians, and exploitation of gays and lesbians can change as people become educated, and as gay and lesbian people have voice and as they are represented in the curriculum. I think that is really important. Invisibility is so criminal and so harmful in the long run. People are silent when invisible. Having it in the curriculum gives those people a voice, and gives that lived reality a voice, and

gives the topic a voice that requires everybody to face the history of it, the oppression of it, and the injustice of it, and it invites everybody to ask the question “what can I do?”

One participant was not as sure about what the implications are, but could only hope that student awareness gets raised through critical thinking about the issues and those attitudes of respect for each others’ differences are increased. Another instructor put the following idea forth:

Talking about LGBT issues provides a broader base for students to understand the notion that gender does not mean biological sex. So, they would have a clear understanding of that, and a clear understanding of diversity. In terms of other implications, like negative ones, it would be in terms of someone taking issue with it, but they could take issue with anything that you teach in class. You cannot be assured that everybody is going to like everything all the time. That is the nature of academics. Sometimes you have to be apprised of or confronted with that which you do not necessarily feel comfortable with. That is what helps you clarify, and understand, and grow intellectually.

Regardless, if students felt that the topic created discomfort, and the occasional giggling in class during discussions of homosexuality was a clear indicator that it did, instructors reported that negative evaluations had never been received as a result of including the topic in the curriculum.

*Free to choose inclusive curriculum.*

In addition to wondering what participants would think or feel about the implications of including LGBT content in the curriculum, I was curious to know what

they would suggest needs to be changed in the current education system that may improve or make more inclusive the educational experiences of LGBT students, teachers, administration or parents.

For example, in order to provide a temporary resolution to LGBT youths' high drop out rates from high school, the Board of Education in Toronto developed a program called the *Triangle Program*. This program was intended to provide greater feelings of protection and safety for LGBT youth by offering a separate high school away from mainstream environments. The school is located in the basement of a local church, and students who felt at risk in a regular high school environment could attend the Triangle program until they were ready to re-enter the regular system once again.

I asked participants what they thought about providing a separate high school environment for LGBT students in Alberta who felt at risk in the mainstream school environment. Most participants reported that they could "see a need for it because of issues of safety," but on the other hand were either ambivalent about the concept, or explicitly against it. However, the reasons why they were against it were based on similar experiences in history with respect to other oppressed groups. The participants explained that the costs of segregation or isolation would far outweigh the short-term benefits of a "band-aid solution." One participant thought that that "there is a danger of creating a ghetto," and another had the following view:

I think it is a dual edged sword. Why I say that is because I think that when a student has to be contending with and wrestling with a whole range of emotional issues inside their head they are not going to be able to attend in the classroom and focus on subject matter. And, for a gay and lesbian student to be entering in

what they feel is a war zone every time they have to go to school is going to be totally disruptive to their learning experience. So, on the one hand being in an environment that normalizes it and where they feel supported and safe is terrific. On the other side, I think it is a slippery slope when you start thinking about separating them again, because they are already separated. Is that going to further create the marginalization in a sense of their disenfranchisement, or in the sense of being stigmatized? I do not know the right answer.

Another professor compared the isolation of LGBT youth with the efforts made to isolate African American people, or with creating women's colleges. Historically, neither effort was very productive:

I think that I would be concerned about setting it up for the reason that it does isolate you. It pulls you out. I think that you do have a need for a place for gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender students like a club where they can get together and find other people like themselves and find out that others experience the same difficulties or something to normalize themselves. The problem is people will say you guys are deficient somehow and you've got to have special babying, therefore you are singled out easier as a target. That would become more of a problem than having a particular space that is a safer space for them to be. Even women's' colleges are extremely contentious, and we all know the case with black students who were put into separate schools. They received inferior education. You know, you still run a risk even if you have a separate program for LGBT students. Short term, there's no safe spot.



At least three of the seven professors adopted the opposite viewpoint in the debate, focusing more on the concept that a separate environment with instructors who may be gay and lesbian themselves would allow students to feel like they were less marginalized in an educational facility that understood the daily personal traumas encountered in their lives:

I do not have a problem with any kind of school of that nature. Even though I think it is unfortunate that you would feel as though you can't be in the mainstream population of a school because you are not regarded as mainstream, and you would feel as though you must go to a school like that in order to identify with your peers, I understand that is the reality. And if that is what you need to do then I think that there should be some place that you can do that. I just think it is sad that it has to be the case, but bullying occurs every day in every kind of form whether it concerns this issue or not.

A second opinion was similar to the above:

I personally think it would be a very good addition to what is available so that students would have an option of choosing which kind of program that they wanted to go to. And they would have the option of forming a community with other teenagers who had similar experiences to them. I just think that it would be really positive and it would allow the staff there to really think about the curriculum they were teaching in relation to gay and lesbian youth, not necessarily watering it down but using their lived experience as a way into the curriculum. But it would certainly protect students too and give them kind of a safe

environment to explore their identity, or a safer environment to explore their identity than in a huge composite high school.

In lieu of providing a school that was segregated from mainstream schools, I wondered what ideas the participants in this study would have to improve or make more inclusive the current mainstream educational system, or if they even felt that there was a need for change that would address all stakeholders in the education system including students, teachers, administrators, or parents.

A few of the instructors who were interviewed explained that they still knew of colleagues who were LGBT persons teaching in a junior high school or high school but who have kept their sexual orientation hidden for fear of losing their job. As one instructor clarified, “technically you can still be fired from an educational institution in Alberta for being gay or lesbian, even though it is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; Alberta has its own little thing.” Furthermore, whether or not a teacher was concerned with being fired if their orientation was made public, the participant explained that LGBT teachers felt that being “out” was not “worth the homophobic reactions of the heterosexual climate.”

It was felt by one participant that even though there was a need for change in education, and it would be ideal to have all colleagues be “more gay positive at a grass roots level than actually takes place but I would not want to impose a system that ensures that.” A few other participants agreed that the bottom line for any instructor was to have the fundamental academic freedom to teach whatever they preferred. That is not to say that they would not teach about Queer Theory of LGBT issues because it does tend to ensure that heterosexual assumptions are challenged, but teachers should have a choice

about their own curriculum content. This seemed to be evident to one instructor who knew that the “Alberta Teachers Association is promoting awareness about LGBT issues, but I am not sure how much of it is actually getting into the grass roots system. The school system is very much entrenched in the status quo and it is very hard to change.”

All of the participants in this study keenly believed that it was their professional responsibility to be informed of and responsive to the needs of LGBT students in their classrooms. They sensed that there was a need for change in the Alberta Education system, and all of them had ideas about how changes could be implemented that would improve the curriculum by increasing the awareness of everyone’s lived experiences.

Aside from including issues about diversity in a variety of courses and recognizing that it is “important for teachers to be aware of personal issues that students are going through “ one professor suggested that faculties should “have a top down thing where people could do a curriculum review and look at how these issues are included. I think that the pressure has to come from outside the university because I think it is still dangerous, or at least almost impossible, for junior faculty to agitate the change.”

Certainly, many of the professors believed that in addition to pressure being exerted from outside the university, changes would occur if there were “more gay and lesbian people in positions of leadership around curriculum, around teachers, and around teacher education and program development.”

In addition to having proactive leaders within the educational institutions who may be able to reduce potential resistance of teachers and students alike with regard to any challenges that undermine their assumptions, it was suggested that one avenue to address the issues is through availability of more literature and textbooks that talk about

the subject. Resources must be made available at both university and public libraries so that access to information is not a concern to those who seek out information. “Everybody needs to be educated, so we must make sure that we try to help everybody think about the issues.”

#### *Part IV: Personal Opinions of the Participants*

Professors do not live in an academic vacuum or devoid of values, beliefs and meanings that they have developed through their own lived experiences. Therefore, although they are highly educated in their respective disciplines, similar to counselling psychologists they are prone to succumbing to personal biases when proffering opinions about any subject matter. They may also be susceptible to demonstrating attitudes or perceptions that present their image in a light of political correctness, as illustrated in the title of a thesis by Fair (2001) called “Yes, I should, but no I wouldn’t.” Therefore, one way in which I thought some of these personal biases or stereotypes may emerge is by asking participants about their personal opinions.

Only one of the participants in this study indicated that he or she is aware of having LGBT students in the classroom based on the personal appearance of the student:

Sometimes I’m aware and the way that I know is in peoples’ mannerisms and style of dress. Sometimes I am aware by how they choose to share things, but so cautiously, and I kind of read between the lines. Sometimes I am not aware but they have approached me because they feel a certain comfort level in disclosing.

Six of the seven participants said that they are only aware that a student may be LGBT if they self-identify. All of the participants said that they would never ask a student if they were LGBT because the decision to disclose that information is exclusively the

right of the individual. However, every effort is made by each instructor to provide a “safe space” for students should they wish to disclose personal information.

Some of the literature that speaks about verbal harassment of gay and lesbian students in the schools suggests that teachers may ignore the verbal abuse when they hear it within their school. The literature also suggests that some people feel that if you call a homosexual person a “fag” or a “homo” or some other label that denotes that the person is gay, the behavior is only degrading, humiliating or insulting if the person who you intended to insult is actually heterosexual. In other words, as long as that person really is gay then it is okay to pitch such labels at them. Regardless of the sexuality of the victim of verbal abuse, all participants felt that derogatory language is considered to be an insult in any situation:

If you call someone a fag whether or not he is a homosexual, you are still using derogatory language. The baggage carried in that term is a very derogatory image. You are accusing them of being deviant, and unworthy.

#### *Part V: Societal Influences on the Participants*

More than one professor thought that the province of Alberta is known to be a very conservative place, and there “seems to be a real level of intolerance and lack of understanding of LGBT persons.” Others think that the Alberta population is polarized, or that there is a growing population within the province who are critical of conservative attitudes. Nonetheless, participants stated that they “still see a large number of students in their class who claim that the bible says that homosexuality is a sin. All you have to do is read the old Alberta Report to know that conservatives exist out there.”

At least half of the contributors to this study stated that a lot of Alberta politicians are homophobes or that “this is a really redneck province in terms of not being all that open to hearing about homosexuality. In a way I do see that it is harder to fight for certain rights in Alberta, but it is way more worth it in a way. I think it forces people who are interested in issues of what’s fair and what is right, it is more of a challenge for them and some rise to the challenge and some do not.”

In addition, participants thought that gay and lesbians are marginalized: “every time gay and lesbian issues come up our premier wants to trot out the notwithstanding clause. It is scary!”

One way to minimize and hopefully reduce disparaging remarks is through public education. Participants were asked to comment about what they thought were specific needs or ways to augment public education about LGBT issues. Aside from offering more “discourse that challenges homophobic presuppositions,” in the educational system, many participants thought that the mass media such as magazines, newspapers, television documentaries, and movies would be one way of normalizing differences as long as it was unbiased and could “present different slices of life and kinds of people that exist.”

The problem is according to one instructor:

Mostly people are afraid for their job and afraid of losing professional status. The idea that gay and lesbian people want to put their career on the line in order to stand up for their rights just does not happen to be the case.

Another participant believed that there is a need to:

Bring attention to things like sexual orientation harassment, hate crimes, and homophobia, but it is not going to be the racist people who show up at the anti-

racism workshop, and it is not going to be the rapists that are going to come to violence against women march, right? We need some good, cold hard facts like maybe some good websites that have some good information and good links for more information, or things like kids help lines could be really helpful.

*Summary*

The participants in this study have provided their perceptions about academic freedom, curriculum, personal opinions, and societal and political influences. Chapter Five further discusses their perceptions, relates it to existing literature on LGBT issues and concerns, provides recommendations for change, examines the limitations of the study, reviews the implications for counsellors and educators, and makes suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This study investigated faculty perceptions toward offering courses that include and integrate discussions and material within the curricula concerning issues relevant and perhaps specific to lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or trans-Gendered students (LGBT).

Specifically, the research question asked, “What are instructors’ perceptions about gay and lesbian content in Alberta university Gender courses?”

This study also intended to reveal the need to make more visible the lived experiences of LGBT students. Participants in this study have agreed that they must assist LGBT students in fulfilling this need through education at all levels. Often times, if we were to examine our own beliefs, values, traditions and actions, we distance ourselves from thinking that hatred and violence could be something that we personally own. We assume that it lies in the other, and forget that we are capable of offering equality to all minorities regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion or sexual orientation.

Qualitative researchers are often advised that if they want an in-depth and “true” experience of a phenomenon they should spend some time living with it, as is done in a participant observation method. Aside from the personal lived experiences of the researcher, participants in this study have shared their experiences and perceptions about LGBT content in the university gender course curriculum. As part of this shared knowledge they have imparted their views about academic freedom, curriculum and institutional expectations, personal cultural lived experiences, experiences as educators, and most importantly experiences and observations as caring humans. Although there were similar beliefs and perceptions about this topic among participants, the majority of



them supported the idea that there needs to be more information disseminated to all students about issues that affect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons.

In addition to the main themes of Academic Freedom, Curriculum, Personal Opinions and Societal Influences several sub-themes emerged from the data, which painted a more holistic picture about professors' attitudes toward LGBT issues.

First, professors felt that there were no restrictions on their academic freedom, so they were left with all kinds of room to offer an inclusive curriculum if they choose. Consistent with findings reported by Harbeck (1992), and despite the fact that only two of the professors were tenured faculty, none of the participants had any concerns that teaching about LGBT issues would affect their chances to become tenured, or that it would affect their job status in any other way. However, participants made comments that agree with the opinions of Sanlo (1999). That is, similar to the fears of some United States teachers who feel isolated and without support systems, some gay and lesbian teachers in some Canadian schools do feel that their jobs would be threatened if they disclosed their sexual orientation.

An interesting result that emerged from the data that was not evident in any literature available on the subject is that of attitudes of other faculty about those who teach gender courses. Many of the participants felt that because they taught gender courses, they were a marginalized group who received less respect from colleagues than professors who teach natural sciences. Concomitantly, their chances of career advancement may be jeopardized, or at least less likely than professors who teach other courses. Some of the participants believed that attitudes of other professors towards the "touchy-feely" course material offered in social science courses such as gender courses may actually deter new

teachers from having any interest in teaching gender courses. It was suggested that it may also influence whether or not an instructor included LGBT content in their course outline.

The theme of Curriculum produced some interesting results that were consistent with the literature discussed in Chapter Two. Participants defined curriculum in both a narrow and a broad perspective, which is consistent with the findings of Harden (2001). All of the participants expressed that the curriculum is designed with the mindset that it is the student who is the consumer of knowledge; therefore they set their course goals accordingly. However, the results of this investigation also conclude that there is little or no collaboration among professors with respect to development of course content, course goals, or for any other academic reasons. Most participants were completely unaware of what their colleagues do, or what their attitudes or perceptions are about the material taught.

The course goals that participants have for discussing gender and LGBT issues in general is in line with goals stated in the literature (Athanases, 1996; Andrews, 1990; Fletcher & Russell, 2001; Quinlivan & Town, 1996; & Sanlo, 1999). Increasing awareness of diversity and awareness of differences was a predominant goal for many instructors. Broadening students' knowledge, deconstructing biases and reducing heterosexism were also important goals. The participants emphasized that changing attitudes was not one of their course goals, however raising awareness may result in changed attitudes. Participants also hoped that if the course goals are successful, and LGBT youth become a visible part of the curriculum, perhaps the impact of that success would be that the lives of gay and lesbian youth would be less difficult.

Unlike the reports given by Batelaan (2000) who claims that teachers are reluctant to discuss homosexuality in their classroom lectures, participants in this study provided

responses that were more consistent with Waterman, Reid, Garfield, & Hoy (2001), and Meers (1997). They noted that scholars are eager to teach gay-studies programs and that when students are given the opportunity to discuss and explore diversity their increased knowledge often changes attitudes and breaks down stereotypes.

Consistent with research conducted by Fast (2002) and Ferfolja (2001) who reviewed attitudes of pre-service teachers, some of the same reasons emerged about why there may be discomfort with teaching sexual orientation issues. These included lack of knowledge, fear of imposing beliefs, or fear of not portraying enough sensitivity to the topic. Unlike Fast and Ferfolja's reports that student resistance was a concern, some of the participants in this investigation did mention that at times they were concerned about student resistance, but that students do not generally tend to submit negative evaluations about the topic being included in their courses. Also contrary to the aforementioned researchers' findings, there were no concerns about lack of time, personal biases, or that social justice issues are not within the realm of education. Inconsistent with suggestions made by Simplicio (1995), none of the participants in this investigation indicated that they would shy away from discussing homosexuality in their classrooms.

Instructors' perceptions about student reactions to incorporating LGBT content in the curriculum were mixed, whereas Meers (1997) has suggested that students have either neutral or negative attitudes with respect to the topic. Some instructors indicated that on occasion an atmosphere of silence prevailed when the topic was raised in class, whereas other instructors were pleased with the liberal attitudes and active involvement of students in the discussions. Many of the participants who teach graduate students noticed a different level of active engagement than they experienced with their undergraduate

students. Participants suggested that the level of education that the students had already attained seemed to make a difference in the intensity of discussions that took place.

Although all of the instructors implicitly were aware that LGBT youth endure verbal and physical harassment at various times and in various settings, none of the participants specifically spoke to issues such as youth suicide, drop outs, depression, substance abuse or behavioral problems when discussing the implications that having LGBT content may have in the curriculum. Adolescent development and identity formation were also not areas of discussion that participants mentioned. However, as many of the participants indicated throughout the interview process the fact that they are heterosexual means that the issues do not directly affect them, and therefore they may not be aware of them unless they read about it or hear about it through the media. The findings in this study confirm the work of Andrews (1990) that heteronormativity prevails and that development of instructors' knowledge in these areas could be accomplished by enhancing teacher education programs and enriching the whole curriculum at every phase.

There were five sub-themes that emerged under the umbrella of influential factors that may determine if an instructor included LGBT issues in his or her course content. Factors such as course subject matter, personal interest, career advancement, political awareness, and lack of knowledge were instrumental factors denoted by the participants.

A Gender course is not necessarily the only course that could offer LGBT content in its curriculum according to the majority of participants. In fact, they think that it could be integrated into almost any program to a certain degree. They also believed that there

are many courses in the Faculty of Education that place education in a social context, thus LGBT content could be easily integrated into all courses.

A result of this study that was not mentioned in the literature is that instructors may include LGBT content in their course curriculum because he or she may have experienced discrimination on a personal level, and therefore have first-hand knowledge of oppression. If that is not the case, then it could be possible that current political awareness has become so focused on the issues that they would be remiss if they did not address the issues at a higher level of education. The pro or con politics of the university administration may also be a contributing factor to decisions they make about an inclusive curriculum.

Unlike the claims of Rodriguez (1998) and Foulks-Boyd (1999) who state that teachers do not want to be accused of teaching students how to be homosexual, or are torn between academic responsibility and personal beliefs, participants in this study did not report either as a concern. Instead, they reported that they are committed to teaching about all areas of diversity, including sexual orientation.

The results of this study do indicate that there is a lack of training and knowledge by professors surrounding LGBT issues, but that is not to say that educators are not capable of training themselves. In fact, all participants in the study had knowledge about the topic that was self-taught, but stated that if there were workshops available to them about the subject matter they would likely attend. As luck would have it, one of the participants informed me of an upcoming workshop that was being offered by the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA) Diversity, Equity, and Human Rights committee. The workshop was entitled "Building awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity

issues.” A description of the workshop explained that the “the purpose of this workshop is to help teachers begin to build awareness and understanding of the everyday lived experiences, safety and health concerns that many LGBT students face in their classrooms, schools and communities. These experiences include feelings related to safety, inclusion and concerns about LGBT student health and wellness.”

I commend the ATA for offering the above noted workshop. Participants in this study have proclaimed that further training may undoubtedly relieve some of the other fears about being insensitive to the topic or imposing their own heterosexist beliefs on students.

#### *Recommendations for Change for Counsellors and Educators*

In order to summarize and make sense of the data, I wanted to know, what are the main messages of these voices of experience who participated in this research? Sceptics would ask, what are they not saying about the issues? What can educators do to improve things, if they feel there is a need for improvement?

Overall, university instructors who teach gender courses in Alberta proactively support and offer LGBT content in their course curriculum. They also recommend that it could be integrated into all university programs. Half of the participants in this work did not recommend that separate or alternative schools be made available to gay and lesbian students as they feel that isolation from the mainstream would be a short-term solution. The other half felt that a safe environment in a community of their peers would be a positive addition to the education system.

All of the instructors who provided input into this research feel it is their professional responsibility to be informed and responsive to the needs of LGBT students.

Instructors suggested that some changes could be implemented into the educational system. For example: Awareness of the issues could start with an administrative top down approach of curriculum review; administrative leaders who are gay or lesbian could provide some insight not available to heterosexist people in positions of power; pressure could be exerted from gay and lesbian activists who are students, or from activists from outside the university who could persuade the administration to revisit curriculum policies; and gay and lesbian resources should be available to all stakeholders. Regardless of which changes occur in the educational system, it was made very clear that instructors in all programs have the fundamental academic freedom to implement changes, if they deem it necessary.

#### *Implications for Counsellors and Educators*

The primary role of the professional is to assist in promoting a good fit between the young person and their environment so that they can grow into healthy, well-adjusted adults. Counselling, in particular, operates on the principle that it is a strength-based model. That is, Counsellors try to help clients discover what works for them, versus what is wrong with them in the form of a diagnosis or disorder. Furthermore, Counsellors emphasize the diversity within the client that makes them unique and high functioning.

In order to accomplish this objective, many counsellors shy away from using a positivist model of clinical assessment such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Duffy et al (2002) discuss the debate about which theory of knowledge is best suited for the social sciences, comparing paradigms of medical models of diagnosis with social constructivism, narrative therapy, phenomenology, and other theories that profess that social reality is constructed through “the coordination in time

and space of people interacting in language and generating consensual agreement about the nature of things and their meanings” (p.364).

It is pointed out by some professionals that one of the problems of assessment tools like the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) is that it has been created by socially privileged scientists who are a dominant group, and who generally ignore the alternate understandings of behavior or experience exhibited by marginalized or oppressed groups. For this reason, many counsellors tend to use a paradigm of social reality that is non-positivist and broader in scope than looking at just the bio-psycho-social aspects of the individual. They believe that there are larger social systems that shape an individual than what a purely medical model can identify.

Social systems’ influences on an individual are one reason that by the time adolescents become adults, identity consolidation has taken place (Hunter & Mallon, 1999). Learning for the adolescent occurs through healthy experiences, activities, and interactions in the classroom, at home, in religious institutions, and in the community. If the individuals’ interaction with their environment is unhealthy, they may seek problem solving assistance from a counsellor. In most cases, the counsellor will build on the individuals’ strengths and assets, on positive mental health and identity development, and attempt to provide a point of view of optimism and hopefulness.

On the other hand, if a professional has a tenacious hold on negative attitudes or propaganda about LGBT issues in general, there may be an impact on the service provided to the LGBT individual. As it is, it would appear that the needs of LGBT youth are just as invisible as they are. Therefore, gay and lesbian youth may also experience unmet needs from professionals in addition to family, peers, and schools. In lieu of the



challenges that LGBT youth already face, adding unsupportive counsellors to the mixture may be the straw that breaks the camel's back. It follows then that Greene (1994) appropriately wonders if therapists are still in the dark even though gays and lesbians are out of the closet.

In view of that, implications for psychological counsellors' treatment approaches may vary in keeping with the education that counsellors and students receive about issues of concern for LGBT persons. However, regardless of the primary theoretical orientation that a counsellor adopts, the basic foundations of counselling such as offering unconditional positive regard, acceptance, and a non-judgmental position will most likely provide psychological healing.

The literature has indicated repeatedly that the problems that LGBT youth experience are numerous, and that the outcome of an individual not being able to cope with the multitudes of stressors may sometimes lead to suicide. It is therefore imperative that supportive and proactive mental health resources within or outside of the education system be available to this minority population of students. In my experience during my practicum at a small town Alberta high school, it was obvious that school counsellors are stuck with certain variables that other counsellors outside of the education system may not encounter. These include high student to counsellor ratios, lack of training in specific areas, lack of resources, and increasing numbers of cases where high school adolescents are becoming involved with drug-related activities. Therefore, high-school counselling services for gay and lesbian identity crises, or any other personal issues that require intervention or advocacy, are put on the back burner.

Johnson & Johnson (2000) maintain, "A multidisciplinary approach to education, enlightenment and consciousness-raising will have the most in-depth and lasting effects on reducing or eliminating homophobia and/or heterosexist bias" (p.632). Furthermore, they suggest that it is imperative for clinicians to have a good understanding of the varied and complex factors that engulf the lives of LGBT people and how they have developed their worldview.

It has been made clear by all of the participants in this study that graduate training or teacher education training offers next to nothing or inadequate training in LGBT issues. As a result, instructors in this study stated that at first they felt woefully unprepared to speak to the issues that gay and lesbians live with on a daily basis.

Participants in the study have suggested in their responses to the interview questions that although it is not necessary to be a LGBT person in order to counsel LGBT youth, it does require a comfort level and awareness in homosexuality discussions, and it is necessary to be knowledgeable, unbiased, sensitive and accepting of LGBT persons. According to the literature, it may also be necessary to throw away heterosexist and essentialist views. The obvious place for normalizing differences among humans is to start educating in the schools, and at all levels of education. Accordingly, educational institutions offer a prime opportunity to accomplish what Glesne (1992) says is the main goal of any research; to "create critical consciousness, improve the lives of those involved, and to transform societal structures and relationships." If discussions, acceptance, and support about LGBT issues were to be examined more often in the curricula, there may be less unmet needs for LGBT students, and the amount and

frequency of clinical problems that gay and lesbians bring to counselling may be significantly reduced as their feelings of safety in school is amplified.

One way that counsellors can assist educators in achieving a greater comfort zone when teaching about LGBT issues, is to offer workshops or training sessions to them. As mentioned several times by instructors who participated in this study, there is currently little information available to them, but should workshops become available they would take advantage of them.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

It is clear that there is a paucity of literature on the issue of integrating more sexual orientation issues into the curriculum of post-secondary courses in Canada, and in particular with respect to integrating LGBT issues into Gender courses. Because information on university instructors' perceptions is not firmly entrenched in the research, I was unable to learn from previous studies. I was also unable to make many comparisons between the results of this study and similar works. Nonetheless, I believe that it is time to acquire a Canadian perspective on the topic, and to compare it with North American perspectives. Banks (2003) states that Canada has much in common with the United States, including standards of living, quality of health care and economic development, therefore some generalizability may be utilized from non-Canadian studies.

A small sample was drawn utilizing snowball-sampling methods. The overall implication of a small convenience sample is that the ability to generalize the results to extended populations and geographic areas is limited. That is, the sample was not randomly selected and comprised only instructors who teach Gender courses in the province of Alberta, Canada. These factors thereby limit the extent to which the results

can be generalized to other university educators in other regions. Furthermore, this study was purely descriptive in nature; therefore, I cannot predict future trends from the data collected. Another limitation that must be taken into consideration is that any sample that is derived from referrals from other people also has the potential for a loss of anonymity of the participants who do choose to participate.

I was fortunate to select people to interview for this study who accepted the invitation to participate on first contact. Although I did have four participants from the same university decline an interview when I asked them to participate, the reasons stated about why they declined were valid academic or personal grounds. I mention this because at first glance it could appear that a refusal to participate in this kind of study may indicate homophobia. However, in these incidents I do not believe that anyone was reluctant to discuss the subject matter, as all those who refused have already been very proactive in making the subject matter a key issue of review in their respective faculty. This itself presents another limitation of the study in that it would have been beneficial to speak with those who haven't worked through the angst of discussing LGBT issues. Unfortunately, it is difficult to get those persons to participate. Those who did volunteer to be interviewed appeared to be those who are already instrumental in developing awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity issues.

For those who did agree to be interviewed upon first contact, this could mean a selection bias that results in an under or over-reporting of the topic under review. Furthermore, all of the participants were white males and females, varying in age and teaching experience, thereby leaving instructors of various cultural origins under-represented.

Christensen (1992) discusses various interactions between researchers and participants that can influence the outcome of the study. If possible, these interactions must be controlled and kept constant. A limitation of this work is that the individuals who volunteered to participate may have done so because they have strong feelings for or against the topic. As one participant suggested, individuals' responses may also have been influenced by what they believe to be "politically or socially correct." In other words, participants may have been motivated to respond in such a way as to present them in the most positive and least homophobic manner. For this reason, I asked the participants if they had answered the interview questions with the intent of making it look like they were not homophobic. All of the participants seemed quite taken aback by the question, and all answered that they had no such intent in mind. I believed all of them to be truthful about their response. In fact, each and every participant expressed surprise with himself or herself that they had so much to say about the topic. Certainly, at no time throughout the interview process did I sense that the participants were attempting to be dominating powers that purported to be benevolent advisors. I believe that both the participants and I were made more aware of our beliefs and assumptions simply by reflecting on the interview questions.

An additional limitation of this work is that of "demand characteristics," specifically those of the researcher. That is, participants may have tried to anticipate responses that I expected to hear, and answered accordingly. "Experimenter effects" include things like the expectations that a researcher has about the outcome of the study along with confirmation of any hypotheses. Therefore, it was important that I ensured that I did not influence the outcome of the data with my own motives, my verbal or non-

verbal communications, or my expectancies (biases). I took advice from the writings of Christensen (1994), who cautions researchers about transmission of verbal or non verbal cues during interviews that participants could use to define their responses, and thereby maximize the probability that they will present themselves in a positive manner. In order to control the interactive effects that may have existed between a participant and me I ensured that participants were not aware of my sexual orientation (that is, I did not volunteer that information), and that participants were aware that this research was exploratory in nature to determine if further research into the topic may be valuable. I made every effort to neutralize verbal and non-verbal cues that may have indicated pleasure or satisfaction with the responses.

Another limitation to this research and that could have confounding influence on the outcome is that of the participant's sophistication. All of the participants in this work are well educated and familiar to some degree with the subject matter of diversity. The participants' level of education may therefore be influential in the type of responses given to the interview questions.

A final limitation is that the researcher developed the instrument used. If I were to conduct this study again, I would enhance the credibility of the study by using multiple sources of data and collection strategies. For example, I would request that the participants also complete a quantitative scale such as the "Beliefs about Diversity" scale, or the "Index of Homophobia" scale. Because a researcher developed instrument was used, the reliability and validity are therefore unknown or undermined, thus making it necessary to improve the methodology that may be utilized in future studies.

Although the study sample is small and specific sites were chosen for the participant selection, I feel that this research may provide a general representation of attitudes of post-secondary instructors who teach Gender in the province of Alberta. I anticipate that data collected in this study has provided enough evidence to draw inferences about attitudes of university level Gender course instructors concerning gay and lesbian issues in the curriculum. Through the process of analysis, I hope that I have contributed to the sparse existing literature on this topic or at the very least illuminated important implications for educators and counsellors.

As I tried to add bits and pieces to parts of this work, such as the section about limitations of the study, I wondered if the biggest limitation to the work overall is that of western society. Handfuls of the population actually read research conducted on topics of oppression, so it is common for researchers to be preaching to the converted. The portions of the population who actively condone and/or participate in sustaining the oppression of minority groups are not the ones who are reading the research about how to reduce discrimination or hatred. Succeeding with the task of making all people aware of the negative consequences of discrimination is also limited by the reality that for many people life is simply too busy to care about the problems of others. Transforming problems seems very distant or even perhaps impossible if it were not for the determined few who do care. The participants in this study are just some of the select few who are authentically concerned with transcending heterosexism, so that LGBT persons will no longer have to fight for equality or acceptance.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

It is suggested that significant benefits can be achieved for students receiving recognition and acceptance of sexual orientation within the educational environment at all levels. The impact of being visible and accepted for those who do not feel that they are is that of encouragement of growth and self-actualization.

This study appears to be one of the first to address the perceptions of university professors about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. Although there have been two Canadian studies about pre-service teacher attitudes at the University of Toronto, and homophobia in the Newfoundland education system, it does not appear that other research has been done, especially at the university level. Perhaps it is assumed by researchers that they too would be preaching to the converted. As a result, there are many faculties within many universities that have been untapped for information.

I also suggest that because the participants in this study have indicated that there is little or no training available to them about LGBT issues it may be useful to conduct inquiries with psychologists and educators alike that could provide the necessary training to those who demonstrate a need.

The value of working towards a better paradigm in understanding the phenomenon of oppression is a positive goal that has been demonstrated by all who participated in this study. The optimistic outcome of this work is that many people believe that there is a place for everyone in the curriculum. I invite all educators, students, and counsellors to own the task of transcending heterosexism, so that LGBT persons will no longer have to fight for equality or acceptance.



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## Appendices

### *A: Interview Guide and Questions for Participants*

#### Instructors' perceptions about gay and lesbian Content in Alberta university gender courses

##### Part I: Demographics:

- a. How many years have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Are you presently teaching full time or part time \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Are you tenured? \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Approximately how many times have you taught a Gender course?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. What other courses do you teach? \_\_\_\_\_
- f. In how many provinces in Canada have you taught? \_\_\_\_\_
- g. In how many different schools have you taught? \_\_\_\_\_
- h. What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_
- i. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ (optional)
- j. Do you identify your sexual orientation as:
  - Heterosexual \_\_\_\_\_
  - Homosexual \_\_\_\_\_
  - Bisexual \_\_\_\_\_
  - Transgendered \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

Part II: Academic Freedom (Institutional Influences)

1. If the university required you to include LGBT content in your curriculum, would you feel that you were being forced to deal with the subject, even though you may be uncomfortable with it, and/or do not approve of homosexuality?
2. If Alberta had legislation protecting LGBT youth from harassment and discrimination in schools, would you feel more secure in offering LGBT content in the curriculum? I.e. because you would be defended against attack against proselytizing, via legislation.
3. Please describe the academic freedom given to you by your employer, to discuss LGBT issues in your classroom?
4. Are you aware of homophobic attitudes from colleagues or staff with respect to LGBT persons? Please explain your response.
5. Does your school include LGBT students in its harassment or discrimination policies? Please elaborate on your answer.
6. Are same sex benefits available to faculty and staff in your school?

Part III: Curriculum

7. When you speak to a class about diversity, what is included within the definition of diversity that is used?

8. What factors do you think influence an instructor's decisions to include LGBT content in their course curriculum?
9. Can you describe how you would design, develop, implement and evaluate a LGBT curriculum?
10. What is your meaning of the word "curriculum?" Can you describe the implications of incorporating sexual orientation issues into the curriculum?
11. Please explain any fears or "consequences" that you might anticipate as a result of integrating LGBT issues/materials into the curricula? For example: Would your academic credibility be questioned? Would there be a personal impact of teaching a course that included LGBT content?
12. How would you describe your feelings about being prepared (academically or personally) to teach curriculum about homosexuality to your students?
13. What are the reactions of the students in the classroom discussions, when gay and lesbian issues are brought forward?
14. What types of concerns have you had or heard regarding the availability of materials and guides or resources for teaching about sexual orientation issues?
15. In your opinion, are topics of concern to LGBT students adequately represented in the curriculum?
16. Based on your teaching experience, please discuss if you feel that there is a need for change in the education system. For example, is there a need for a more positive and inclusive environment for LGBT persons involved in education? I.e. for students, teachers, administrators, parents, etc.

17. What kind of training is involved in the professional education of teachers, or student teachers, related to sexuality and sexual orientation issues?
18. What is your opinion about having a high school or university in Alberta, specifically for LGBT students, or a program similar to the Triangle program run by the Toronto board of education for gay and lesbian teenagers?
19. What recommendations for change would you make that may improve, or make more inclusive the current (Gender) curriculum for LGBT university students?
20. If you do integrate LGBT issues into your course, what are your course goals? for example: to change attitudes about LGBT issues, to increase students' awareness of their own personal biases about LGBT persons, to increase students' knowledge base, etc.
21. Approximately how much time per term is spent in class on discussing LGBT issues? For example: one full lecture, less than one full lecture, more than one full lecture, etc.
22. What do you think the strongest points of the classroom discussions have been up to this point?
23. In your opinion, what does having LGBT content in the (Gender) curriculum accomplish?
24. A). Which university courses within the Social Sciences Faculty should or could offer LGBT content? B). Do you think that a Gender course is the most appropriate course that should offer LGBT content in its curriculum?

Part IV: Personal Opinions

25. Are you usually aware when you have LGBT students in your classroom? If so, how are you aware of that?

26. Do you think that LGBT students have equal rights in today's society, in Alberta?

27. Should university recruiters address sexual orientation as a part of the university's sales pitch to prospective students? I.e. emphasize that the university has a policy to protect and/or support LGBT students.

Part V: Societal Influences

28. In your opinion, what are the specific needs for more public education about LGBT issues?

29. What is the earliest age or grade that you think children should learn about sexuality or sexual orientation?

30. Please describe the attitude of Alberta's population with respect to the topic of homosexuality, as you see it.

31. In your opinion, when a person degrades, humiliates, insults, or otherwise violates someone that he or she believes to be a homosexual person, is it considered to be "harassment" only if that person is NOT a homosexual?

32. A). What is instructors' perceptions about gay and lesbian content in Alberta university gender courses? B). what do you think is the best method to discover instructors' perceptions about this topic?

33. Is there any other information or opinions about this topic that I have missed, or that you would like to add or expand on your previous comments?

34. Is there any feedback that you would like to give about this topic that would be useful for me to know, or to pursue further?"

Interview # \_\_\_\_\_  
Tape #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*B: Interview Guide and Questions: Researcher's Copy*

Instructors' perceptions about gay and lesbian  
Content in Alberta university gender courses

Interview with University Professors/Instructors:

"Good morning/afternoon. I am \_\_\_\_\_ (introduce self).

This interview is being conducted to discuss your perceptions about incorporating sexual orientation issues for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students into the Gender course curriculum, at this university. I am especially interested in any problems you have faced when you have discussed sexual orientations issues in your classrooms, or any benefits that you have seen or foresee should more sexual orientation content be incorporated into the curriculum.

"If it is okay with you, I will be tape recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a thesis that will contain all participants' comments, without any reference to individuals. If you agree to this interview and the tape recording, please read and sign this consent form."

"I'd like to start by asking you to complete a few demographic questions, and then I will have you briefly describe your position with the university, and your teaching experience thus far in your career. (Note to interviewer: You may need to probe to gather the information you need). Please answer demographic questions that you are comfortable answering, and omit any that you do not wish to answer. Your name does not appear anywhere on this sheet of questions, and I ask that you seal the information in this envelope (provided) when you are finished.

I'm now going to ask you some questions that I would like you to answer to the best of your ability. If you do not know the answer, or feel uncomfortable answering the question, please say so. I would like to remind you that you are not obligated to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer, and can withdraw completely at any time. If you wish to have a break, or want to stop for any reason whatsoever please let me know immediately.

Do you have any questions before we get started?



## Part I: Demographics:

- a. How many years have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Are you presently teaching full time or part time \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Are you tenured? \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Approximately how many times have you taught a Gender course?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. What other courses do you teach? \_\_\_\_\_
- f. In how many provinces in Canada have you taught? \_\_\_\_\_
- g. In how many different schools have you taught? \_\_\_\_\_
- h. What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_
- i. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ (optional)
- j. Do you identify your sexual orientation as?
  - Heterosexual \_\_\_\_\_
  - Homosexual \_\_\_\_\_
  - Bisexual \_\_\_\_\_
  - Transgendered \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

Part II: Academic Freedom (Institutional Influences)

1. If the university required you to include LGBT content in your curriculum, would you feel that you were being forced to deal with the subject, even though you may be uncomfortable with it, and/or do not approve of homosexuality?
2. If Alberta had legislation protecting LGBT youth from harassment and discrimination in schools, would you feel more secure in offering LGBT content in the curriculum? I.e. because you would be defended against attack against proselytizing, via legislation.
3. Please describe the academic freedom given to you by your employer, to discuss LGBT issues in your classroom?  
**(Note to interviewer: You may need to probe to gather the information about input from other instructors that teach the same course, student participation and reactions, availability of instructors, etc.)**
4. Are you aware of homophobic attitudes from colleagues or staff with respect to LGBT persons? Please explain your response.
5. Does your school include LGBT students in its harassment or discrimination policies? Please elaborate on your answer.  
**(Note to interviewer: If so, probe - "What are the policies," "What have the problems been?," "Do you know why these problems are occurring?," "Do you have any suggestions on how to minimize these problems?")**
6. Are same sex benefits available to faculty and staff in your school? **(Note to interviewer: this question relates to how LGBT curriculum may influence decisions about policy, or legislation in both private and public sectors).**

## Part III: Curriculum

7. When you speak to a class about diversity, what is included within the definition of diversity that is used?
8. What factors do you think influence an instructor's decisions to include LGBT content in their course curriculum?
9. Can you describe how you would design, develop, implement and evaluate a LGBT curriculum?
10. What is your meaning of the word "curriculum?" Can you describe the implications of incorporating sexual orientation issues into the curriculum?
11. Please explain any fears or "consequences" that you might anticipate as a result of integrating LGBT issues/materials into the curricula? For example: Would your academic credibility be questioned? Would there be a personal impact of teaching a course that included LGBT content? **(Note: Probe about if a faculty member revealed that he or she was gay, do you think that it would have a negative impact on his or her career, or endanger that person from achieving tenure?)**
12. How would you describe your feelings about being prepared (academically or personally) to teach curriculum about homosexuality to your students? **(Note to interviewer: Ask if the participant has ever been to workshops on LGBT issues in the curriculum)**
13. What are the reactions of the students in the classroom discussions, when gay and lesbian issues are brought forward? Do you or your students usually initiate discussions of gay-related issues? Do you encourage discussions about gay and lesbian issues?  
**(Note to interviewer: After giving individual time to respond, probe specifics about student participation, depending on the response of the**

**professor/instructor. i.e., are there planned activities/strategies/papers/ assignments that the professor uses to encourage participation. Has active participation been encouraged? Please describe for me how”)**

14. What types of concerns have you had or heard regarding the availability of materials, guides or resources for teaching about sexual orientation issues?

**(I am looking for the knowledge base of the instructor with respect to sexual orientation, diversity, homophobia, etc., as well as what other technical aids like videos, films, books, etc. that or may not be available to them on the topic. Note to interviewer: You may need to probe to gather the information you need)**

15. In your opinion, are topics of concern to LGBT students adequately represented in the curriculum?

16. Based on your teaching experience, please discuss if you feel that there is a need for change in the education system. For example, is there a need for a more positive and inclusive environment for LGBT persons involved in education? I.e. for students, teachers, administrators, parents, etc.

17. What kind of training is involved in the professional education of teachers, or student teachers, related to sexuality and sexual orientation issues?

18. What is your opinion about having a high school or university in Alberta, specifically for LGBT students, or a program similar to the Triangle program run by the Toronto board of education for gay and lesbian teenagers?

19. A). what recommendations for change would you make that may improve, or make more inclusive the current (Gender) curriculum for LGBT university students?

**B). (Note to interviewer: After the response, ask “Do you feel that is your professional responsibility to be informed of and responsive to the needs of LGBT students in your classrooms?)**

20. If you do integrate LGBT issues into your course, what are your course goals? for example: to change attitudes about LGBT issues, to increase students' awareness of their own personal biases about LGBT persons, to increase students' knowledge base, etc.

21. Approximately how much time per term is spent in class on discussing LGBT issues? For example: one full lecture, less than one full lecture, more than one full lecture, etc., or are LGBT issues integrated into the overall curriculum?

22. What do you think the strongest points of classroom discussions about LGBT issues have been up to this point?

**(For those who do discuss sexual orientation issues in their classroom already). Why do you say this?" (Note to interviewer: You may need to probe why specific strong elements are mentioned - e.g., if interviewee replies, "They seem to be open minded about the material", respond "How can you tell that they are open-minded?)**

23. In your opinion, what does having LGBT content in the (Gender) curriculum accomplish?

24. A). Which university courses within the Social Sciences/Education Faculty should or could offer LGBT content? B). Do you think that a Gender course is the most appropriate course that should offer LGBT content in its curriculum?

#### Part IV: Personal Opinions

25. Are you usually aware when you have LGBT students in your classroom? If so, how are you aware of that?

26. Do you think that LGBT students have equal rights in today's society, in Alberta?

27. Should university recruiters address sexual orientation as a part of the university's sales pitch to prospective students? I.e. emphasize that the university has a policy to protect and/or support LGBT students.

Part V: Societal Influence(S)

28. In your opinion, what are the specific needs for more public education about LGBT issues?

29. What is the earliest age or grade that you think children should learn about sexuality or sexual orientation?

30. Please describe the attitude of Alberta's population with respect to the topic of homosexuality, as you see it.

31. In your opinion, when a person degrades, humiliates, insults, or otherwise violates someone that he or she believes to be a homosexual person, is it considered to be "harassment" if that person IS a homosexual? **(ie. it is not okay to make false accusations against a straight person)**

32.) .What is instructors' perceptions about gay and lesbian content in Alberta university gender courses? B). what do you think is the best method to discover instructors' perceptions about this topic?

33. Is there any other information or opinions about this topic that I have missed, or that you would like to add or expand on your previous comments?

34. Is there any feedback that you would like to give about this topic that would be useful for me to know, or to pursue further?" **(Note to interviewer: If so, you may need to probe to gather the information you need).**

*35. Did you answer any of these interview questions with the intent of making me believe that you are not homophobic? (optional question)*

Interview # \_\_\_\_\_

Tape #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*C: Invitation to Participate***INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE**

Dear Research Participant:

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Norma M. Healey, Graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge. The study concerns Instructors' perceptions about gay and lesbian content in Alberta University Gender courses. The research is important in understanding various perceptions and attitudes toward offering courses that include and integrate discussions and material within the curricula concerning issues relevant and perhaps specific to lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender students (LGBT). The research question asks "what are instructors' perceptions about LGBT content in Alberta university gender courses?" The study will attempt to identify factors that are internal and external to the course instructors' control such as academic freedom, societal influences, government influences, and/or personal opinions that affect the content of the curriculum.

If you decide to participate, the researcher will travel to your location to conduct an audio taped semi-structured interview, at a time, date, and location that is convenient to you. Participation is expected to take approximately two and a half hours. A copy of the interview guide is enclosed for your preview.

Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You are not required to participate and declining to participate in no way jeopardizes your academic standing. All responses will be kept in strict confidentiality. This means that no record bearing your name will be provided to anyone except the investigator involved in this study. You will not be identified as an individual in any report coming from this study.

In this project, there are no known economic, legal, physical, psychological, or social risks to participants in either immediate or long-range outcomes. There will be no remuneration for participation in this study. You may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time.

Please find enclosed a copy of "Consent for Research Participation" for your advanced review. Your signature of consent will be obtained at the time of the interview, should you agree to participate.

I would very much appreciate your participation in this study. If you choose to participate, or if you have any questions or concerns about the nature of this study, please contact me, Norma M. Healey, Graduate student, Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge, at my email address [norma.healey@uleth.ca](mailto:norma.healey@uleth.ca) or call (403) 317-0019.



You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Leah Fowler at [leah.fowler@uleth.ca](mailto:leah.fowler@uleth.ca) or Cathy Campbell, the Chair of Human Subjects Research at the University of Lethbridge, (403) 329-2459, or via email at [cathy.campbell@uleth.ca](mailto:cathy.campbell@uleth.ca)

Sincerely,

Norma M. Healey  
M.ED. Graduate Student  
Faculty of Education  
Counselling Psychology  
University of Lethbridge  
Lethbridge, Alberta  
(403) 317-0019

*D: Consent for Research Participation*

The University of Lethbridge  
Faculty of Education

## Consent for Research Participation

Thesis Title: Is curriculum in the closet? Instructors' Perceptions about gay and lesbian content in Alberta university gender courses

Investigator: Norma M. Healey  
Supervisor: Dr. Leah Fowler

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research project is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully, and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this study is to examine university professors' attitudes and perceptions about incorporating more sexual orientation issues into university curriculum, and to review the implications that may benefit gay and lesbian persons, should the curriculum be more inclusive of sexual orientation issues. If you choose to participate in the present study, you will be required to participate in a semi-structured interview. In total, approximately 150 minutes of your time would be required. It is unlikely that any discomfort or inconvenience will be associated with participation in this study. There are no known or suspected short or long term risks associated with study participation.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in the study (e.g., money). However, there may be indirect benefits to you. The information gathered in this study may help to increase understanding about the curriculum of university Gender courses with respect to issues of concern for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students.

To maintain strict confidentiality, the investigator, her supervisor, and a person other than the investigator who transcribes the interview data will be the only individuals to access the original data. Should the transcriber be other than the investigator, the transcriber will not be given participant identifying information. No record bearing your name will be provided to anyone else except the investigator's supervisor. Original copies of taped audio tapes of the interview and all transcripts will be secured in a file cabinet in Norma Healey's possession. Original data including tapes and transcripts will be destroyed five years after successful completion of the thesis defence.

Your signature on this consent form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this research project and agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigator, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the Counselling Psychology thesis known as "Is curriculum in the closet? Instructors' perceptions about gay and lesbian content in Alberta university gender courses."

2. I understand that the Dean of the Faculty where I am employed has granted permission to the researcher to conduct interviews with faculty members, upon their consent.

3. The interview will be audio taped. In the interview I may be identified by name, subject to my consent. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) of such interview, subject to my consent. If I choose to remain anonymous, I know that the tape(s) of my interview will be closed to use, and my name or identifying institution where I work will not appear in the transcript or reference to any material contained in the interview or overall thesis. I know that in the case of choosing to remain anonymous, my interview will only be identified by an internal tracking number.

4. I understand that participation will involve approximately 150 minutes, and that I can withdraw from participation at any time. In the event that I withdraw from the interview, any tape made of the interview will be either given to me or destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview. If requested, I will be provided with contact information for the University Counselling Centre at my affiliated institution.

5. I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to the researcher and the University of Lethbridge, and that the thesis conclusions and findings can be used by the University of Lethbridge and the investigator in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, use by researchers in presentations, conferences, and publications. I understand that I may request to view a copy of the final thesis findings before public release.

6. Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript. In addition, I understand that I will be given an opportunity to be given individual feedback to my responses and I have the right to inquire on the results of my interview at any time.

7. If I have questions about the research project or procedures, I know I can contact Norma M. Healey at the University of Lethbridge (403) 317-0019, or via e-mail at [norma.healey@uleth.ca](mailto:norma.healey@uleth.ca), or Dr. Leah Fowler, University of Lethbridge at (403) 329-2457, or via email at [leah.fowler@uleth.ca](mailto:leah.fowler@uleth.ca)

8. If I feel I have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that my rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, I know I can contact the Chair of the office for Human Subjects Research, Cathy Campbell at the University of Lethbridge, (403)329 -2459, or via email at [cathy.campbell@uleth.ca](mailto:cathy.campbell@uleth.ca)

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be identified by name in any transcript or reference to any information contained in this interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to remain anonymous in any transcript or reference to any information contained in this interview. I wish to have the tape(s) containing my interview closed to use. I wish to have my transcript only identified by an internal tracking number.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to receive a copy of the results of final thesis document upon its completion.

Investigator signature \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Consent date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_  
Day    month    year

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. This research has the ethical approval of the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee (Human Subjects Research).

This research follows the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP).

*E: Demographic Data*Demographic information on Research participants

Subject	Anne	Beth	Barbara	Mary	Joanne	Andrea	Steven
Number of years teaching.	33	9.5	30+	5	5	6	4
Full time; Part time.	FT	FT	FT	FT	PT	PT	FT
Tenured: Yes/No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Number of times teaching a gender course	6	2	3	9	6	13	1
Other courses Taught.	English curriculum; Research	Ed. Psych.; Evaluation; Learning Processes	Curriculum; Language Arts; Interpretive inquiry; Native education.	Religion; Theology.	Psych. Of Adjustment	Intro. To Psych.	Addictions; Counselling
Number of Canadian Provinces in which he/she has taught	1	2	4	2	1	1	2
Number of Schools in which he/she has taught	2	4	8-9	5	3	2	3
Gender: Female/Male	F	F	F	F	F	F	M
Age	57	39	52	34	31	59	52
-Heterosexual -Homosexual -Bisexual -Transgendered -Other	v	v	v	v	v	v	v

Note. All participants were assigned pseudonyms.