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***ARE YOU A LESBIAN, MISS?***

**BEING LESBIAN: A BARRIER  
IN EMPLOYMENT  
IN NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY SCHOOLS?**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of  
Educational Administration**

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## CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

I certify that the research paper entitled Being Lesbian: A Barrier to Employment and Promotion in New Zealand Secondary Schools? and submitted as part of the degree of Master of Educational Administration is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this research paper (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution.

Signed: ..... *Carol Bartlett* .....

Carol Bartlett

Date: ..... *29th May 2003* .....

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the perceptions of secondary school teachers who are lesbian, specifically their perceptions of how sexual orientation affects their appointment to positions and also affects their promotion within New Zealand schools. A postal questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from 67 self-selected participants. Their responses form the basis for the research findings. These responses are considered using various perspectives but mainly those of lesbian feminism. The research reveals that, even when it is illegal to discriminate in employment on the grounds of sexual orientation, many participants perceive that there are barriers to their appointment and promotion based on sexual orientation. This is particularly so in schools which serve small urban and rural areas. It is also so in schools of special (religious) character, which are exempt from the legislation. The study also highlights the many ways that teachers who are lesbian manage their sexual identities within their workplaces. Based on these findings, recommendations for using this study, and for change, form the final section of this thesis.



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## GLOSSARY

**Bisexual/Bi:** Someone who is or is capable of being attracted to members of both sexes or genders as prescribed by the binary gender system (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Board of Trustees (B.O.T.):** Set up by “Tomorrow’s schools reforms, an elected group of parent representatives who, with an elected student and staff representative, and the principal, govern their school.

**CAPNA:** Curriculum and Pastoral Needs Analysis. This is an exercise completed in schools to identify projected staffing needs for the following year. The process precedes the identification of areas of surplus staffing. Individuals who will be redeployed (made redundant) are then identified.

**Closet:** The metaphorical space occupied by those who are aware of their same-sex orientation, but who are unwilling to declare them. Thus to be “in the closet” is to live life ostensibly as a heterosexual, and to be “out of the closet” or “out” is to acknowledge one’s sexual orientation (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Coming out:** The process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation to others. Because of heteronormative assumption this is a continuous and never ending process..

**Compulsory Heterosexuality:** This presupposes and prescribes gender. It is based on the belief that the male/female couple is natural and so this is demanded by patriarchal society (a power hierarchy based on gender). On this basis, straight sexuality prescribes behavior patterns (active male, passive female), with the sexual act always interpreted as being done by the male to the female by penetration. Lesbian existence is rendered fully deviant or invisible for the purpose of men safeguarding their right to women’s sexuality. Women defining their sexuality on their own terms, or in terms of other women, are punished within patriarchy because they threaten the most primary intuitions: marriage and heterosexuality. (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Decile Rating:** For administrative purposes, the Ministry of Education has ranked each state school into decile (10 %) groupings. Schools described as Decile 1 draw their students from areas of greatest socio-economic disadvantage; those in Decile 10, from areas of least socio-economic disadvantage.

**Dyke:** Used as a derogatory term applied to lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. Some have reclaimed this word as a symbol of pride and strength.

**Faggot/Fag:** Used as a derogatory term for gay, bisexual and queer men. Some have reclaimed this word as a symbol of pride and strength.

**Gay:** A man whose primary emotional, sexual, social and political commitments lie with men. Gay also sometimes used in a gender non-specific way to describe a homosexual person.

**Gender:** A. In its most accepted definition, gender refers to the social roles (e.g. men, women) and characteristics that develop through cultural interpretations of biological or anatomical sex. In this definition, sex is seen as natural, and gender as the social construction that stems from readings of sex. B. A societal construct referring to roles, characteristics, behaviours, appearances, and identities that develop through cultural interpretations of genetic sex. One's sense of being woman, man, girl, boy, androgynous, or something else entirely, or of being perceived as woman, man, etc. (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Hegemony (Hegemonic):** The processes by which dominant cultures maintain a dominant position: for example, the use of institutions to formalise power; the employment of a bureaucracy to make power seem abstract (and, therefore, not attached to any one individual); the inculcation of the populace in the ideals of the hegemonic group through education, advertising, publication, etc.; the mobilisation of a police force as well as military personnel to subdue opposition (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Heteronormativity (Heteronormative):** Those punitive rules (social, familial, and legal) that force us to conform to hegemonic heterosexual standards for identity. The term is a short version of 'normative heterosexuality'.

**Heterosexism:** The concept that heterosexuality and only heterosexuality is natural, normal, superior and required. This can refer to any institution or belief system that excludes or makes invisible, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and gay people, as well as any system that constructs queer sexualities as deviant, wrong, or immoral. Heterosexism is deeply rooted in the culture and institutions in our society. Homophobia (see glossary entry) stems from and is supported by heterosexism (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Heterosexual:** A person who is primarily and/or exclusively attracted to members of a gender or sex which is seen to be 'opposite' to or other than the one with which they identify or are identified.

**Homophobia:** The irrational fear or hatred of gays, lesbians, or queer-identified people in general. This can be manifested as an intense dislike or rejection of such people, or violent actions against them.

**Homosexual:** A person who is primarily and/or exclusively attracted to members of what she/he identifies as her/his own sex or gender. Because the term can have connotations of disease and abnormality, some people do not like to identify as homosexual. Others do not feel that it accurately defines their chosen identity.

**Integrated Schools:** Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act, 1975, the Government permitted the incorporation of private schools into the state school system. These schools are called "integrated schools" and deemed to be of "special character". They receive public funding. More than 250 of the 303 such schools are Roman Catholic. As schools of "special character" they are exempt from some sections of the Human Rights Act.

**Internalised Homophobia:** The fear or hatred of, or discomfort with one's own non-heterosexual sexuality. Internalised homophobia is linked to low self-esteem and presumed to be a contributing factor in the high rates of suicide among non-heterosexual teens.

**Intersex:** An anatomical variation from typical understandings of male and female genetics. The physical manifestation, at birth, of genetic or endocrinological differences from the cultural norm. Also a group of medical conditions that challenge standard sex designations. Intersex and transgender people share some overlapping experiences and perspectives, but the terms are not synonymous, and the issues are not the same. 'Intersex' or 'intersexual' is used today rather than the term 'hermaphrodite' especially by the people themselves (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Lesbian Invisibility:** Lesbians become invisible as a result of heterosexual assumption. Like institutional racism and sexism, heterosexism (see glossary entry) pervades societal customs and institutions. It operates through a dual process of invisibility and attack. Homosexuality usually remains culturally invisible; when people who engage in homosexual behavior or who are identified as homosexual become visible, they are subject to attack by society.

**Lesbian:** A woman whose primary emotional, sexual, social and political commitments lie with women.

**Out:** Shortened version of "out of the closet".

**Outed:** Being 'outed' is having someone else tell another person of your sexual orientation without your knowledge and/or permission.

**Passing:** Shortened version of "passing as heterosexual", which means not disclosing one's sexual orientation. Passing may involve lying, dressing in gender-conventional clothes, adapting language use to avoid the use of a personal pronoun when talking of a lover or partner, etc.

**Patriarchy:** Literally, 'rule by the father'; hence, any social or political system that grants privileged status to males and permits or encourages their domination of females. Most Western cultures have been, and continue to be, patriarchal in this sense.

**Queer:** An umbrella identity term encompassing lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered people and anyone else who does not identify as heterosexual. 'Queer' originated as a derogatory word. It is currently being reclaimed by some people and used as a statement of empowerment. Some, however, reject its use due to its connotations of deviance and its tendency to gloss over and deny the differences between these groups (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Report:** As a database term, report refers to the presentation (text and/or graphical) of specific data drawn from an underlying table (or tables) via a query.

**Select Query:** (Database term) The means by which data stored in a table (or tables) is used to ask a question specifying data inclusion, sequence and summary parameters.

**Sexual Orientation, Sexual Preference, Sexual Object Choice:** These terms refer to categories of sexuality, as indicated by the object of one's sexual desire (e.g. members of the opposite sex/gender, member of any gender, etc.). 'Sexual orientation' may imply biological roots of sexual attraction, whereas 'sexual preference' and 'sexual object choice' may connote an element of choice. Some people who see all these terms as loaded prefer the more general term 'sexuality' (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Sexuality:** Can be used to refer to sexual orientation, object choice, or preference.

**Straight:** Heterosexual person.

**Table:** As a database term, table denotes a repository for a collection of data about a specific topic. Tables provide the record sources for queries and reports.

**Transgender:** This term has many definitions. It is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to all people who deviate from their assigned gender or the binary gender system, including intersex people, transsexuals, cross-dressers, transvestites and others. Some transgendered people feel they exist somewhere between, beyond, or outside the two standard gender categories. The term can also be applied exclusively to people who live primarily as the gender 'opposite' to that which they were assigned at birth. These people may sometimes prefer the term 'transsexual' (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Transsexual:** A person who has altered or intends to alter their anatomy through surgery, hormones, or other means, to better match their chosen gender identity. As a medical term transsexual was coined in the 1950s to refer to individuals who desire to change their bodies through surgery to reflect the gender that feels more 'natural' or authentic. The people in this group are often divided into pre-operative, post-operative, and non-operative transsexuals. Due to the high cost, not all transsexuals can have genital surgery. Others do not feel that surgery is necessary, but still maintain a transsexual identity (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

**Units:** Part of the Secondary Teachers' Collective Employment Contract. Boards of Trustees are entitled to a number of units generated by a Ministry of Education formula who allocate them to individuals, either permanently or for a fixed term, in recognition of responsibility. At the time of writing, each unit merits an annual payment of \$2,900.

## Annie

Annie's up at seven on a work day  
Brews herself a cup of peppermint tea  
Gathering her papers and lesson plans she grabs her keys  
Teaching arithmetic and Africa, geology and girls' basketball  
All the kids in her class will tell you she's the best  
But she's heard the other teachers in the hall  
Saying

### Chorus

"What are we going to do about Annie?  
Pretty girls like her shouldn't be alone  
If she took our advice, dressed up real nice  
She could find a man to take her home."

Monday come questions of couples

"Where and with whom did you go?"  
Avoiding the personal pronoun, she hopes it doesn't show  
Shopping with her lover in the city  
Two women holding hands don't get a stare  
But what if the kids knew, what would they do  
Would they hate her? Why should they care?  
Singing

### Chorus

Never getting too close to her students  
Never letting out too much of her life  
Keeping her delights and disappointments tucked out of sight  
Annie takes herself to the Christmas party  
The principal whispers with a smile  
"you're vivacious and bright, if you play your cards right  
There's some men here tonight worth your while  
Thinking

### Chorus

Work that you love is hard to come by  
The kids she could never bear to lose  
So she makes conversation out of silences and half-truths  
But at night by the fire with her lover  
She looks out at the wind-driven snow  
And dreams of the day when she'll look in their faces  
And tell everyone she knows  
She'll say

### Last Chorus

Don't you worry about Annie  
She don't lie awake and pine  
She's got love to fill her heart  
Flowers growing in her garden  
Annie's doing just fine

Words and Music by Fred Small.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study investigates perceptions held by New Zealand secondary school teachers who are lesbian.<sup>1</sup> It examines, specifically, their perceptions of how others' responses to their sexual orientation have affected, and may continue to affect, their appointment to teaching positions and their promotion within the secondary teaching service.

In many ways the study is well overdue. In New Zealand, discrimination against minority groups in most areas of their lives, including employment, has been made illegal. Homosexuals<sup>2</sup> are included in human rights legislation but it is still possible to remain socially acceptable while articulating a hatred of lesbian and gay people. As Montgomery (2000) states: "... homophobia retains its title as the last socially acceptable form of bigotry" (p.1). It is within this duality of law and bigotry that New Zealand schools operate. The Employment Relations Act 2000 (ERA)<sup>3</sup> makes it illegal to discriminate against employees on the grounds of sexual orientation. The Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement (21 August 2002 to 30 June 2004) includes contractual obligations that Boards of Trustees (see glossary) abide by the ERA. Nevertheless, many teachers in our schools experience employment and promotion barriers based, possibly, on attitudes to their sexual orientation. Until this study, New Zealand had no formal research, concentrating only on the experiences of

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<sup>1</sup> Within the context of their employment, these women are firstly teachers and then lesbians. The language use in this study will reflect this, sometimes at the expense of brevity and smooth syntax.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis the word "homosexual" includes both women and men.

<sup>3</sup> The ERA incorporates the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1993, which prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds, including sexual orientation. These same provisions are included in the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement 2002-2004.



lesbian teachers in our schools. Shaw's (2000) thesis is a study of how secondary school teachers and administrators position sexual diversity in the context of school and, while Shaw does include responses from lesbian teachers, they are not the focus of her research. The aspect of Shaw's research that is valuable to this study is her analysis of the attitudes that are currently held in New Zealand secondary schools towards homosexuality and homosexuals. Teachers are not the focus of Town (1996, 1998) or Quinlivan (1994,1996). Their studies concentrate on lesbian and gay students in New Zealand schools. However, like Shaw (2000), Town and Quinlivan give insight into New Zealand schools and the conditions they create for non-heterosexual members of their communities.

For those researching lesbian teachers and their employment, there is some overseas literature. This is mostly from the United States, Canada, Great Britain and, only recently, Australia. The situation is stated succinctly by Lee (1996): "... the extent to which research on lesbian issues is being carried out in New Zealand by lesbian academics ... is minimal" (p.170). Because of the dearth of New Zealand writing, I refer to overseas studies and consider these with regard to our New Zealand context.

## **1.1 Reasons for this Study and Background to the Researcher**

That 'lesbian teachers' are a subject of public interest and debate is evidenced by their appearances in non-academic literature and popular culture. These are sufficiently frequent to be remarkable. The novel *The Chinese Garden* (1962), by headmistress Rosemary Manning, examines lesbians (mainly students but also



teachers) at a British boarding school in the 1920s. Fred Small's folk song 'Annie' (1983, see page xii) relates the experiences of a school teacher whose colleagues remain ignorant of her longstanding lesbian partnership. New Zealander Lorae Parry's play *Frontwomen* (1988) suggests that if a character is open about her lesbian relationship, her plans to return to teaching will be ruined. Fellow New Zealander Barbara Anderson's first novel *Girls High* (1990) suggests that a secondary teacher character may be blackmailed for a past lesbian partnership. Another Parry play, *Eugenia* (1996), has an applicant for a principal's job denying a lesbian flirtation and then, pressured to cancel a school production with lesbian content, deciding to withdraw her job application. Chris Bohjalian's novel *Trans-Sister Radio* (2000) explores community discrimination against a school teacher (heterosexual but perceived otherwise) based on her relationship with a male-to-female transsexual. Jackie Kay's short story "Physics and Chemistry" (in *Why Don't You Stop Talking*, 2002) tells the tale of two closeted high school teachers who are dismissed when their long-term lesbian relationship is discovered. Most recently, New Zealand writer Renée's latest novel *The Skeleton Woman* (2002) has as its main character a lesbian who resigns from secondary teaching after a false accusation of sexually harassing a female student. Clearly, there is plenty of scope for studying lesbian teachers as they are portrayed in popular culture, let alone as they appear in real life.

However, it is real life to which I now turn as a researcher. As often occurs with thesis research, my own story provides both the basis for my choice of topic and an explanation for the passion needed to complete the work. For this reason, and because it identifies me, the researcher, as a member of the population group being studied, the inclusion of my story is necessary here.

If you are a member of a group, you already have experiences on which to draw and, as Robert Merton writes, are 'insider as insider, one endowed with special insight into matters necessarily obscure to others, thus possessed of penetrating discernment' (1972: 19). (Cited in Kirkman, 2001 p.55).

My own experience in two New Zealand schools has guided my choice of study. For three years between 1986 and 1989 (before the Human Rights Act, 1993) I was employed as a teacher in a private school. In 1989 the long-serving principal left. The new principal arrived with a board of governor's mandate, some staff believed, to rid the school of lesbian staff. The new principal arrived on a Tuesday. On the Friday of the same week a member of the physical education department, a lesbian, was summoned to the principal's office, told to collect her things and not to return to the school. This woman, who was in her early 50s at the time, has never taught again. She had taught at the school for more than 20 years. She was summarily dismissed, she told me, for rudeness to a student in front of the student's mother. The student had taken the teacher's umbrella from the physical education department office without the teacher's permission and the teacher had addressed this with the student, in front of the girl's mother. Over the next three months, four teachers who were lesbian were dismissed, another left after her resignation was demanded and one chose to leave. Another teacher, also a lesbian, was told that she was lucky she was retiring at the end of the year otherwise she would have been sacked.

Two weeks after the new principal arrived, she sent for me and requested my resignation. She would give me only unspecified parental complaints as a reason for this. I refused to resign. Over the next term and a half I was often observed critically while teaching. These observations were completed by three heads of department for

whom I worked and by one of the deputy principals. Years later this deputy principal told me that she had been instructed to build a case strong enough against me to allow the school to dismiss me. I successfully challenged accusations that I was ill-prepared for lessons, not treating students with enough respect, not completing marking quickly enough, not delivering the recognised curriculum and that I was failing to support the goals of the school. My life at the school became more and more stressful as I strove to prove that I was a good teacher. I worked more and more hours. I arrived at school early and left late. Teaching filled my life seven days a week. Teachers in the private sector did not have a union. They could belong to an association for independent schools' teachers but this did not, as far as I was aware, have the function of a union. In October I started looking for work elsewhere. Once I had secured a position in another school, I resigned. I came out<sup>4</sup> to my new head of department before she offered me the job.

I was at my new school for five years before the Ministry of Education's prediction of a falling roll necessitated a redeployment<sup>5</sup> round. Eight of the teaching staff were made redundant. Of these, six were re-employed by the school following the next year's March 1<sup>st</sup> Return<sup>6</sup>. One was helped by the principal into a position in another

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<sup>4</sup> Coming out for a lesbian or gay man is the process of telling others of one's sexual orientation. Being out is having one's sexual orientation known. There are degrees of being out, from being out simply to oneself to being out to everyone (see glossary entry).

<sup>5</sup> Redeployment is now synonymous with the term "redundancy". However, schools are obliged to re-employ 'redeployed' staff should the roll that has been predicted to fall, not do so.

<sup>6</sup> The March 1st Return is a requirement of the Ministry of Education. It records the number of students enrolled at a school on this date.

school. Only I had to face the reality of unemployment. As chair of our Post Primary Teachers' Association branch, I had asked that the principal deal with students who were harassing a gay union member. It was later reported to me by a third party that this incident, and the principal's impression that I was "flaunting my perversion"<sup>7</sup>, made him grateful that the redeployment round enabled him to remove me from his staff. I was redeployed in 1994 after the passing of the Human Rights Act, 1993 which outlawed employment-related discrimination based on sexual orientation. Following this event, I wanted to find out if other New Zealand teachers who are lesbian have had, or are having, experiences similar to mine. My experiences seem to reflect those commented on by Kissen (1996), who writes from a United States perspective. She claims that teachers who are lesbian as well as those who are gay face discrimination in their work:

To the average heterosexual reader, the fears of lesbian and gay teachers may seem extreme, even paranoid. The truth is that despite the proliferation of gay/straight alliances and diversity days, despite the very real legal and contractual gains of the last ten years, gay teachers are still harassed, humiliated and fired because they are lesbian or gay. In some cases the victims are teachers who have dared to come out to colleagues or students, but just as often they have done everything possible to conceal their sexual orientation and have never shared their private lives with anyone. In schools where the climate is indifferent or hostile to lesbians or gays, students can make life unbearable for a gay teacher. In other cases, parental pressure, narrow-minded colleagues, or intolerant administrators have forced gay teachers to resign or fired them outright ( p. 84).

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<sup>7</sup> This, I presume, meant that he objected to me being out to some members of staff and some Year 13 students.

## 1.2 Scope

The focus of this study is the perceptions of New Zealand secondary teachers who are lesbian, in particular the extent to which they feel their sexual orientation has affected their employment and promotion within New Zealand secondary schools.<sup>8</sup>

I restricted the study to secondary teachers for several reasons. The most important of these is that the primary and secondary services have very different student-teacher dynamics. Primary teachers teach mainly pre-pubertal children who are less likely to think about sexual orientation. Many of the adolescents taught in our secondary schools are, by their very nature, extremely interested in sex and sexual orientation and are striving to find acceptance as a man or a woman. The challenges these students present for a teacher are different from those of their younger counterparts.<sup>9</sup> Inclusion of primary teachers' perspectives would, then, have led to complications in the analysis of collected data.

A further consideration when deciding the scope of this research was that I wished to limit the number of participants to a manageable number. The number of teachers who are lesbian is unknown. According to the Ministry of Education (2002) there are 9701 women employed on the teaching staff in New Zealand secondary

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<sup>8</sup> For many lesbians their sexual orientation is not a problem. Problems result from the responses of others to their sexual orientation.

<sup>9</sup> I am not suggesting that primary-aged students are asexual. Research suggests that even at very young ages children are sexually aware. However, it is generally not until puberty that this dimension of the human condition becomes a major preoccupation.

schools (teachers, middle management and senior management). Using an estimate that five percent of people may be homosexual, about 485 of these women may be lesbian. An estimate of 10% gives a figure of 970.<sup>10</sup> To include primary teachers who are lesbian would create an impossible task for a researcher working alone.

The focus of this study is on those who are currently teaching in the New Zealand secondary service. My intention is to describe conditions as they exist now in the secondary sector.

### **1.3 Research Objectives and Questions**

The questions arose from my academic reading around the topic and from my growing awareness of gaps in the existing research. I wondered if the experiences of New Zealand secondary teachers who are lesbian differ significantly from those of their counterparts in other Western countries.

#### **1.3.1 Research Objectives**

- To provide more information on the professional lives of New Zealand secondary school teachers who are lesbian.

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<sup>10</sup> There is ongoing controversy about what percentage of the population is homosexual. Kinsey (1948) in his study of 5,000 American men - mostly white, of all social classes - found "half the men he and his associates interviewed had experienced erotic attraction towards other men, 37% had acted on that attraction as adults, over 12% had extended same-sex orientation, and 4% were exclusively homosexual" (Chinn, no date). Authors generally use a figure of 10% (Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Mayer, 1993; Kissen, 1996, are some examples). I have been unable to trace any research that indicates the percentage of lesbians in the population but it is generally assumed by many authors that the percentage is similar to that of homosexual males.

- To ascertain if secondary teachers who are lesbian believe that their sexual orientation, or others' response to this, has been a barrier to their appointment to teaching positions or their promotion within New Zealand secondary schools.
- To ascertain whether any perceived effects of sexual orientation on appointment and/or promotion relate to any other aspect or aspects of employment. These other aspects could include age of teacher, type of population served by a school, and type of school.
- To ascertain whether the perceived effects of sexual orientation on teachers' employment and promotion are related to the inclusion (or exclusion) of sexual orientation in their school's sexual harassment policy.
- To ascertain the extent to which secondary teachers who are lesbian disclose their sexual orientation within their school communities.

### **1.3.2 Research Questions**

- To what extent do secondary school teachers who are lesbian feel their sexual orientation, or others' perceptions of this, has affected their appointment to teaching positions or their promotion within the teaching service? In what ways has this been demonstrated?
- To what extent have participants changed teaching positions in New Zealand secondary schools because of their sexual orientation or others' perceived responses to this?
- To what extent have participants decided not to apply for jobs or promotions because of their sexual orientation or their perceptions of others' responses to this?
- To what extent are there relationships between participants' perceptions of their sexual orientation as an issue in appointment or promotion, and other aspects of

their employment? (These other aspects may include age of teacher, type of population served by a school, and type of school.)

- To what extent do New Zealand secondary school teachers who are lesbian disclose their sexual orientation within their school community?

## 1.4 Language

The theoretical basis of this work and my perspective as researcher are feminist. Even academics who are feminist use inaccessible language at times. Miller (1991) asserts that, “Feminists fault traditional research for its inaccessibility to anyone but researchers or their peers” (p. 4). This inaccessibility is often created by the use of complex and specialist language and through the assumption that the reader will understand this. Miller, a librarian, continues, “Nothing about my personal life, including years of graduate education, equips me to understand [the language of some feminist academic] prose” (*op. cit.*). I too have questioned why academics use language that confuses rather than illuminates. Miller (*op. cit.*) asked a feminist academic for answers but:

The scholar simply shrugged, dismissing my naiveté with a wave of her hand. All social movements, she told me, have intellectual manifestations that operate on some removed plane. ... feminists, who want traditional researchers to pay attention, need to communicate in a language the latter will respect, play ball with the boys so to speak (p.5).

My intention is that this research will provide data and analysis that can be used by others (such as teachers who are lesbian, educators, educational administrators, boards of trustees and teacher unions). If this goal is to be achieved then the language used must be accessible not only to academics but also lesbians in general,



non-academics and those who are not part of lesbian or gay communities. I also want this study's participants to be able to read the research, should they wish to, and to understand it.

Some of the vocabulary I use originated in lesbian and gay communities. Much of this vocabulary has subsequently entered mainstream English, albeit with slightly different meanings or connotations. To ensure clarity I have included a glossary (page xi). Also explained in the glossary are educational terms and language which is likely to be unknown to non academics who read this study.

## **1.5 Thesis Outline**

Following this introductory chapter, this thesis is organised in the following way: Chapter Two discusses the theoretical point of view from which this study is written and why a lesbian feminist perspective is the most relevant. A review of literature relevant to this study comprises the content of Chapter Three. As the environments in secondary schools are the product of a myriad of forces – historical, social, legislative, locational and cultural – this chapter is necessarily of some length. Chapter Four summarises employment legislation pertinent to teachers who are lesbian and who work in New Zealand secondary schools. Chapter Five outlines the methodology used in this study and Chapter Six records the findings of a postal questionnaire which was completed by secondary school teachers who are lesbian. Discussion of these findings is the focus of Chapter Seven. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, identifies the implications of the results of this study and makes recommendations for actions in schools.

Like Shaw (2000):

It is my hope that this research will help teachers and administrators reflect on the ways that affirming diversity might become a reality for *all* who work together in our school communities. (p.9) (emphasis author's)

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The main theoretical perspective of this thesis is feminist, specifically lesbian feminist. This perspective is the product of both the topic and my own background.

I share the concerns, aspirations and beliefs of feminism. At its core feminism has the concept of women having equal rights with men. Feminists generally work to accomplish the specific goals of social and political change and changes in belief systems which perpetuate female/male inequalities. Feminist academics work to understand the influences that have created a world of inequality where men are advantaged and women disadvantaged. Through communication of these understandings, they provide a basis for work towards change. As Bunch (1983) points out:

Feminist theory is not ...an unengaged study of women. It is an effort to bring insights from the movement and from various female experiences together with research and data gathering to produce new approaches to understanding and ending female oppression (p. 242).

A major theme of this thesis is the way in which the professional lives of the survey participants are a response to societal forces. Feminist scholarship has taken a central role in investigating these forces. Even though feminist theorists may work in different areas, there is a commonality of understanding within their work. Feminist theory aims at respecting different standpoints as they all add missing pieces to an overriding pattern: male dominance over the lives of women. As I will discuss later, this is not always the perspective of gay and lesbian studies nor is it the perspective

of queer theory – either of which could have been used as a theoretical basis for this thesis. I locate this research as within what Flax (1997) identifies as the goal of feminist theory:

A fundamental goal of feminist theory is (and ought to be) to analyse gender relations: how gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think or, equally important, do not think about them. The study of gender relations includes but is not limited to what are often considered the distinctively feminist issues: the situation of women and the analysis of male domination. Feminist theory includes an (at least implicit) prescriptive element as well. By studying gender we hope to gain a critical distance on existing gender arrangements. This critical distance can help clear a space in which in which re-evaluating and altering our existing gender arrangements may become more possible. (p.171)

Women are at the centre of this study. The problems examined are those of women who are lesbian working within, as will later be discussed, a patriarchal and heteronormative New Zealand secondary school system. Some parts of the system may be becoming tolerant, even accepting, of the presence of teachers who are lesbian. Nevertheless this system remains one in which many lesbians choose not to disclose their sexual orientation in fear of negative professional and personal consequences.

## **2.2 Lesbian Feminism**

Lesbian feminism proceeds from an analysis of gender interests which situates lesbians primarily as women rather than homosexuals, thus distinguishing it from gay theory which proceeds from an analysis of sexual identity and interests. Lesbian feminism also bases itself in the primacy of identity, distinguishing it further from queer theory which lays primary emphasis on actions and performance (Zimmerman, 1997, p.6).

Zimmerman provides the basis for choosing lesbian feminism as the theoretical perspective of this study. I situate lesbians primarily as women, agreeing with Jeffreys (1994) that:

Lesbian feminists do not see themselves as being part of a transitional minority of 1 in 10 or 1 in 20, but as the model of free womanhood. Rather than wanting acceptance as a minority which is defined in opposition to an accepted and inevitable heterosexual majority, lesbian feminist theorists seek to dismantle heterosexuality... (p. 469)

In choosing the theoretical perspective of lesbian feminism I have not excluded completely the perspectives of lesbian and gay studies or of queer theory. These are, at times, useful to add understanding to extremely complex problems.

## **2.3 Gay and Lesbian Studies**

Gay and lesbian studies analyse the kinds of social structures and social constructs which define our ideas about sexuality as act and sexuality as identity. As an academic field, gay and lesbian studies look at how notions of homosexuality have historically been defined as normal or abnormal, moral or immoral. Gay and lesbian studies challenge notions of normative sexualities and, as with feminist studies, work to understand how the categories of normal and abnormal are constructed, operate and are enforced. Following understanding, intervention aimed at change can be implemented. The underlying philosophy of gay and lesbian studies is not, however, solely concerned with women or women's well-being. "In gay and lesbian studies, lesbians are linked to gay men along the axis of gender" ( Zimmerman, 1997, p. 3). Jeffreys (1996) makes this point even more strongly:

... that which is called lesbianandgay (sic) theory, i.e. theory which homogenises lesbians and gay men, must be palatable to gay men. Anything which smacks too outrightly of feminism is regarded with suspicion (p.359).

The participants of this study are women. I do not see the problems of teachers who are gay as completely different from those of their lesbian counterparts but I believe that all men, including those who are gay, live within the privilege of the patriarchy<sup>11</sup>.

## 2.4 Queer Theory

The most recently evolved theoretical perspective which examines the lives of non-heterosexual people is queer theory. It could be argued that queer theory would best serve analysis of the data collected for this study but, as Shaw (2000) observes, “The main focus of queer theory is with deconstructing gender, per se, rather than with the feminist political concern of how women are positioned as a social group” (p.13). There are basic problems for lesbian feminists, furthermore, with the underlying philosophies of queer theory:

For lesbian-feminists, sex and gender are conceptually interdependent categories, best exemplified by the institution of compulsory heterosexuality, but for queer theorists, sex and gender are and must be conceptually distinct. ... (Goodloe, 1994, p. 1)

Queer theory, says Goodloe:

... privileges sexuality, in both political analysis and cultural expression, over gender, and thereby threatens to erase or reduce the gender-bound experience of lesbians as women ... “queer theory” fails to address gender at all, which makes it an arguably less effective political philosophy for many lesbians (*ibid* :3).

Goodloe supports her views with reference to Jeffreys (1994). Jeffreys’ concern, like that of many lesbian feminists, is that queer theory threatens to offset the advances made by feminism by failing altogether to recognise its impact in shaping

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<sup>11</sup> I recognise that gay men are subject to the power of heteronormative forces but contend that, in many areas **all** men enjoy the advantages of patriarchal society.

contemporary understanding of sexuality and gender. Queer theory, she argues. Is “feminism free” (p. 459) ... Jeffreys accuses this new theoretical discourse of deliberately reinscribing the very oppression(s) that feminists and lesbian feminists have been fighting against made by for years, in order to privilege (homo)sexuality and gay male culture as the epitome of the “anti-discourse” made so much of by postmodern theory (*ibid*).

Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1996) identify further reasons for my rejection of queer theory as a theoretical perspective for this study. They write:

Within queer theory, radical feminist analysis is ignored ... subverted or derided ... Despite its “denaturalising” potential, queer theory is centrally antagonistic to feminism ... Queer functions as an apologia or justification for much of the behaviour seen by radical feminists as damaging to women and – especially – to lesbians. ... The queer movement displays a continuing fascination with violence and degradation, including claiming as its own ... supporters of pornography and sadomasochism. ... (pp.379, 380).

It is, then, from the theoretical perspective of lesbian feminism that this study comes.

The next chapter, Chapter Three, is a review of literature relevant to this study.

## CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 Introduction

My research examines how New Zealand teachers who are lesbian perceive that their sexual orientation may have affected their employment and promotion. The wide range of theories and ideas explored in this literature review will facilitate understanding of the societal context in which New Zealand secondary teachers work. These topics include: the patriarchy, male hegemony, heterosexism, society's acceptance or non-acceptance of lesbians, lesbian identity and the effects of coming out, lesbians' acceptance of self and why individuals may choose to hide (or disclose) their sexual orientation and lesbians in schools.<sup>12</sup> Finally, this review considers how all these impinge on the employment lives of New Zealand secondary school teachers who are lesbian. It is only with knowledge of these factors that it is possible to understand participants' perceptions of whether their sexual orientation has affected their employment and promotion.

There is little local literature on teachers who are lesbian and their working lives. Shaw's (2000) thesis is a study of how secondary school teachers and administrators position sexual diversity in the context of school. Teachers who are lesbian are not the focus of Shaw's research. However, she does include responses from such teachers. Also, her thesis illuminates the wide range of attitudes to homosexuality and non-heterosexual teachers and students in our secondary schools.

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<sup>12</sup> New Zealand employment and human rights legislation which is also relevant will be discussed in Chapter Four.



Teachers are not the focus of Town (1996) or of Quinlivan (1994, 1996) either. Their studies concentrate on lesbian and gay students in New Zealand schools. As with Shaw's study, some of their findings are relevant as background to this research. However, much of the literature reviewed here is from the United States and Great Britain.

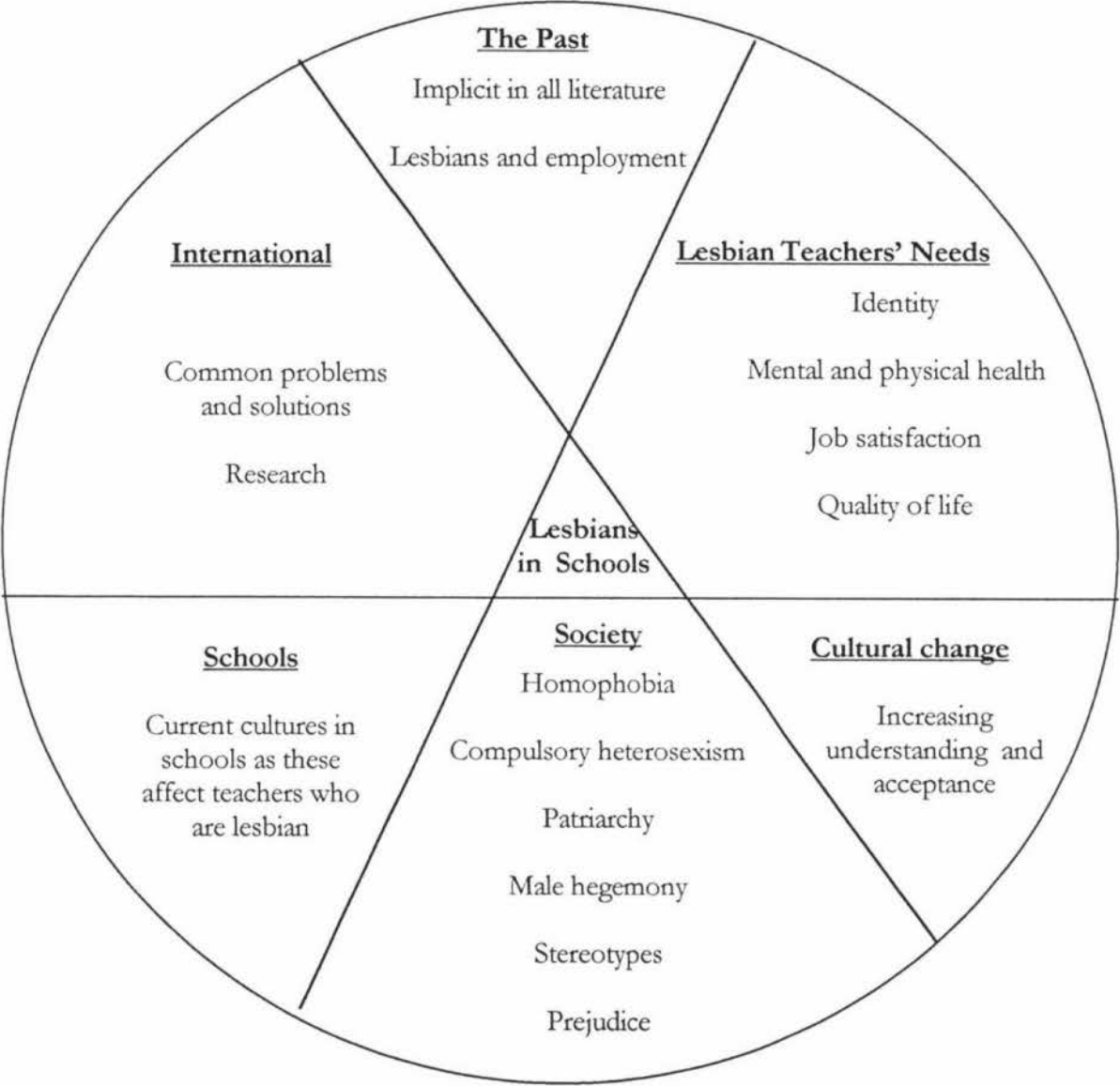
This literature review, then, examines a range of factors that affect schools. In particular, it considers those aspects that affect specifically the lesbian teachers within them. What is omitted from this review is an in-depth consideration of the large amount of research completed on women generally and their employment and promotion. The review assumes that, as women, lesbians encounter the barriers to employment that women in general experience. Figure 1, page 20, summarises the approach taken. As can be seen in this diagram, school environments for teachers who are lesbian are the product of a myriad of forces. To understand the environments, it is necessary to understand each force and the total effect of all of these. Because of the all-encompassing, heterosexist nature of the patriarchy and male hegemony, literature on these will be reviewed first.

### **3.2 Patriarchy**

Certain authors, many working in the 1970s, created theories about and explanations for male domination of women that have become the basis of much ongoing feminist thought and work. The following summary of their views forms the first part of this literature review.

Literature Review – Diagrammatic Overview

Figure 1



The second wave of feminism of the 1970s and 1980s provided ideas and theories which are still relevant when describing patterns evident today. In *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millett coins the term 'patriarchy'. This is generally accepted by feminists and others as a description of the worldwide social system that oppresses women. The possible oppression of one particular group of women, secondary teachers who are lesbian, is the central concern of this research. A consideration of patriarchy is, therefore, essential to an understanding of the workplace conditions that affect these teachers.

Millett (1970) comments that,

Our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance – in short, every avenue of power within society, including the coercive force of the police – is entirely in male hands (p. 25).

A slightly different description is given by Rich (1980). Using Millett's term, she observes that,

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour – determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

... I live under the power of the fathers, and I have access only to so much privilege or influence as the patriarchy is willing to accede to me, and only for long as I will pay the price for male approval (pp. 57-58).

How, Millett asks, is it possible for the patriarchy to be perpetuated in a world where women have education, wide political and civil rights, access to financial resources, and who are – apparently – free from direct coercion? She concludes that the answer is found in psychology. Women, she states, are conditioned through sex-role

stereotyping to accept a system which divides society into two; women (and men) are given certain roles in life. Public power, Millett argues, is given to men.

Examining history, Millett shows how there has been a backlash against women gaining power since they have won the vote. This backlash has worked through the use of psychology, culture and literature. She identifies psychologists as one group at the forefront of keeping women constrained by sex-role stereotyping. She further argues that following the creation of the 'normal' woman (a set of prescribed, rigid role expectations) women conformed, fearful of being considered 'abnormal' otherwise. Sex roles, and sex-type stereotyping, were, then, "the means by which an entire society kept women subject to the rules of the patriarchy" (Millett, 1971, cited in Eisenstein, 1984, p.36).

### **3.2.1 How the Patriarchy Evolved**

Rich (1976) and Millett (1971) accept that biological sex and social gender are separate concepts. This, they agree, has vast implications for the creation of patriarchy. Biologically, the sex of a baby is, with the exception of intersex infants (see glossary entry), either male or female. However, psychologists (see below) maintained that the sense of one's own identity as either female or male was acquired and not biological. "Further research showed that this sense of gender... was acquired independently of, and in exceptional cases in opposition to, the anatomical 'facts' " (Eisenstein, 1984, p. 37). Gender, then, according to many, is culturally created. It is a set of socially expected behaviours and attributes assigned to individuals and based on their biological sex. These theories have recently been challenged, however. The background to this is interesting.

In the 1950s, psychologist John Money and others developed case-management principles for the treatment of intersex babies and children. This treatment involves surgically assigning a gender (usually female) to babies and children.

Money believed that gender identity is completely malleable for about eighteen months after birth. Thus, he argued, when a treatment team is presented with an infant who has ambiguous genitalia, the team could make a gender assignment solely on the basis of what made the best surgical sense. The physicians could then simply encourage the parents to raise the child according to the surgically assigned gender. Following that course, most physicians maintained, would eliminate psychological distress for both the patient and parents (Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, n.p.).

Money's theories are now the subject of scientific controversy. In the last few years, publicity has been given to several intersex people who had their gender surgically assigned as infants, have been raised as female and, in adolescence or young adulthood, have reassigned themselves as male or have come to view themselves in later life as both male and female (or neither, identifying as intersexed). It is now being argued that:

Gender identification is a complex biological and psychological process that has prenatal and postnatal components, although the relationship between prenatal biological and postnatal psychological influences is not understood. ... There are insufficient long-term clinical data to allow understanding of the relative importance of prenatal and postnatal influences, especially in humans (Phornphutkul, 2000, n.p.).

This debate is in its infancy. It has significance for feminists who see the understanding of a socially constructed, gender-separated society as crucial in arguments which advance the condition of women. However the significance of these new developments has yet to be fully studied.

Millett, explains Eisenstein (1984), argues that:

... for female, normal meant passive, while for male, it meant active. Men had instrumental traits: they were tenacious, aggressive, curious, ambitious, responsible, original, and competitive. Women had expressive traits: they were affectionate, obedient, responsive to sympathy and approval, cheerful, kind, and friendly. Social pressure kept women conforming to the expressive role expected of them, a role that dictated conformity and obedience, while men occupied the instrumental role of rationality and power. (p. 37)

If sex and gender can be separated, Millett states, then it is gender roles that differentiate women from men, and it is the psychology of women which keeps them in thrall to the patriarchy.

Other scholars reach similar conclusions to those of Millett. Janeway (1971) writes not of 'patriarchy' but of 'social mythology'. Looking at the idea 'that a woman's place is in the home', she concludes that the "subordination of woman to man" (p. 51) rests on a set of beliefs about what are appropriate roles for males and females. She states that women are restricted as mother/homemaker and no such restrictions are placed on men. She further argues that women have accepted their role because it has brought rewards to them, that women have agreed to exchange "private power in return for public submission" (*ibid.* p. 56). Sex roles, then, are a form of oppression. They keep women in their place.

One basic theory with which many feminists (Firestone, 1970; Eisenstein, 1984 and Janeway 1980) agree with is that the oppression of women is related to their association with the home or 'private sphere'. Women's most obvious connection to the private sphere is their reproductive function. Conversely, it is through their association with the 'public sphere' that men exercise power.

According to Rosaldo (1974), the assignment of women to the private sphere and men to the public sphere is a universal one. She also contends that, no matter what form the division of labour takes, the tasks undertaken by men are always given greater importance. This, too, she says, is universal. Ortner (1974) identifies women's oppression as cultural rather than biological. Like Rosaldo (1974), she concludes that women are subordinated to men through the private sphere/public sphere division. Ortner also concludes that if the subordination of women is universal then so, too, is the cause of this subordination. She states that this is 'culture': the expression of the need to control and regulate society. Each society, she says, recognises a difference between 'nature' and 'culture'. Culture is equated with systems of thought and technology which are used to control nature. Women are seen as closer to nature while men are seen as the controllers of culture itself. Rosaldo (*op. cit.*) states that, until this set of associations can be disbanded, the universal subordination of women will continue. This subordination is maintained through male hegemonic practices.

### **3.3 Male Hegemony**

The concept of male hegemony is now central to many feminist theories, so central in fact that an understanding of its meaning is often assumed. Boggs (1976:39) explains Gramsci's term 'hegemony' as follows:

By hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation *throughout* society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an 'organising principle' that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things.

Based on the idea of the all pervasive power of hegemony, the term ‘male hegemony’ is used to describe universal male power. Connell (1995:77) explains:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. ...

Connell adds that:

Hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual. So the top levels of business, the military and government provide a fairly convincing *corporate* display of masculinity, still very little shaken by feminist women or dissenting men. It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority). (*ibid.*:77)

He also states that men are the centre of power in societies and that their use of male hegemony to dominate women is what feminists call ‘patriarchy’.

Lesbians, as women, are subordinate to men and, in many ways, live with the effects of patriarchy far more than do their heterosexual sisters: being lesbian is intrinsically a challenge to a patriarchal society in which heterosexual orientation is not only the norm, but also compulsory (see glossary entry — compulsory heterosexuality). This affects all facets of lesbian lives, including the employment conditions of lesbians who teach in New Zealand high schools.

### **3.4 Heterosexism**

Heterosexual orientation is “a political regime” according to Wittig (1992 cited in Griffin, 1998:33). She says that the overbearing presence of heterosexism within our



society highlights the hierarchy of heterosexual orientation as a power over homosexual orientation. Heterosexual orientation is given more validity, more location, and infinite space to speak. As a result, homosexuals live in silence, unrecognised and invalidated. Arbor (1993) adds to this idea when she states that:

Heterosexism is a belief in the superiority of heterosexuals or heterosexual orientation evidenced in the exclusion, by omission or design, of non-heterosexual persons in policies, procedures, events, or activities. We include in our definition not only lesbians and gay men, but also bisexuals, transgendered persons, and other sexual minorities (p. 64).

Fuss (1991) adds that heterosexual orientation secures its identity and defends its boundaries from what it perceives as the “predatory encroachment” of homosexual orientation. Homosexual orientation, states Fuss, becomes the excluded.

For heterosexual orientation to continue, it has to be reproduced continually. This occurs in all sectors of society. Heterosexism has a general cultural presence (Epstein, 1994; Fuss, 1991; Wittig, 1992; Harbeck, 1997; Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988 and others). It is reproduced at all levels of society; through laws, the media, churches, synagogues, mosque and temples, schools and families (Herek, 1984; Ferfolja, 1998; Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Arbor, 1993; Fassinger, 1993; Eisenstein, 1984 and Harbeck, 1997).

Authors generally agree that heterosexism is integral to the maintenance of patriarchy, a patriarchy which is partially evidenced in New Zealand secondary schools by the obvious inequalities in the numbers of women to men in senior management, especially in co-educational schools. The Ministry of Education (March/April, 2002) records that, in New Zealand state secondary schools, 73% of principals are male as are 52% of managers (senior and middle managers). Only 39%

of teachers outside management are male. The total teacher workforce of 17,226 is 43.7% male and 56.3 % female (see Table 1, page 29). Even a cursory examination of the statistics would suggest that there are barriers to the promotion of women to management, particularly senior management, in New Zealand's state secondary schools. One of these barriers for teachers who are lesbian may be that of homophobia. Literature on this is reviewed in the next section of this chapter.

### **3.5 Homophobia**

Homophobia, the "irrational fear of, aversion to or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals" (Miriam Webster (n.d.) cited O'Hanlan, Cabaj, Schatz, Lock & Nemrow, 1997 p. 26), has been extensively researched and there is now a large body of literature that examines its roots and effects. Part of this body of literature contains passionate debate about the term itself especially in relation to the term 'heterosexism. Discussion of this would offer little that is valuable to this review of literature so, despite the controversy, the term, as defined above and in the glossary, will be used in this study.

The authors of one of the more recent articles on the phenomenon, O'Hanlan *et al.* (1997), citing Sophie (1987), suggest that homophobia is "a widespread response to this largely unfamiliar and previously hidden segment of society" (p.25).

Homophobia, they say, operates on two levels – internal and external.

**Table 1****Number of New Zealand State Secondary School Teachers, Designation and Gender**

(After Ministry of Education, March/April 2002)

	Principal			Management			Teacher		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Year 7 – 15*	60	24	84	550	491	1,041	713	1,254	1,967
Year 9 – 15*	166	60	226	2,366	2,193	4,559	3,670	5,679	9,349
Total	226	84	310	2,916	2,684	5,600	4,383	6,933	11,316

\* These groupings are for Year 7 to Year 15 and Year 9 to Year 15 schools respectively

### 3.5.1 Causes of Homophobia

O'Hanlan *et al.* (1997) state that early psychoanalytical constructs often worked from the presumption that all homosexuals were "mentally ill, immoral, untrustworthy, unreliable, and lacking in integrity" (p.25). They also say that negative stereotypes persist today because most people are unfamiliar with and uneducated about homosexuality, holding mistaken beliefs that gay men and lesbians are child molesters, immoral individuals, or threats to traditional family values and the "natural order" (*op.cit.*)

Other authors label homophobia as 'heterosexist victimisation', "a term that encompasses a range of behaviors, from verbal harassment to physical assault motivated by heterosexism, "an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatises any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community" (Herek, 1992 p. 89)". (See also Waldo, Hesson-McInnis & D'Augelli, 1998). Following on from this, it is suggested that individuals may express prejudice against lesbians and gay men in order to reassure themselves that they themselves are normal or moral (O'Hanlan *et al.* 1997). It is also suggested that homophobia may be a variation of sexism, a reaction against what is perceived to be femininity in men or masculinity in women (e.g. Laner and Laner, 1980; Isay, 1989; O'Hanlan *et al.*, 1997 and LaMar & Kite, 1998).

What is stated or implied by all the literature mentioned here is that homophobia forms part of the prejudice that all individuals, including those who are lesbian or gay, learn (internalise) from their families, friends, teachers, colleagues, religious institutions, government and the popular media. External homophobia is the overt

expression of those biases and ranges from social avoidance and legal or religious proscription to explicit violence. However, as O'Hanlan points out, there is no rational or scientific basis for the attitudes underlying the phenomenon (O'Hanlan *et al.* 1997).

### **3.5.2 Effects of Homophobia on Lesbians and Gay Men**

All the literature assessed for this study records the effects of homophobia as negative. For gay men and lesbians it can result in low self-esteem and depressive distress, and its effects can impede their effective negotiation in society.

Homophobic prejudice can ultimately result in poor health, with increased risks of stress-related illnesses such as heart disease, cancer and depressive conditions (Moos and Billings, 1993).

Recent studies suggest that earlier recorded higher rates of anxiety and depression, or suicide and attempted suicide, in lesbians and gays may be related to the consequences of accepting the inferior status that homophobia imposes. Of special concern are the increased suicide risks reported for young gay men and lesbians. These are often related to early adolescent discovery of same-sex attraction and subsequent parental non-acceptance, violence from peers for gender atypicality, and the use of drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism (Savin-Williams, 1994; American Academy of Pediatrics, 1993; Schneider, Farberow & Kruks, 1989 and Remafedi, Farrow & Deisher, 1991).

Anxiety and guilt associated with being perceived as deviant and immoral are also negative effects of homophobia (DiPlacido, 1994). These feelings are, the literature

suggests, exacerbated by the associated loss of family support (Bradford, Ryan & Rothblum, 1994 and Larsen & Chastain, 1990). They are also exacerbated by the need that many homosexual people feel to hide their sexual orientation from others and/or suppress their homosexual thoughts and feelings (Larsen & Chastain, 1990).

### **3.5.3 Internalised Homophobia**

A consideration of internalised homophobia will be important as this study discusses the implications for those participants who live their working lives hidden in the closet. Shidlo (1994) defines internalised homophobia as, “a set of negative attitudes and their affects toward homosexuality in other persons and toward homosexual feelings in oneself” (p.178). Internalisation of homophobia is the experience of almost all lesbians and gay men brought up in heterosexist and anti-gay society (Forstein, 1988; George & Behrendt, 1988; Gonsiorek, 1988 and Sophie, 1987). It is often an important cause of psychological distress (Gonsiorek, 1988; Malyon, 1982 and Shidlo, 1994), to the extent that reduction of it is seen as important for the mental health of gay men and lesbians (Malyon, 1982; Martin, 1982 and Sophie, 1987). However, not all homosexual people internalise homophobia to the same degree:

It is likely that there is a wide variability in internalized homonegativity in lesbians and gay men. Societal factors such as region of residence, ethnicity, and social class may be differently associated with homonegativity. Familial factors, such as level of homophobia held by parental figures and significant others (Nungesser, 1983), and personological variables, such as the special vulnerabilities, needs, and defensive strategies of each individual (Malyon, 1982), are also likely to affect levels of internalised homonegativity. (Shidlo, 1994 p.180)

Many writers feel that internalised homophobia is so common that it is part of gay and lesbian normative development (Forstein, 1988; Gonsiorek, 1988; Loulan, 1984; Malyon, 1982; Pharr, 1988 and Sophie, 1987). One major researcher (Maylon, 1982) identifies effects such as the fragmentation of sexual and affectational parts of self, fragmentation that interferes with the developmental processes. He suggests that internalised homophobia can result in the suppression of homosexual feelings, the creation of a heterosexual persona and an interruption of the process of identity formation. Maylon (*op. cit.*) identifies internalised homophobia as causing depression, reducing self-esteem, leading to the elaboration of defences and having negative effects on patterns of cognition, psychological integrity, object relations and superego functions. Other writers suggest that internalised homophobia causes distrust and loneliness (Finnegan & Cook, 1984); difficulties in intimate and affectational relationships (Friedman, 1997) and long-term relationships (Margolies *et al* 1987; Vargo, 1987 and Zevy & Cavallaro, 1987); under- and over-achievement (Gonsiorek, 1988 and Pharr, 1988); impaired sexual functioning (Brown, 1986 and Loulan, 1984); domestic violence (Pharr, 1988); alcoholism (Finnegan & Cook, 1984); eating disorders; weight and body image preoccupation (Brown, 1986 and Pitman, 1999); lesbian battering (Pharr, 1988) and suicide (Rofes, 1983). Crocker & Major (1989) say that those who blame themselves for the difficulties they experience have lower self-esteem than those who blame society.

These findings on internalised homophobia will be relevant when discussing the possible effects of non-disclosure of sexual orientation on participants in this study, as will a discussion of coming out and the effects of this process on lesbian identity.

### 3.6 Lesbian Identity and the Effects of Coming Out

There has been extensive research on the processes and effects of coming out i.e. disclosing one's sexual orientation (see glossary entry). Coming out, according to various authors, is an extremely stressful process (Fassinger, 1991; Gelso & Fassinger, 1992; Fassinger and Schollossberg, 1992; Rudolph, 1991; Sophie, 1985/6; Chapman and Brannock, 1987; Faderman, 1984; Gonsiorek, 1993; Griffin, 1991; Kissen, 1996; Spraggs, 1994 and Khayatt, 1997). All these authors acknowledge that the coming out process is fraught with perceived danger and has, in most instances, a profound effect on an individual's mental and, at times, physical health. Gonsiorek is a widely recognised scholar in the study of coming out and its effects.

In his review of models which describe the coming out process, Gonsiorek (1993) states that the theories, typically, describe lesbian and gay men passing through a series of stages. This begins when the individual recognises same-sex feelings and initially blocks or denies them. The models then suggest that individuals employ various defensive strategies that "may require significant psychological resources for their maintenance" Gonsiorek (1993 p. 246). Some individuals may "maintain these defensive strategies indefinitely, constricting same-sex feelings but also incurring constriction in general functioning and distortions in sense of self" Gonsiorek (*ibid.*). However, most individuals appear gradually to recognise their sexual orientation. This is often accompanied by a time of crisis when they are filled with mental turmoil. The person then begins to tolerate the existence of her/his same-sex feelings. A sense of gay or lesbian identity is gained and then integrated as a positive part of self. Gonsiorek (*ibid.*) comments that although the models describe the later stages



of the process in slightly different ways, they generally agree that the process is not linear but discrete, with stops, starts and backtracks.

Some of the personal effects of coming out as a lesbian are identified by Magee & Miller (1997). They state that the process is “an intrapsychic and interpersonal process through which identity is both created and revealed” (p. 125). For them, coming out is more than a declaration of one’s sexual orientation; “It is a never-ending psychological process in which a woman must continually position herself within, or outside of, or in ambivalent conflict with, her culture’s definitions of, and names for, same-sex attraction and relationships (*ibid.* p. 125). This, they state, is always accompanied by a need to both hide and reveal. Wright (1993) says, “Coming out is not a discussion of intimate sexual details, it is a discussion of identity” (p. 27, cited Allen, 1995 p.138). Magee & Miller (1997 p. 125) comment that, unlike other social markers such as race or gender, homosexual orientation is not self-evident, and that this invisibility forces individuals to make choices about whether to disclose or remain hidden during every personal interaction that is more than superficial. They observe: “Most frequently, coming out involves choices about how to handle moments of *ordinary, daily conversation*” (emphasis authors’). Magee & Miller (*op. cit.*) later continue:

... coming out is not simply a statement made to combat discrimination nor is it usually a description of private sexual experiences. ... A woman must decide whether to reveal; when and how to reveal; how to weigh the consequences of the disclosure; how much time and energy to allocate to deal with the responses in self and in others set off by the disclosure; or if deciding not to disclose, how to manage relationships with family members, friends and work colleagues while keeping such significant information hidden. Unless an unmarried woman specifically reveals her lesbian relationship, she is assumed to be a single, heterosexual woman. This heterosexual assumption leads to interpersonal confusions and deceptions. But revealing lesbian identity or relationship can turn an ordinary conversational moment into something extraordinary. (pp. 127-128)

The “something extraordinary” identified by Magee & Miller (1997) can be the transformation of the ‘personal’ into the ‘political’. Some lesbian authors identify a political dimension to coming out. Elliott (1996) says:

Most recent work on coming out assumes a political position that privileges disclosure over nondisclosure and self-naming over a pretence to “neutrality”, seeing these as strategies that resist conservative institutional pressures to preserve the silence and invisibility enshrouding gay and lesbian identities. (p. 693)

Coming out at a personal level is described by Spraggs (1994):

[Coming out] is about taking loaded words, dangerous words, words that are widely pronounced with embarrassment and fear and distaste, and claiming them, with passion and defiance, as names for oneself: first alone, then with people whose response one trusts, and eventually in front of friends and family, colleagues and strangers. At each stage it is terrifying; it is also exhilarating. It is a moment of vulnerability, but it is also an assertion of freedom, bringing into the open a part of the self and its experience that would otherwise be left submerged: a part that one has been taught by extreme sanctions to despise and conceal, but is nevertheless felt to be intensely precious, a source of meaning and power. The risks are real: from cooling of friendships to harassment at work, public insult, and even physical assault. (p. 79)

Magee & Miller (1997); Elliot (1996); Kitzinger & Wilkinson (1995) and Coenen, (1998) identify the damage that coming out can bring to family relationships, friendships, employment and other areas of the lesbian's life.

Through their review of relevant literature, O'Hanlon *et al.* (1997) examine the health consequences of coming out. These, they suggest, can be profound and are related to the individual coping with environmental and social stressors. As previously discussed, homophobia is identified as a major environmental stressor. The authors identify poor mental health implications as a result of loss of family support systems, (Bradford *et al.*, 1994 and Larson & Chastain, 1990); the consequences of accepting an inferior status that homophobia imposes (Di Placido, 1994); increases in rates of depression (Savin-Williams, 1994); guilt related to with being perceived as immoral and deviant, and the concealment and suppression of feelings and thoughts (Larson & Chastain, 1990).

O'Hanlon *et al.* also note, as do other authors (for example Harbeck 1992), the increased risk of suicide and use of drugs or alcohol for adolescent gays and lesbians who experience violence and rejection from families and peers. Citing Savin-Williams (1989, 1994), the American Academy of Paediatrics (1993), Schneider *et al* (1989) and Remafedi *et al* (1991), they suggest that parental non-acceptance is the most important factor. They also comment that individuals may carry multiple socially marginalised minority statuses, for example, a combination of sexual orientation, ethnicity and race. This, they suggest, brings even higher risks of depressive distress.

Citing Dupras (1994), O'Hanlan *et al* (1997) state that low levels of homophobia allow lesbians and gay men to develop a proactive coping style. This decreases avoidant coping and can improve mental health as the decision to come out allows for less anxiety and depression, a higher self-concept (Gartrell, 1981), greater relationship satisfaction (Berger, 1990), a sense of community and integration into family and society (Larson & Chastain, 1990 and Bybee, 1990).

Models of lesbian and gay identity development suggest that the neutralisation of internalised homophobia is a part of the coming out process, and that acquisition of an integrated lesbian or gay identity follows this (Cass, 1979; Stein & Cohen, 1984; Troiden, 1989 and Shidlo, 1994).

The review of literature on homophobia and its effects could leave a reader with the understanding that all homosexual people experience mental health problems. The literature does, however, indicate that many gay and lesbian individuals are content with their sexual orientation and function well within society.

The decision to disclose one's sexual orientation is an individual one. Lesbians and gays, including those who are teachers in schools, manage their identities in many ways. These are summarised in Figure 2, page 39.

Figure 2

## Lesbian and Gay Educators' Identity Management Strategies

(After Griffin, 1992, p. 177)

TOTALLY CLOSETED	PASSING	COVERING	IMPLICITLY OUT	EXPLICITLY OUT	PUBLICALLY OUT
OUT TO NO ONE AT SCHOOL	Lying	Censoring	Telling Truth without lesbian/gay labels	Affirming lesbian/gay identity	OUT TO SCHOOL COMMUNITY
	I assume you don't know	I assume you don't know	I assume you know, but I'm not sure.	I know you know. You know I know you know.	
	See me as heterosexual	Don't see me lesbian/gay	You can see me as lesbian/gay if you want to	See me as lesbian/gay	

←

FEAR

SELF-INTEGRITY

→

SEPARATION

PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL SELF

INTEGRATION

### **3.7 Homophobia and Coming Out in the Workplace**

Some authors (Repetti & Cosmas, 1991; Andrisani & Shapiro, 1978; Ellis & Riggle, 1995 and Crosby, 1982) find that social environments in the workplace are an important part of job satisfaction for lesbian and gay people. Many gays and lesbians feel that an environment in which they need to remain closeted is less supportive than one in which they can be open. Cass (1979) and Cain (1990) suggest that openness about one's sexual orientation leads to greater psychological adjustment and well-being. These have positive effects both in the workplace and more widely. Ellis & Riggles' 1995 study concluded that people who are out at work have higher job satisfaction than those who are not.

Authors show schools as institutions where homophobia is common (Herek, 1988; Simoni, 1996; Town, 1998; Quinlivan, 1994; Shaw, 2000 and Engstrom & Sedlace, 1997).

Engstrom & Sedlacek say of their 1997 research into the attitudes of heterosexual students towards their peers who are gay male or lesbian:

This study confirms previous findings in the literature that indicate... intense negative prejudicial attitudes toward gay male and lesbian students exist (Herek, 1988; Kite, 1992; Rhoades, 1995; Sandford and Engstrom, 1995; Simoni, 1996) and that deeper homophobic feelings are held by male students than female students toward gay men (D'Augelli, 1989; Kite, 1984; Sandford and Engstrom, 1995; Simoni, 1996). For the most part, attitudes of male and female students towards lesbians were similar. ... (no page number).

### 3.8 The Effects of Teachers Coming Out

There is a growing body of overseas literature which examines the working lives of lesbian and gay teachers. This literature suggests that the working environment for teachers is likely to generate far more stress related to sexual orientation than that of other workplaces. The basis for this is that teachers work with children, usually those of other people.

All authors cited in this review recognise that, within schools, sexual orientation is an issue fraught with danger and fear for both lesbian and gay teachers and for the gay and lesbian students whom they teach.

Many authors suggest reasons why this is so. Schools are places for children. Epstein & Johnson (1998) observe that schools are institutions "... associated with all the discourses of childhood, which constantly construct the child as pre- or asexual, as 'innocent' or at least ideal" (pp. 1-2). They further argue that schools are places where society "... imposes very narrow terms of sexual recognition on a sexually diverse society" (*Ibid*: p. 31). They suggest that the prevailing ideology recognises the heterosexual family unit as the basis of society and that this is what is recognised as 'normal' and 'valuable' and is inculcated into all aspects of schooling. The reason for this, they say, is that 'the family' continues to operate powerfully as an ideal.... It remains dominant, in the sense that in public culture other forms are judged against it" (*Ibid*. p.40).

This leads to an active exclusion of emerging alternative family forms. Epstein & Johnston (1998) state that within schools:

Teachers' sexual identity is connected to the role of 'moral guardian', setting an example for children and regulating youthful sexualities. And where this 'moral guardianship' is questioned or rejected by teachers, then their lives may become the subject of scandal, even moral panic. ... Sexual orientation is, then, both inescapable and very dangerous territory for teachers. The tightrope which they have to walk between their public roles and private lives is one with inbuilt insecurity (and no safety net to be relied upon). (p. 123)

As Spraggs (1994) notes: "School teaching is a profession in which the pressures against speaking out are generally very strong indeed." Khayatt (1997) observes that those teaching in pre-tertiary institutions face different issues when coming out to their classes from those who teach at college or university level. She suggests that:

Elementary and secondary teachers have to deal with what Jonathan Silin (1995) calls "the image of the hapless, innocent child essential to the romantic imagination" (p. 120). The "innocence" of the child has to be protected at all costs, particularly from any mention of sex... A teacher's coming out to students is by its very nature is an allusion to sexual matters, and is consequently considered outside of the realm of what is appropriate for children to know or discuss. (p. 5)

Other authors (Watney, 1991 and Epstein & Johnson, 1998) say that there are pressures in schools (which exist within male hegemonic, homophobic societies) for lesbians and gays to conform to the norms. These norms are upheld not only by the institutions within which they work but also by students, parents and the wider school community. Depending on geographic location, these groups can be very homophobic indeed. Juul (1995) conducted research into the lives of gay and lesbian teachers, with particular reference to their geographic location.

Juul's (1995) findings are interesting even if somewhat predictable. He concludes that the type of community in which gay or lesbian teachers work has significant



effects on both stress levels and the degree of openness about sexual orientation. He found greater stress levels and less openness about sexual orientation among the rural and suburban teachers he studied, and less stress and more openness among their city equivalents. Participating rural and suburban teachers, he says, lived in more fear of exposure and subsequent job loss, and were also less accepting of their identities. This relationship between fear of exposure and non-acceptance of self is also noted by Mayer (1993). The rural teachers Juul studied also showed a lowered sense of personal accomplishment, higher rates of depersonalisation from their students, and higher levels of mental exhaustion. Juul concludes that the type of community in which teachers who are gay and lesbian work strongly affects parts of individual identities.

### **3.9 Lesbians at Work**

Lesbians face the same vocational issues and barriers to employment and advancement that pertain to all women. These issues include: choosing a career, lack of role models, and employment discrimination. For lesbians there are additional barriers and problems which include accepting one's sexual orientation and then deciding whether or not to come out to colleagues and employers. This decision, often crucial to an individual's health and well-being, is especially fraught with problems in school environments.

The barriers to women's employment and promotion have been extensively researched, well documented and articulated by many authors (see Shakeshaft, 1989; Limerick & Lingard, 1995; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1993; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994; Fitzgerald *et al*, 1995; Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992 and Walsh & Osipow, 1994).

Recently scholars have begun to research and articulate the specific vocational issues of lesbians. Much of this research is relevant to lesbians who teach in secondary schools. The review of this begins with choosing a career.

Fassinger (1995) states that people appear to begin the process of choosing a career during their early childhood. She points out that lesbian identity formation usually occurs actively only in late adolescence or adulthood. This, she says, means that many lesbians have already planned a career and so their process of choice is complicated. Her views are supported by Morgan & Brown (1991). Many lesbians become aware of their sexual orientation only in late adolescence or as adults. At this point in their lives they may already be in an established career. This can bring problems if it becomes necessary to integrate a new identity into a career in which one may have made great investment. Often it is too costly to change employment (Morgan and Brown, 1991). Fassinger (1995) argues that during the coming out process, lesbians are often so absorbed with their changing life that they may have little remaining energy or motivation to manage employment concerns. She cites Croteau & Hedstrom (1993) in support of this.

Women who discover that they are lesbian may feel that their sexual orientation is potentially a greater problem in some careers than in others. Fassinger (1995) identifies teaching and the military as two such areas. She suggests that many lesbians may choose not to enter careers in these areas because of their perceived oppressive environments.

As previously discussed, coming out increases self-esteem but for many lesbians the process is traumatic and brings with it a decrease in self-esteem and “new complexities in self-concept” (Fassinger, 1995, p.152). These, argue Fassinger (1995), are well-documented barriers to career planning. Betz & Fitzgerald (1993) and Hetherington & Orzek (1989) (cited, Fassinger, 1995) concur. Low self-esteem can be a career barrier to many women but, according to Hetherington and Orzek (1989), this is especially so for women coming to terms with the extra stigma of lesbianism. Low self-esteem is exacerbated by the onerous task of maintaining secrecy and is described by many authors (Fassinger, 1995; Elliott, 1993 and others) as one of the costs of staying in the closet. This leads to low morale and can make effective career planning almost impossible (Elliott, 1993).

For women generally, lack of role models and information are seen as barriers in employment. According to Fassinger (1991) and Garnets & Kimmel (1991), this is particularly so for lesbians. Many lesbians are in the closet at work and this means that they are not available to other lesbians as role models or information sources. Eldridge & Gilbert (1990) and Fassinger (1991) note that, whatever the environment, most lesbians are closeted at work. Morgan & Brown (1991) comment that:

Empirical studies indicate that as many as two thirds of lesbians have not disclosed their identity to employers, whereas only about one third have come out to co-workers and well over one third have not disclosed identity to anyone. Research further suggests that 60% to 75% fear job or income loss with self-disclosure, and that visibility is sometimes associated with increased discrimination and hostility. (Cited in Fassinger, 1991: p.155)

A further barrier to career opportunities is identified by Hetherington and Orzek (1989). They state that promotion in some jobs may depend on social interaction

with heterosexual, often male, colleagues. This may bring with it almost insoluble problems for lesbians. Many lesbians socialise within the lesbian community. This, they argue, could mean loss of important occupational support and mentoring. Elliot (1993) states that connection with the lesbian community, which gives useful and highly valued support, may lead to compromises in job advancement and may restrict a lesbian's mobility if she is offered advancement in a different location.

Remaining closeted, 'passing as heterosexual' (see Figure 3, page 99), is the strategy for those who fear the consequences of disclosure of their sexual orientation, but it comes with a cost. Croteau & Hedstrom, 1993; Elliot, 1993; Fassinger, 1993; Gonsiorek, 1993; Morgan & Brown, 1991 and others identify the strain of secrecy and the negative effect this has on mental health, job satisfaction and productivity. They also note advantages brought by coming out, at least to selected co-workers bring. These advantages include the gaining of support and the allies who may support one's occupational progress.

Croteau & Hedstrom (1993) and Fassinger (1993) comment that many lesbians find that the fears of coming out are often worse than the consequences of doing so. They state that coming out in the workplace may be a viable option for many gays and lesbians. Pope (1991) adds that the coming out process itself can be slowed because of fears that one will lose one's job if one's sexual orientation becomes known to others at work. This indicates that work and sexual identity issues are closely linked as lesbians struggle to manage a stigmatised identity in their workplace.

For Gonsiorek (1993), the most significant issue in identity management on the job is self-disclosure of sexual orientation. This, he feels, affects both the internal career barriers of internalised homophobia and low self-esteem, and workplace environmental barriers like workplace discrimination and harassment.

Employment discrimination against lesbians has been researched extensively (see, for example, Diamant, 1993; Fassinger, 1991; Garnets and Kimmel, 1991). Lesbians, as these same authors note, are at a double disadvantage; not only are they women, they are also lesbian. They have a double minority status which, for lesbians of colour, becomes a triple minority status. The result of this is that they may experience even more discrimination based on their multiple identities.

Browning *et al* (1991) and Fassinger (1993) note that multiple role management of identity at work and outside work can have detrimental effects on lesbians. This management draws on internal factors (such as personal attitudes) and response to external factors (such as discriminatory policies and harassment). It can, they feel, affect lesbians' personal relationships outside the workplace.

Another identity management issue is raised by Fassinger (1993). She suggests that the closeted lesbian may perceive involvement in lesbian community political and social activities as too risky, as it may lead to the disclosure of her sexual identity. Such a revelation could lead to job loss, discrimination and other negative consequences, including accusations of the dishonest representation of her identity at work. Fassinger (*op. cit.*) suggests that this places lesbians in a double bind: come

out at work and risk the negative consequences, or remain closeted and risk the negative consequences which may follow being outed.

Identity management is an ongoing task for many teachers who are lesbian. Reasons for it can be identified in the review of Australian and New Zealand research which follows.

### **3.10 The Australian Experience**

Irwin (2002), using the data from an extensive study of a 1997 collaborative research project, *Workplace experiences of lesbians, gay men and transgendered people*, isolates the experiences of teacher, academic and educator participants. This was conducted by the Australian Center for Gay and Lesbian Research, the New South Wales Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, Sydney and the Australian Center for Lesbian and Gay Research, University of Sydney. Of the 900 participants in the original research, 120 or 13% of the total sample were teachers, academics or educators.

The author notes that 60% of the education sector participants experienced homophobic behaviour or harassment. This behaviour included: being the target of homophobic jokes (35%); being asked unwelcome questions about their sexual orientation (31%); being outed (or having their sexual orientation disclosed) (23%); being socially excluded (23%); being socially excluded (23%); being ridiculed (18%); being sexually harassed (16%); and being threatened with physical violence (11%). Three participants experienced physical violence and one of these was also sexually assaulted.

Those who perpetrated these behaviours were identified as colleagues employed at a similar or more senior level and, in the case of teachers, students and their parents.

Many teachers, academics and educators also recorded incidents of prejudicial treatment. The most frequent form was the undermining or sabotaging of work (22%). This was followed by unreasonable work expectations (15%); limited opportunities for career development (15%); threat of loss of promotion (13%); and additional performance criteria (12%). Also identified as prejudicial treatment were the denial of partner rights to superannuation (18%), and denial of entitlements available to heterosexuals, like parental and compassionate leave and leave to care for an ill partner (9%).

Those participants from the education sector who had experienced some form of discrimination commented that this had had some negative effect on them or their work performance. Generally the research participants identified that homophobic treatment was ongoing rather than a single incident. It affected the way they felt about themselves, their workplace and their colleagues and students. The effects extended beyond their workplace. Workplace performance was negatively affected, participants commented, through increased leave due to stress-related illnesses, participants not wanting to be at work and having to be constantly on guard. Irwin comments that the existence of homophobia and workplace harassment affected the workplace culture, often creating a hostile and unsafe environment for out or suspected lesbians, gay men and transgendered people.

The literature reviewed so far has been from overseas, particularly from North America and Great Britain. I now turn to New Zealand literature to form the concluding part of this review.

### **3.11 The New Zealand Literature**

I have been able to access three New Zealand theses which have direct relevance to this study: Quinlivan's 1994 study on the school experience of 10 young lesbians, Town's 1998 study of the school experience of 10 young gays, and Shaw's 2000 study of the positioning of sexual diversity within New Zealand schools. Although none of these specifically discusses the employment and promotion of teachers who are lesbian, each provides information about the climates that exist for homosexual people within New Zealand secondary schools.

Quinlivan (1994) comments on the strong heteronormative and male hegemonic climate in many of New Zealand's schools. This is evident in the stories of her 10 study participants and has led to much distress for the young women she interviewed.

With one major exception, her participants painted a picture of their schools as homophobic environments, far from safe for young lesbians who are educated within them. Quinlivan (*op. cit.*) observes:

On a local level, school communities have a complex culture of their own. These cultures play a role in determining the extent to which lesbian students felt safe in their schools (p. 86).

Quinlivan also found that the invisibility of lesbians is a feature of New Zealand schooling.



Sears' (1991) study revealed that 80 percent of the participants mentioned that there had been no discussion of homosexuality in the classroom and that the topic was avoided by teachers, counsellors and administrators in the schools. These features are also a feature of this study ... The compulsory heterosexuality which is a strong feature of patriarchal western society is reflected in the absence of material that caters to the lives of young lesbians in the classroom (*Ibid*: 64).

She also comments on the importance, to both lesbian and non-lesbian students, of the visibility of staff who are lesbian and gay. She suggests that teachers and counsellors play an important part in creating "a climate of safety and acceptance of difference in schools" (*Ibid*:96). These people, she advises, "are in a strong position to influence student attitudes and many students take their cues from the adults they work with at schools" (*Ibid*: 96). As one of her participants related, in a climate of acceptance where difference is valued, and homophobia is publicly acknowledged and admonished, lesbian students feel recognised and affirmed. This is important for healthy psychological development.

Comments by participants in Quinlivan's research highlight the importance of positive role models for students. For at least one of Quinlivan's participants, the fact that a teacher was out as a lesbian created "an atmosphere that was safe for her as a young lesbian..." (*Ibid*: 106). Out teachers were also perceived by participants as role models; they provided the assurance that there were other lesbians and that these women were happy, safe and likeable. This was an important factor in undermining the stereotype of lesbians as unhappy, unattractive women, "...perverts preying on vulnerable youth" (*Ibid*: 102).

What has special relevance for my research is the complexity of Quinlivan's participants' feelings about the importance of out teachers while they were at school.

They felt supported by the idea that there were other lesbians, even if these women were in the closet and identification of them was based on rumours fuelled by stereotypic looks and single marital status. However, the fact that the teachers were closeted indicated that being a lesbian was unacceptable. Implicit in this are two distinct ideas: firstly, if it is acceptable to be a lesbian, then there is no need to conceal this, secondly, that people mind that others are lesbian.

Oh it was a double sword, on one side it was like well if they are then I am not alone, but on the other side it was that this was obviously a bad thing, or we wouldn't be hearing about it... what annoys me is not the possibility that they may be, but the obvious way that it matters that they are, to people, that's what pissed me off (*Ibid*: 103).

Another participant felt disappointed that two teachers whom she knew to be homosexual (one female, one male) were closeted. She felt she had no one to identify with. She recognised, however, the implicit danger to career and employment that coming out would have brought for the teachers. Two participants commented that lesbian teachers who befriend lesbian students are at risk of accusations of sexual impropriety. This, Quinlivan comments, is related to the common confusion between homosexuality and paedophilia. One participant felt safe with closeted teachers because she felt it was less likely that her own lesbian identity would be revealed. Another used her friendship with a teacher who was lesbian to gain information about, and ingress into, the lesbian and gay communities. As Quinlivan comments, "the dynamics that operate between lesbian teachers and students are complex and layered because of the lack of safety experienced by them within heterosexual environments" (*Ibid*: 97, 98). She also identifies a need for more research in this area.

Quinlivan's 1994 research was a parallel study to Town's 1998 research, *Is it safe to come out now? Sexuality and the education of ten young gay men*. Many of Town's findings are similar to those of Quinlivan. He, too, describes New Zealand schools as unsafe for students and teachers who are gay and lesbian and as places of invisibility for non-heterosexual people. Town found that his ten participants often lived in fear of harassment and mental and physical abuse. They felt unsupported and lacked any recognition by others of who they were.

Town's participants noted, as did Quinlivan's, the lack of information about their sexuality or about how they could make contact with the gay and lesbian communities and support groups within these. Participants felt that knowing other people felt the same way would have helped reduce their sense of isolation. The only information some of Town's participants gained about homosexuality was via health lessons on AIDS, with a connection to disease and pathologisation of same sex-desire. In a finding similar to Quinlivan (1994), Town says that his participants did not see the school library as a source of information. Participants in both studies suggested that they would not have accessed information from the library, as this would have compromised the hidden nature of their sexual orientation.

Both studies identify the responsibilities that schools have to meet the needs of all students, including lesbian and gay students. These, the authors assert, are established in school charters and their equity clauses. Quinlivan points out that changes introduced in the Education Amendment Act 1991 removed the compulsory policy clause from charters. Following the passing of the act, equity funding targeted at disadvantaged students was disbursed in schools' bulk operating funds, and boards

of trustees could then spend it on whatever they wanted. Quinlivan identifies the National Education Guidelines (1993) and the National Administration Guidelines (1993) as vehicles through which schools should address the needs of lesbian and gay students.

Town comments that these needs were not being met when he undertook his research. He states in his preface that since he himself was at school, little has changed for students or teachers who are gay or lesbian.

I have experienced and observed first hand the homophobic environment/s lesbian and gay teachers and students have to endure in their daily lives, and the effects this has had on their physical and emotional well-being ... on the whole the increased visibility of sexual diversity in our communities has not reached our schools. There appears to still be a long way to go before gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered young people will have their lives vindicated by our education institutions and communities through the provision of relevant curricula, resources and practice/s (Town, 1998, p.vi).

The third New Zealand thesis of relevance to this study is Shaw's 2000 *Discourses of Difference: A study of how secondary school teachers and administrators position sexual diversity in the context of school*. Her research sought to find the nature of teacher, senior management and trustee attitudes to issues of sexuality in their schools. Shaw's study was conducted in 10 Wellington secondary schools and was based on survey responses of 124 teachers, senior management and school trustees. The results make depressing reading.

In her introduction, Shaw (2000) observes that previous research describes the experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in schools as alienating, hostile and uncomfortable, and that this is true for students and for teachers. Citing the work of

Quinlivan (1993) and Town (1998), she states that an invisible wall seems to prevent implementation of interventions which “would help make a reality of the anti-discrimination laws in our schools” (p.3).

Seeing a gap in the literature, Shaw set out to discover “just what needs intervention”. The purpose of her research is to gain an understanding of the ways that sexuality is positioned within schools. She proposes that this be followed by informed actions within the teaching profession to bring positive change to sexual politics in schools.

Through her study, Shaw shows that there is little understanding or concern about how heterosexism affects social practices and institutions, although there is a common understanding of the role of sexism in schools. She remarks that schools seem to have little concern about the levels of homophobic verbal and physical abuse found in these institutions and in the wider community. Furthermore, she states that she found no indication that the teachers, senior administrators or trustees whom she surveyed were questioning the discourse that assumes “the ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality let alone the dominant views of what it means to be male and female, masculine and feminine” (Shaw, 2000, p.2).

A majority, 55%, of Shaw’s sample thought that students were disadvantaged by tacit acceptance of heterosexuality as ‘normal’. Respondents stated that deviance from heterosexuality was neither acknowledged nor accepted. Forty-five percent of respondents believed there was active discrimination against non-heterosexual students. They cited verbal and physical abuse from peers towards students who

were believed to be gay or lesbian or who, presumably, did not conform to hegemonic beliefs of correct masculine and feminine behaviour. A number of respondents also referred to the invisibility of gay, lesbian or bisexual role models; the lack of validation of gay people; and an inability of non-heterosexual students to find an acceptance of their sexuality. Respondents also identified alienation and isolation as harmful effects of heterosexism. Some, who responded that there was no active discrimination, mentioned that such abuse was just blanket insults and that “it doesn’t **mean** anything” (*Ibid*, p.119 – emphasis mine).

Fifty-five percent of Shaw’s sample did not believe that staff were harmed by tacit heteronormivity. They cited tolerant school climates and stated there was evidence (not specifically provided) that non-heterosexual staff were safe in their schools. None of the small number of teachers who were gay, lesbian and bisexual in Shaw’s sample agreed that this was so.

Eighty-nine percent of the heterosexual people surveyed believed that there was no active discrimination against lesbian and gays. Seventy-five percent of the gay, lesbian and bisexual staff stated that there was.

The results and conflicting perceptions within schools give testimony to the invisibility of the actual presence of lesbian and gay staff, let alone the invisibility of the way those staff are positioned in their schools (*Ibid*:194).

Some respondents mentioned disadvantages at their schools for teachers who were gay or lesbian. These ranged from isolation and vulnerability in a dominant heterosexist culture through to career and promotion barriers. As Shaw articulates:

“... it is still far from ‘politically correct’, let alone safe, to be ‘out’ as a lesbian, gay or bisexual teacher in secondary school staff rooms. Furthermore, the complacency heterosexual staff have about the ‘tolerant and accepting’ attitudes in their staff rooms is misplaced, according to the reports in this survey from non-heterosexual respondents” (*Ibid* p. 196).

Even though many of Shaw’s respondents identified their schools as unsafe places for non-heterosexual students and staff Shaw says few schools were attempting to address this. Her respondents identified a number of barriers to changes which would create safer environments for non-heterosexuals in schools. Some respondents noted that in today’s education marketplace, where there is competition for students, schools strongly defend their reputations. Active promotion of the welfare of lesbian, gay and bisexual people would, it was perceived, damage a school’s standing in its community. Other constraints mentioned were the lack of strong leadership and of supportive staff attitudes. Both of these were perceived as necessary before change could occur.

However, until the lack of safety is identified as lying with the school, no action is likely to occur. As Shaw concludes:

Teachers locate the problem with those who are positioned as ‘other’, as different from, as binary opposite of normal/heterosexuality (*Ibid*, p. 187).

This study’s literature review is extensive. The reason for this can be seen in Figure 1, page 20 “Literature Review – Diagrammatic Overview”. The environments in New Zealand secondary schools for teachers who are lesbian are the result of a number of separate yet interacting factors. A knowledge of each factor is useful when considering the responses of this study’s participants and gaining an

understanding of their professional lives as well as the conditions within which these are played out. Many of the theories and research results discussed in this chapter will be referred to in the discussion of the findings of this thesis and when recommending actions to change the working environments of New Zealand teachers who are lesbian.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, is a brief summary of the legislation which governs the working lives of New Zealand teachers.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: NEW ZEALAND EMPLOYMENT LAW**

Lesbian secondary teachers work in institutions that, generally, serve the communities in which they are located. These schools are subject to national laws and policies which are created and administered by politicians. These politicians are elected, theoretically at least, to represent the views of their constituents. It should follow, then, that our laws and policies mirror public opinion. School practices and the environments which these create are based on national legislation and reflect this. Because legislation governs the legal relationship between employers and employees, it is pertinent to include a review of employment law in this thesis. It is also necessary to look at the history of employment legislation: the past informs understanding of the present and allows predictions of the future. Some of this study's older participants have worked under more than one employment law during their teaching careers, and the expression of changing employment legislation in their workplaces has affected their lives and their perceptions.

In New Zealand's well regulated society there is ongoing, and oft-changed, employment legislation. This affects the employment and promotion of lesbian secondary school teachers. Firstly, these teachers are part of the female workforce and subject to the same barriers as other women; secondly, they belong to a stigmatised population which, I will later argue, has been, and continues to be, subjected to discrimination.

Women's struggle for equality in employment is ongoing. It arose in the 1890s from the "appalling working conditions of women in the 1880s. Conditions that resulted

from an unregulated labour market” (Wilson, 1997, p. 6). Wilson further observes that:

Equality as a value and goal arose from the struggles of those people who demanded the right to participate freely in the decisions that governed their lives on the same basis as everyone else. (p. 6).

The struggle was to be a long one; it was not until 1960 that the right to equal pay was recognised in the public sector through the passing of the Government Service Equal Pay Act, and this was not extended to the private sector until 1972. This act which referred specifically to males and females, legislated for equal pay for similar work by persons of similar qualifications, regardless of the sex of the worker (Wilson, 1997, Commission for Employment Equity, 1991; New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, 1998).

Individual discrimination began to be addressed in the 1970s. The Race Relations Act became law in 1972 and the Human Rights Commission Act in 1977. In terms of employment, the latter covered five areas: advertising for new staff, hiring, setting terms and conditions of employment, training staff, and dismissing employees. The commission found that by far the most complaints lodged with it were related to sexual harassment and, although sexual harassment was not specifically referred to in this act, the Equal Opportunities Tribunal found that sexual harassment was unlawful under the act.

Following the enactment of the Race Relations Act and Human Rights Commission Act, the Department of Education and some individual educational institutions

introduced Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) initiatives in 1979. The department appointed its first Women's Officer. This officer had the dual role of promoting equal employment opportunities for women and equal educational opportunities for women and girls.

In 1984 a State Services Commission policy specifically covered women, Maori, minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities. This was signed by all Government Employing Authorities. Limited numbers of personnel and money were applied to the introduction of this policy (Commission for Employment Equity, 1991).

In August 1985 the Employers' Federation published its policy statement on EEO. This statement recognised the changing role of Maori, Pacific Island peoples, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities and women as well as the changes needed to address systematic discrimination in the workforce. The State Owned Enterprises Act 1986 required that state-owned enterprises should be 'good employers' and have an EEO programme. However it gave no indication of what this programme should contain, nor did it state requirements for monitoring or reporting on EEO programmes. The State Sector Act 1988 was stronger.

The State Sector Act 1988 declared that all state sector employees (including state education workers) should have an EEO programme designed to eliminate barriers to advancement in the employment of women, Maori, minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities. The act also contained annual reporting requirements and provision for regular monitoring of results (Commission for Employment Equity,

1991; The State Sector Act, 1988). In 1989, legislation covering local government followed. Its wording was almost identical to that of the State Sector Act 1988 but with fewer reporting requirements. Now there was legislation that required employers to take action to ensure equal employment opportunity.

The State Sector Act 1988 was followed by the State Sector Amendment Act 1989. This second act required that education institutions introduce equal employment opportunities with a systematic and planned approach.

The State Sector Amendment Act 1989, Section 77, required every education employer to develop, implement and publish an EEO programme each year. Each education employer is also required to report annually to the Education Review Office, provide a summary of the EEO programme for the year and an account of the extent to which the employer was able to meet the objectives of the EEO programme for that year. (Commission for Employment Equity, 1991, p. 61)

In the 1989 act, schools' boards of trustees were made responsible for ensuring that EEO was carried out in their school. Section 77 gave the Ministry of Education the responsibility of promoting the development and monitoring of EEO in the education sector. The 'Tomorrow's Schools'<sup>13</sup> reforms introduced charters as a legal requirement for schools. As EEO is a requirement of the act, it is incorporated into most schools' charters. The Education Review Office reviews schools' performance in relation to these. (Ministry of Education, 1991; Commission for Employment Equity, 1991)

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<sup>13</sup> In 1989, New Zealand's Labour Government adopted as education reform package that is known as "Tomorrow's Schools". This transferred operating responsibility from the Department of Education to each school's newly elected governing board of trustees. Two years later, in 1991, the government enacted further reforms that introduced full parental choice of school and established a competitive environment in the state education system (Fiske & Ladd, 2000).

One force for change has been the New Zealand education unions. From the 1980s they have consistently and actively promoted EEO, not only for their members but also for the education system generally. They have channelled resources into political pressure and training for members and their members' employers.

Successive teachers' employment contracts have recognised EEO (Commission for Employment Equity, 1991). The efforts of the unions to achieve this were even more crucial following the National Government's repeal of the Employment Equity Act and its passing of the Employment Contracts Act 1991.

The Employment Contracts Act 1991 (ECA) altered the structure of the labour market by giving maximum freedom for employees and employers to negotiate their own employment contracts. The aim of the ECA was to create an efficient labour market. It was based on the philosophy that "the labour market should be neutral and not provide any special protections for any particular interest group... beyond minimum standards enacted in legislation. It is assumed that the market delivers the necessary equality" (New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, 1998:7). Consequently, Section 28 prohibited discrimination against workers on very limited grounds: the employer had to give the same conditions and benefits to all employees of similar qualifications, experience, or skills in similar circumstances. She or he could not legally dismiss employees in circumstances where other, similar, employees were not dismissed "by reasons of colour, race, ethnic or national origins, sex, marital status, or religious or ethical belief... or that employee's involvement in an employee's organisation" (Section 28, ECA 1991). Discrimination based on family status, sexual orientation, disability, political opinion, age, or employment status was not prohibited in this act.

The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (CTU, 1998) asserts that the provisions of the ECA were rendered unworkable by workplace practices which prevented employees from establishing that discrimination had occurred. The council comments that:

It became common practice for employers to include confidentiality clauses in employment contracts and these prohibited employees from discussion of their remuneration packages with other employees. It restricted access about comparability of pay and conditions to those who may of [sic] wished to prove discrimination. (p. 10)

Furthermore, the CTU asserts that employers used the Privacy Act 1993 to argue that they were not allowed to disclose details of an individual's income.

The Employment Relations Act 2000 (ERA) is a recent piece of legislation and, thus far, has not resulted in a wide body of literature which examines it. The act prohibits discrimination on grounds included in the Human Rights Act 1993. These grounds, itemised in Section 105, are expanded from the Employment Contracts Act 1991 and include sex, colour, race, disability, political opinion, age, employment status, family status, and sexual orientation. Generally, discrimination under the ERA occurs where the employer or employer's representative does not offer the same terms or conditions of employment to all employees, or dismisses or retires an employee by reason of any of the prohibited grounds (Cullen, 2000, p. 25).

Under the ERA, harassment must, either by its nature or through repetition, have a detrimental effect on the employee's employment, job performance, or job satisfaction. The act relates sexual harassment to either an implied or overt promise of preferential treatment, or a threat of detrimental treatment, or threat to present or future employment (ERA Section 108 a). The grounds governing racial harassment

are far wider. The act defines racial harassment in terms which include the following clauses:

- (a) to express hostility, or bring into contempt or ridicule an employee on the basis of their race, colour, or ethnic or national origins of the employee; and
- (b) is hurtful or offensive to the employee (whether or not that is conveyed to the employer or representative); (Employment Relations Act 2000: Section 109)

It would seem that there is a distinction made between the hurt caused by racial harassment and other forms of harassment such as that experienced at school by teachers who are lesbian, including name-calling and other forms of ridicule aimed at their sexual orientation.

At the time of writing, the ERA governs discriminatory behaviour of employers and employees in the workplace. The act, requiring workplaces to engage in EEO-based practices, should prevent poor practice and ensure the fair treatment of individuals. However, as Cullen (2000) notes:

EEO is about systemic and structural organisational change, which aims to promote good employment practices and policies which prevent discrimination. Addressing individual cases of discrimination deals with the effects in a piecemeal manner and does nothing to analyse and change the causes of discrimination. (p. 2)

Theoretically, existing New Zealand legislation ensures that sexual orientation is not a barrier in the workplace. This thesis will later show, however, that many of the participants in this study felt that others' responses to their non-heterosexual orientation continued to be a barrier to both employment and promotion. The methodology of the research that collected these experiences and perceptions is the subject of the next chapter in this thesis.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The methodology used in this research was dictated by the topic and the study's potential participants. The participants are members of a stigmatised and often hidden population, a population that is dispersed throughout New Zealand secondary schools. A further factor was the imperative that participants' privacy was totally respected and that potential participants had confidence that this would be so. These problems were addressed through the development, use and careful and sensitive, distribution of a postal questionnaire to self-identified participants.

### **5.2 The Sample**

The target population for this research was lesbians currently teaching in New Zealand secondary schools. This population includes principals, senior management, middle management and classroom teachers. To find participants from the target population, I used a variation of snowball sampling.

#### **5.2.1 Snowball Sampling**

Snowball sampling is a useful way of gaining research participants from a hidden and scattered population. It is a straightforward procedure which is described succinctly by Kumar (1996):



Snowball sampling is the process of selecting a sample using networks. To start with, a few individuals in a group... are selected and the required information is collected from them. They are then asked to identify other members in the group... and the people selected by them become part of the sample. Information is collected from them, and these people are asked to identify other members of the group, and in turn, those identified become the basis of further data collection. This process is continued until the required number or a saturation point is reached, in terms of information being sought (p. 162).

This process was adapted to ensure the confidentiality of participants. It would have been an invasion of women's privacy if other people had communicated their names to a third person. To ensure that this did not happen, two 'pass-on' information letters and two flyers (Appendices 1, 2) were included in the questionnaire pack. Also included was a request that the recipient give these to other secondary teachers who are lesbian. The comprehensive information letter was two sides of an A4 sheet with type 10 point in size and may, to some readers, have seemed unfriendly. The shorter flyer was directed specifically at teachers who are lesbian. It was designed to be visually interesting and to be passed on to potential participants who could then contact me.

The outcome of this process was that each participant's involvement resulted from her own communication with me. The process ensured that no participant was asked to disclose the sexual orientation of others to the researcher.

There is one inherent problem with using a snowball sample: it is impossible to ensure that a representative sample of the population under study is obtained. I tried to address this by gaining as many participants as possible.

Originally, the timeframe for response was one month from the publication of the articles requesting participation (these are discussed in section 5.4). This was later extended to three months to allow for the time lag created by the snowballing of the information letters and 'pass-on' flyers. In response to three telephone calls, 57 emails and 27 snowballed request forms, 91 questionnaires (Appendix 3) were posted to potential participants. Seventy-nine (87%) were returned. Of these 67 were included in the study. Six pilot questionnaires were not included because, as will be discussed later, the testing of the questionnaire resulted in some changes in wording and the last of the pilot interviews brought about the introduction of a new question. The inclusion of questionnaires with different wording and a missing question would have complicated the interpretation of results or even invalidated some of the conclusions drawn from the data.

Before the receipt of completed questionnaires I considered how I could exclude responses from would-be participants whose questionnaire answers indicated that the sender was not a lesbian or that he or she might have had malicious intent. This, it turned out, was not a problem. Each returned questionnaire seemed genuine and, with the exceptions noted on page 71, was included in the study. Thus the sample for this research is 67 secondary school teachers who self-identify as lesbian.

### **5.2.2 Profile of Sample**

A diverse group of teachers forms the sample for this research.

The sample comprised one principal, one student director, six senior managers (four deputy principals, two not specified), 22 middle managers (19 heads of department,

three deans), two guidance counsellors, seven teachers-in-charge, four teachers with units, 24 teachers without units.

These teachers had varying lengths of service at the schools where they worked at the time of the survey. Twenty-one had worked there for two years or fewer, 29 for three to six years, eight for seven to 10, six for 11 to 15 and three for over 15 years.

Participants' years of teaching varied, too. Nineteen had been teaching for less than five years, 16 for six to 10 years, six had been in teaching for 11 to 15 and eight for 16 to 20. Five had been teaching 26 to 30 years and three for over 30.

The number of schools in which participants had taught is likewise diverse. Sixteen had taught in only one school, 16 in two, 13 in three, 12 in four, six in five, none in six but two had taught in seven, one had taught in eight and one in nine schools.

The types of schools that participants were teaching in when they completed this study's questionnaire also covers a wide range. One participant worked in a community college, one in a composite school, one in a private religious school, six in integrated religious schools, nine in other types of private schools and 49 in state schools.

These schools had varying decile ratings (see glossary entry). Three participants were teaching in decile 1 schools, two in decile 2 and three in decile 3. There were nine participants teaching in each of decile 4, 5 and 6 schools and five in decile 7, seven in decile 8, three in decile 9 and nine in decile 10. Eight of the participants recorded that the private schools at which they teach do not have decile ratings.

The sample was drawn from schools in both main islands and the participants taught in schools serving areas of differing population density. Fifty-one participants were teaching in the North Island and 16 in the South. Cities were represented by 26 participants teaching in Auckland, eight in Wellington, five each in Christchurch and Hamilton, one in Manukau and one in each of Upper and Lower Hutt. Ten participants were teaching in large towns, seven in the South Island and three in the North. Seven taught in schools which serve a mixed rural/urban population. Of these four participants were teaching in the North Island and three in the South. Three participants (two from the North Island and one from the South) were teaching in schools serving small towns or small urban areas. One of these was from the south Island and one the North Island.

Only one teacher in the sample taught in a boys' school. Forty of the participants taught in co-educational schools and 26 in girls' schools.

The participants' ages also encompass a wide range. Four were 18 to 25 years old, 22 were aged 26 to 35 and another 22 36 to 45 years old, 13 were 46 to 55 and six were older than 55.

For ease of understanding, these statistics are summarised in a series of small tables on page 71.

## Sample Characteristics – Summary Tables

## Tables 2A to 2H

### 2A Position in School Hierarchy

Position	Teachers Without Units	Teachers with Units	Middle Management: HOD, TIC, Dean Guidance Counsellor	Snr Management, D. Principal	Principal, Stdnt Dir.	Total
Number	24	4	31	6	2	67
% of Sample	35.82%	5.97%	46.28%	8.96%	2.98%	100%

### 2B Number of Years Teaching in Secondary Schools

Years	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	30+	Total
Number	19	16	6	8	10	5	3	67
% of Sample	28.36%	23.88%	8.96%	11.94%	14.93%	7.46%	4.48%	100%

### 2C Number of NZ Secondary Schools in which Taught

Schools	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Number	16	16	13	12	6	0	2	1	1	67
% of Sample	23.88%	23.88%	19.40%	17.91%	8.96%	0%	2.99%	1.49%	1.49%	100%

### 2D School Types

Type	Community College	Composite School	Integrated Religious	Private	Private Catholic	State	Total
Number	1	1	6	9	1	49	67
% of Sample	1.49%	1.49%	8.96%	13.43%	1.49%	73.13%	100%

### 2E School Decile Rating

Decile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A	Total
Number	3	2	3	9	9	9	5	7	3	9	8	67
% of Sample	4.48%	2.99%	4.48%	13.43%	13.43%	13.43%	7.46%	10.45%	4.48%	13.43%	11.94%	100%

### 2F Geographical Location

Location	Rural/Urban	Small Town	Small Urban	Large Town	City	Total
North Island Number	4	1	1	3	42	51
North Island % of Sample	5.97%	1.49%	1.49%	4.48%	62.69%	76.12%
South Island Number	3	1	0	7	5	16
South Island % of Sample	4.48%	1.49%	0%	10.45%	7.46%	23.88%

### 2G School Types (Student Gender)

St. Gender	Single Sex Boys	Single Sex Girls	Co-ed	Total
Number	1	26	40	67
% of Sample	1.49%	38.81%	59.70%	100%

### 2H Age Group

Age Group	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	55+	Total
Number	4	22	22	13	6	67
% of Sample	5.97%	32.84%	32.84%	19.40%	8.96%	100%

### 5.3 Validity and Reliability

According to Graziano & Raulin (1997) validity is the methodological soundness or appropriateness of the research being undertaken. It is assurance that this is “a valid measure of what it is supposed to measure [and that] the concepts being investigated are actually the ones being measured or tested” (pp. 188-189). This, they state, can be divided into ‘construct validity’ – how well the study’s results support the constructs (theory) behind the research and ‘external validity’, “the degree to which we are able to generalize the results of the study” (*Op cit.* p. 191). To have external validity, the authors say, “the sample must be selected from the population in such a way that it adequately represents the population” (*Op cit.* p. 192). The third type of validity identified by Graziano & Raulin (1997) is ‘internal validity’. This is assured, the authors state, “when it can be concluded with confidence that the independent variable and not some other variable brought about the observed changes in the dependent variable” (p. 192).

The snowball sampling on which the selection of this study’s sample was based is an example of ‘non-probability sampling’. In this type of sampling

There is no certainty that the probability of selection is equal among the potential respondents. Without such equality, the researcher cannot analyse the sample in terms of normal distribution. Therefore the sample data cannot be used to generalize beyond the sample itself, because the degree of sampling error associated with the sample cannot be estimated without an assumption of normality. (Rae & Parker, 1997, p. 141)

Given the stigmatised nature of this study’s population, lack of knowledge of the numbers contained within it and their distribution, snowball sampling was the only practical method of sampling appropriate to this study. Although the validity of the

sample cannot be completely assured, examination of the profile of the survey's participants (pages 68-71) shows that a wide cross-section of the target population was included within the sample. The breadth of the sample gives some confidence in the validity of the results gained from it.

Firestone (1987) cited by Merriam (1998) explores the different ways in which quantitative and qualitative research convince audiences of their trustworthiness.

The quantitative study must convince the reader that the procedures have been followed faithfully because very little concrete description of what anyone does is provided. The qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusion 'makes sense'....[Further] the quantitative study portrays a world of variables and static states.... By contrast the qualitative study describes people acting in events. (Firestone, 1987, p.19)

This study does "provide the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show the author's conclusion 'makes sense'" (*op. cit.*) and also has, as Wolcott (1994) cited by Merriam (1998, p. 201) expounds when arguing the "absurdity of validity" (p.364)

...a quality that points more to identifying critical elements and wringing plausible interpretations from them, something one can pursue without becoming obsessed with finding the right or ultimate answer, the correct version, the Truth.... [finding] understanding (Wolcott, 1994, p.366-367).

Other aspects of validity are addressed below when considering survey research generally.

It is not possible, given the nature of this study, to test, the reliability of this study in statistical terms. Reliability is "a statistical measure of how reproducible the survey instrument's data are" (Litwin, 1995, p.6). The most common test for reliability is

the 'test-retest' indicator and this is administered by having the same set of respondents complete a survey at two different points in time with the intention of seeing how stable the responses are. This, clearly, has not been possible in this study. An indicator of alternate-form reliability was included in the survey. Question 11 asked the participant to identify the way her sexual orientation affects the way others at school work with her. Question 14 asked if the participant's work, working conditions or the way others treat her has been affected by her sexual orientation. The comparison of the responses to these two questions was not numerically based. Both questions required open-ended written responses. Comparison of what the participants did record for the two responses did, however, indicate a high degree of similarity.

It should be noted that much of the data collected was qualitative rather than quantitative. Tests of validity are not appropriate for qualitative data.

## **5.4 Survey Research**

Cohen and Manion (1994) recognise survey as a research method. They conclude that it is "the most commonly used descriptive method [employed] in educational research" (p.83). They also assert that, "Typically, surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions ..." (*op. cit*). This is the intention of this research.

Although many authors state the advantages of the survey as a research method, others do not recognise it as a method. Graziano & Raulin (1997) suggest that,



Survey research is not a single research design (Schuman & Kalton, 1985) rather it is an area of research that utilizes several basic procedures to obtain information from people in their natural environments (p.142).

They continue by explaining that the survey is a basic instrument used to present a set of one or more questions to subjects and that virtually any human issue can be surveyed. Graziano & Raulin (*op. cit.*) also state that, because the survey can be used to test relationships between variables and it has an emphasis on the participants' natural environments, it is similar to both case studies and correlation research and is a transition between these two methods.

Other authors of books on survey research (Czaja & Blair, 1996 and Suskie,1996) assume the validity of the method and choose not to justify it at all.

The survey instrument used in this study collected all three types of information that are typically gathered by surveys: descriptive, behavioural and preferential.

Descriptive information, for example participants' age, type of school taught at, position in school, allowed for the better understanding of the larger population represented by the sample. The collection of this type of information also allowed for a comparison of the sample with known school populations and allowed for scrutiny of how representative the sample is of the wider population of teachers in New Zealand secondary schools.

A second type of information collected was preferential. Questions asked to gain this type of information were mainly open-ended and invited participants to record their opinions. The questionnaire included requests for information about the participants'

perceptions of other staff members' changes in behaviour towards them and whether others' perceptions of the participant's sexual orientation had affected the behaviour of members of staff.

The last type of information sought was that pertaining to participants' behaviour. The questionnaire asked to what extent participants had chosen to be open about their sexual orientation and what types of schools they would exclude from their list of options when seeking an appointment.

Rea & Parker (1997 p. 4) state that the researcher may often gain data from each of the informational types. That occurred in this study.

## **5.5 Data Gathering: The Choice of a Postal Questionnaire**

As already stated, there are inherent problems when conducting research within lesbian communities. Population numbers and the geographic distribution of potential participants are unknown. In this research, these factors precluded the use of methods which ensure that a study includes a representative sample. They created the problem of how to gain a sample large enough to ensure valid statements can be made, and conclusions drawn, from the collected data.

The problem of a representative sample was insoluble but, as previously stated, I hoped that the effects of not achieving this would be countered by gaining a reasonable number of participants. As will be discussed below, this would not have been possible without the use of a postal survey or internet survey. (The rejection of

the use of the internet for data collection is discussed below under the heading “ethical considerations”).

Participation was invited through printed articles published in *PPTA News* (a New Zealand Post Primary Teachers’ Association publication which is given to each member and available in most secondary school staffrooms) (Appendix 4), and through articles in lesbian and gay publications like the *Otago Daily Times* and *express* as well as newsletters published within New Zealand lesbian communities such as Auckland’s *Tamaki Makarau Lesbian Newsletter* (Appendix 5). What was unexpected was that the *New Zealand Herald* and *Sunday Star Times* newspapers each ran an item about the research based on the PPTA News article.. Neither published contact details. As previously noted, further participants were found through the snowballing of the information letter and ‘pass-on’ flyers included in the questionnaire package. This ensured that a high percentage of potential participants knew of the research and had the opportunity to contribute to the study.

A further problem solved by using a postal survey was that of a single researcher having insufficient resources to interview, personally, a large number of participants who were scattered throughout New Zealand.

It is also possible that the postal nature of the survey encouraged greater participation from lesbians who were in the closet. Responding by post allowed a greater sense of anonymity. For some participants, this may have been an important factor in their willingness to complete a questionnaire. As Czaja & Blair (1996) comment: “Mail surveys [are] successful in the collection of data about sensitive topics... the more

anonymous the method of data collection, the higher rate of reported behaviour” (p.35). Moreover, the postal method may have encouraged greater participation because there have previously been snowballed postal surveys within the lesbian community (Rankine, 1997 and Saphira & Glover, 1999). These may have resulted in a feeling of confidence in this type of research within the targeted population, thus leading to positive responses to this study.

### **5.5.1 Disadvantages of a Postal Questionnaire**

There are disadvantages of using a postal survey but strategies were put in place to minimise these. There was no way (other than a telephone call or email to the researcher) that participants could ask questions about the questionnaire. This problem was reduced by careful arrangement of questions, through the use of clear, unambiguous language and through allowing space on the questionnaire for full responses. Participants were invited to use the back of each sheet for very long answers. They could also email or telephone the researcher at her home as the information letter contained both an email address and the researcher’s home office telephone number. The information letter advised participants of this and also that both the email address and the telephone were used only by the researcher. Only two participants emailed to discuss the questionnaire. Neither asked questions or sought clarification; they wished to make comments on the value they perceived in the study. Three abusive (anti-lesbian) emails were received from people who had obviously seen the publicity about the study. These were not responded to and were deleted.

As one participant noted on her questionnaire, a self-administered postal survey does not provide opportunities for an interviewer to probe for a full response from the

participant. Those taking part in this study, however, were literate, educated teachers, a population group who are generally skilled communicators who do not find writing threatening. Generally, the responses were full, comprehensible and relevant to the questions asked.

It has to be accepted that there may have been lower response rates with a postal questionnaire than with personal approaches but, given the advantages of a postal survey and the unknown population, this was unavoidable. I had hoped that 150 women would choose to participate in this research. This goal might have been achieved had I extended, further, the time available for finding participants. Given university deadlines this was not possible. As will be discussed later, the problems of a comparatively modest number of participants were offset by the quality of the responses received. Most participants' answers were comprehensive and illuminating.

One way that good response rates were encouraged was through careful questionnaire design.

## **5.6 Questionnaire Design**

Three main goals were important in the design of the questionnaire. The first of these was to gain data which would provide valid answers to the research questions. The second was to encourage a high rate of return and the third to produce a document that looked professional. This last goal was related not only to the need for a high rate of return but also to the need for participants to snowball a request to

others, inviting their participation. This was more likely to happen if the questionnaire appeared to be of value (Suskie, 1996 and Czaja & Blair, 1996).

### **5.6.1 Question Evaluation**

Using the research questions as a guide, I formulated a set of survey questions. I then evaluated each question using the following guide, adapted from Czaja and Blair (1996 p. 61):

Does the question measure an aspect or aspects of one of the research questions?

What kind of information is needed to answer the research question?

Is the question free of emotional loading and bias?

Will most participants understand the question in the same way?

Will most participants have the information to answer it?

Will most participants be willing to answer it?

Should the question be asked of all participants?

Consideration was then given to the order of the questions. This was important because the topic is sensitive and a high rate of return of the questionnaires was hoped for. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, and because I wished participants to feel comfortable and confident and so provide thoughtful and comprehensive responses to open-ended questions, I placed some classification questions at the beginning of the questionnaire. This goes against received wisdom (Suskie, 1996; Czaja & Blair, 1996 and Cohen & Manion, 1994). However, these questions were non-threatening and required little thought from the participants. More demanding questions followed this first section.

Question One was a screening question and asked if the participant was currently a secondary teacher. One respondent noted she had left teaching the previous year. Five respondents noted that they were either primary or intermediate schoolteachers. One of these wrote commenting that she felt that the study was important and that primary teachers should be included. In part her note stated;

I find it most unreasonable that you should include only secondary teachers. Lesbians teach in all schools and we all face the same bloody shit. If you are not including us then the study is only half done. ... You can't tell only half the story. ...

This writer may have a valid point. The reasons for including only secondary school teachers are explained earlier (page 7).

The next section, Questions 2 to 5, comprised classification questions included at the beginning because they were non-threatening. These asked participants to position themselves within their school's structure by indicating what job title they had (for example, head of department or teacher with or without units) and how many units (see glossary entry) they held.

Questions 6 to 8 asked participants about their appointment to their present school. These questions were followed by those designed to collect information about participants' perceptions. These included questions on how their sexual orientation had affected/was affecting their decisions on where and how they applied for work, their promotion or professional recognition and whether they felt that their sexual orientation had been a reason for a change in employment. The questions (9-15) in this section invited participants to explain their responses.

Question 16 asked participants about their schools' sexual harassment policies.

Questions 17 and 18 asked if participants had come out in their workplace during the time they were teaching and, if so, what responses from others had followed their disclosure. The questionnaire concluded with the collection of further classification data and thanks to participants.

## **5.7 Piloting the Questionnaire**

As De Vaus (2002) states, "Once a questionnaire has been developed, each question and the questionnaire as a whole must be evaluated rigorously before final administration" (p. 114).

Piloting (testing) of the questionnaire was carried out with friends who are all secondary school teachers and lesbian. I telephoned those whom I knew were qualified to participate in the study asking if they would help to trial a questionnaire I was planning to use in my research for a master's degree. I chose friends who were teaching in a range of schools. Each of the women I rang agreed to help. The types of schools these women taught in are as follows: two in state co-educational schools, one in a girls' state school, one in an integrated Catholic boys' school, one in a composite school, and one in a private secular girls' school. I made appointments to interview five of these women in their own homes, suggesting to them that the completion of the questionnaire could take 30 minutes and the complete interview about an hour. The sixth was interviewed at my home.

Before each appointment I telephoned the participant and explained that the purpose of the time that we would spend together was to pilot the questionnaire. I stated that we would not be able to socialise during the piloting and I arranged with each woman



to meet away from other family or household members. At least five days before each interview I posted the participant an information letter which explained the purpose of the study, and that the information given to me would be treated as confidential and her anonymity would be protected as far as possible.

I arrived outside each of the five 'in-home' appointments at least five minutes before the appointed time and at the house precisely on time. Once we were settled away from other members of the household, I gave the participant the questionnaire and asked her to complete it. I, too, had a copy of the questionnaire which I annotated during the pilot interview. I requested that the participant comment on questions that she found ambiguous or difficult to answer. I brought a magazine to read while the participant was completing the questionnaire. I did this for two reasons. Firstly, I wished to replicate, as closely as possible, the conditions that participants would experience when completing the questionnaire. These participants would not be able to talk to an interviewer during their completion of the questionnaire. If I was reading, the participant was absolved from her social obligations to me as 'visitor'. I wished to restrict our dialogue to commentary on the questionnaire. Secondly, I did not want to make the participant feel that I was watching her every movement and so make her uncomfortable. A magazine was chosen because, whereas many people are uncomfortable interrupting someone reading a book, they are less so if the material being read is a magazine. As I explained to the participant before she started to complete the questionnaire, I did want to be advised of any difficult or obscure questions as she answered them.

After each pilot participant completed the questionnaire I asked if she had found any problems with it. I asked her to comment particularly on ambiguity, on anything she found confusing, ease of use (particularly if there was sufficient space to record responses) and whether she found any of the questions biased or leading. I also asked if she thought there was anything that should be omitted from the questionnaire or added to it. Suggestions were made by pilot participants that instructions should be in bold type, that the layout of Question 7 be changed to allow for inclusion of more categories of interviewers and that a question be added about the effects of coming out at school while teaching. The questionnaire was amended to incorporate these suggestions.

The piloting also raised some interesting problems, not so much with the questions themselves, but with the language used in some parts of the questionnaire.

Originally, I had used the term 'sexual orientation' instead of the word 'sexuality' which appeared in the final questionnaire. The first woman who completed a pilot questionnaire found the term 'sexual orientation' alienating. She argued strongly that she did not feel that she was 'orientated' but that her lesbianism was her choice, a political or conscious decision as much as an inherent part of her being. She suggested the use of 'sexuality' as a more encompassing and less alienating term. I subsequently discussed this with the other pilot participants, all of whom were comfortable with either term. In retrospect, this was probably a mistake. Three of the research participants commented about the word 'sexuality' on their questionnaires. Two suggested the term 'sexual orientation' was more accurate and appropriate and one wrote, "Surely you mean sexual orientation?" (QA 56). The

term 'sexual orientation' is widely used in the literature reviewed for this study. It is also the term used in various New Zealand acts of Parliament including the Human Rights Act 1993, the Employment Relations Act 2000 and the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement 2002-2004, all of which are pertinent to this research.

There were also problems with the use of the term 'lesbian'. Two of the pilot participants stated that this word is not appropriate as it does not describe them. One said that she identifies as 'gay' and the other expressed disquiet about accepting the label.

Morris & Rothblum (1999) point out that there has been little research but much discussion about the heterogeneity of women's sexual orientation. These authors cite Golden's (1987) multidimensional model of sexual orientation. Golden argues that,

Sexual identity (I am lesbian), sexual behaviour (I have sex with women), and community participation (I am a member of the lesbian community) are orthogonal dimensions that may be congruent or incongruent. Thus women who self-identify as lesbian may be currently celibate or may never had had a genital sexual relationship with another woman. Women who self-identify as bisexual or even heterosexual may be active in lesbian community activities... some self-identified lesbians have disclosed their sexual orientation to few other people, so that they are assumed to be heterosexual. (Golden, no date, cited by Morris and Rothblum 1999 p. 583)

Sexual orientation, then, is not unambiguous. Labels can be confusing and an unreliable expression of who is perceived to be encompassed within them. Labels also have other problems, as Ristock (2002) observes,

In using a feminist postmodern framework that stresses multiplicity, contradictions, and diversity, I open myself to criticism of my use of the term “lesbian.” Queer theory, for example, has emerged in postmodern theorizing to interrupt the production of the heterosexist binary straight/gay that assumes we define ourselves against another. Queer is a term used to shift the focus from essentialist categories such as gay and lesbian to something more fluid that works against establishing authentic, normative sexual identity positions. (Jagose 1996, cited by Ristock 2002 p. 23)

This may be so, but many of us live our lives within the term ‘lesbian’. My use of the term in this study does not suggest that the participants have a fixed core identity. I use it as does Ristock (2002) “...as a convenient, albeit inadequate, umbrella term” (p. 23) to signify women whose primary affectational relationships are with women, while aware that for many women sexual identity is not their primary identity. Because of the changes made to the original questionnaire, especially the inclusion of a new question, the decision was made not to include the pilot questionnaires in the study’s collected data.

## **5.8 Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted within the framework of Massey University’s Code of Ethics.

Ethical considerations were of paramount importance to this research. Because the research was conducted within a stigmatised population, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants were vital considerations. This was even more of a consideration in this particular research because of the widely-held principle in lesbian community that one should not compromise the right of a lesbian to stay in the closet. Consequently, contacting participants was an exercise that necessitated much thought and planning. As previously noted, I developed an adaptation of

snowball sampling. This adaptation required that participants passed on an information sheet, rather than a questionnaire, to teachers who were potential participants. As a result, participants did not divulge to the researcher the names of others that they knew to be lesbian. This may well have reduced the total number of participants. As previously discussed, it certainly slowed the return of completed questionnaires and caused me to extend the time allowed for this.

During the design of this study, I considered using the internet as one medium for data collection. I rejected this for ethical reasons. With an on-line questionnaire with its electronically generated font, even more than with a postal questionnaire, it is difficult to be sure who has completed it or how many times the questionnaire may have been completed maliciously. (This is of particular concern in research within lesbian or gay communities because of the stigmatised populations being surveyed.) The use of an internet questionnaire would, as Tolich (2001 p.78) points out, call into question the robustness of the study. Tolich (*op. cit.*) suggests that this may not be an ethical concern but I disagree.

Women participants enter into feminist research trusting that the information they give will be used by the researcher to provide accurate and useful findings which will, in some way, lead to an improvement in their lives. As Alice (1999 p.62), cited Kirkman (2001) states "...feminist research now aims to investigate social inequalities 'using research methods that may assist the improvement of the research subject's social location'" (p.51). In my opinion, the researcher whose poor methodology calls into question the robustness of their study is, in ethical terms,

failing study participants (whose lives the researcher must honestly and accurately reflect).

Although I decided not to use an on-line questionnaire for the reasons outlined above, this research did involve the limited use of email. Before this use was incorporated into the research, consideration was given as to how likely it was that emails containing participants' names and addresses would be intercepted by a third party. I sought information from a manager at Telecom's internet service provider, Xtra. I was advised that emails are safer from interception than traditional post which is physically handled by many people en route. There are, I was advised, millions of emails flowing through New Zealand addresses daily, and it would be most unlikely that any hacker would target an unknown private address. In the manager's view, it would be most unlikely that the anonymity of participants would be breached.

An address was established through which teachers could record their interest in participating in the study. The only other ways that the email address was used was to send reminders or to respond to email from participants. The address was passworded so that only I could gain access to it. (My computer was also passworded from the beginning of the study until after all records of participants' names and addresses were deleted.)

### **5.8.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality**

There is a difference between anonymity and confidentiality. As Tolich (2001) explains:

A respondent is 'anonymous' when the researcher cannot identify a given response as belonging to a particular respondent; 'confidentiality' is where the researcher can identify a certain person's response but promises not to make the connection publicly (p.78).

Tolich (*op. cit.*) also says that anonymity is assured for participants in a postal survey because "nothing links the respondent to their answers", but this was not absolutely true in this research. In order to track questionnaires and send reminders to those who had not returned them within two weeks of posting, I pencilled a number on the back of the last page. On receipt of the returned questionnaire, I deleted the sender from the 'sent questionnaires' record I kept on my computer and erased the number on the questionnaire. Anonymity for participants was thus maintained.

Generally, the following steps were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in this research.

For the duration of the study, access to a post office box was arranged. All correspondence was through this box or via an email address set up specifically for this research. Participants were also able to contact me on a home office telephone line that only I answered. A 'call-minder' facility was attached to the number so that messages could be left when I was not available to answer the telephone. This was passworded so that only I had access to it.

Names and addresses were used only for the sending of information letters, questionnaires, follow-up requests for the return of questionnaires and a summary of the research findings to those participants who requested this. Names and addresses were kept on a passworded computer file and one back-up disk. Both the files and the back-up disc were erased at the completion of the research.

Questionnaire packs were addressed and posted solely by the researcher. The names and addresses used were those provided by the participants. Some participants chose to use private addresses, others that of a post office box or their school. Some used first names only and others full names. These were strictly adhered to. The envelopes were plain and the return address on them was that of the my post office box.

The write-up of the research referred only to collected data. Care was taken to ensure that, as far as was practicable, I did not refer to details which may have led to the identification of a participant or may have led to a participant being associated with a particular school in a particular area. This was important because of the limited teacher population numbers of New Zealand and because our schools have unique characteristics. Reference to these could lead some people to identify the schools or a participant even though the references are to a pseudonym.

All completed questionnaires were kept in a locked cupboard in the researcher's home. Only the researcher had access to them.

All data input was completed by the researcher in her own home.

## **5.9 Database Design**

Microsoft Access 2000 was used to design a database incorporating all questions and answers from the questionnaire with further provision for the inclusion of any extended responses. Drop-down lists were created from the answers to each question. These served as the basis for generating simple statistical reports and



charts. Advanced queries were constructed to show whether there are any correlations between specific questions, and the resultant findings were displayed in the form of relational reports and multi-level bar graphs.

A selection of these reports and charts are included as Appendix 6. The summary information gained allowed for the identification of patterns in the data and for generalisations to be made. It was most useful for the analysis of quantitative data.

The qualitative data, participants' responses to invitations to expand on or explain their answers, was rich and dense. Attempts were made to categorise this in ways that would allow meaningful inclusion on the database, but much detail was lost when doing this. Consequently, all participants' written responses were typed onto question-specific sheets. It was from these that commonalities and differences were identified. Data was entered on receipt of the questionnaires. Once this was completed, the data entry for each questionnaire was checked and then double-checked. Data analysis was then begun.

## **5.10 Data Analysis**

In order to analyse the relationships between data collected across the questionnaire, 'select queries' (see glossary entry) were designed in Microsoft Access 2000 to generate 'reports' (see glossary entry) incorporating findings from multiple questions. These reports, the results of the select queries, are in the form of ordered compiled data charts and corresponding graphs (see Appendix 5). These relationships are described in Chapter Six.

This chapter has described the methods used for the collection of data and the reasons that these methods were chosen. The following chapter describes the findings.

## **CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter has been divided in the following way. The first part reports statistics generated through the collection of quantitative data. As this is univariate analysis these are recorded as percentages. The second part of the chapter cross-references the data from various questions to show relationships between these. In this second part, there is also some initial discussion of what has been found.

Where I have used a participant's own words, I have included the whole of her response to a question, even though only part of the response may be relevant to a point being made. This is to ensure that what she has said is not taken out of context. To protect the participant's confidentiality I have sourced the quote using only the number of the questionnaire from which it was taken. In another measure to maintain participants' anonymity, I have removed from each participant's quotations any direct reference which might have identified her or the school to which she referred.

The questionnaire used to collect the data set out in this chapter is included as Appendix 3.

The patterns identified in the compiled statistics must be treated with caution. The sample is small and, although participants teach in a wide variety of school types, the numbers of participants from several of these (private non-religious, and integrated and private religious schools) are low. This may have led to a distortion of the

results. The findings, however, generally support the research reviewed in Chapter Three.

In this record of findings, statistics have been rounded to the nearest .5. As a consequence, totalled statistics for any one question may not be a neat 100%.

## **6.2 Findings: Univariate Data**

For reasons discussed in Chapter Three, the first five questions of the survey were classification data relating to the participant's position in her school and her teaching work history. Question 6 asked how widely the participant was 'out' at school and the reasons for this level of disclosure of sexual orientation. Questions 7 and 8 asked about the participant's interview for her present job, the gender of the interviewers, whether they were aware at the time of the interview of the participant's sexual orientation and, if so, how they gained this knowledge. If the interviewers were not aware of the participant's sexual orientation, the participant was asked if she had made a conscious decision not to disclose her orientation. She was then asked to explain why or why not. Question 9 elicited whether her sexual orientation had ever been part of her decision not to apply for a job. Questions 10 and 11 asked about the effects of the participant's sexual orientation within her workplace. Question 12 questioned the ways that the participant's sexual orientation had affected how she had applied for a job and Question 13 was about the effects of her sexual orientation on internal promotion. Question 14 was included not only to gain information but also as a measure of reliability through comparison with questions 10 and 11. It asked if the participant's sexual orientation had ever affected her working conditions or

treatment during her employment in secondary schools. Question 15 asked if the participant's sexual orientation had ever been a reason for a change of jobs, either within a school or to a new school. Question 16 asked about the sexual harassment policy at the participant's present school. Questions 17 and 18 asked if the participant had 'come out' while teaching at a school and the effect of this if she had done so. The remaining questions were classification data asking the participant to record the general location of her present school, its type and decile rating. The final question asked the participant to record her age. The classification data, discussed in Chapter Five, was used to test the survey's reliability and validity.

### **Question 1**

This was a screening question which asked respondents to confirm that they are secondary school teachers. Only those respondents who ticked the box qualified for inclusion in the study. Five respondents indicated that they were either primary or intermediate teachers and were, therefore, excluded from the sample.

### **Question 2**

This question asked the participant to record her level of responsibility within her school and to indicate how many units<sup>14</sup> she held. Compiled statistics show that the sample for this study was 3% principals or student directors, 9% senior management, 52% middle management (this includes the 6% of the sample who recorded that they were teachers with units) and 36% teachers without units.

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<sup>14</sup> Units are part of the Secondary Teachers' Collective Employment Contract. Boards of Trustees are entitled to a number of units generated by a Ministry of Education formula. Boards allocate these units to individuals on either permanently or for a fixed term in recognition of responsibility. At the time of writing, each unit merits an annual payment of \$2,900. Also see glossary entry.

**Table 3**

**Comparison of Participants' Designations with those of State School Teachers**

	Principals	Management*	Teacher
Min of Education Males and Females	2 %	32 %	66 %
Min of Education Females	1 %	27.5 %	71.5 %
Min of Education Males	3 %	39 %	58 %
Participants	3 %	61 %	36 %

(Source: Compiled questionnaire data and Ministry of Education, March 2002)<sup>15</sup>

(\* Includes deputy principals, assistant principals and teachers holding management units)

As discussed in Chapter Five, this compares with the national population as indicated in Table 3 above. cursory examination of the data in Table 3 suggests strongly that the survey sample is unrepresentative of the general population of teachers who are lesbian in New Zealand schools. However, it may not necessarily be as unrepresentative as it appears. The greatest disparities are found when comparing the statistics for the general population of women teachers with those for this study's participants. There is less difference if the latter are compared with those of the male teacher population of our secondary schools. There is no national data which

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<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that Ministry data refers to state employees only. The survey data includes participants who were working in private schools. (15% of the sample).

includes the designations of teachers who are lesbian. As pointed out by the participant quoted below, they may not be typical of women generally.

*I feel that lesbians in education are seen as hard workers more committed to the school community than heterosexual women who often have commitment to family. So often, the women who have risen through the ranks have been (or are) lesbians or single women (or childless).*

*(Certainly this has been my experience – although it would be an interesting piece of research to verify it?!!) QA 39.*

This participant's comments are interesting. I have been unable to find any published New Zealand or overseas research or statistics comparing the promotion of single women, childless women or lesbians in schools with that of heterosexually partnered women who have children. The participant's comment about further research is apt. The comment has caused me to question whether the sample I have gained for this study is more representative than this study's statistics indicate. There is currently no way of ascertaining if this is so.

### **Question 3**

Participants were asked to record how many years they had been employed at their present school. Those who had been in their schools for two years or fewer comprised 31.5%; 43% had worked there for three to six years; 12% for seven to 10 years; 9% for 11 to 15 years and 4.5% for over 15 years. This question was designed to ascertain the time-span that participants covered in their responses to other questions.

#### **Question 4**

This asked participants to record the number of years they had been employed as a secondary school teacher. Those who had worked as secondary teachers for fewer than five years amounted to 28.5% ; 24% had been teachers for between six and 10 years; 9% between 11 and 15 years, 12% between 16 and 20 years; 15% between 21 and 25 years; 7.5% for between 26 and 30 years; and 4.5% of the participants had been teaching in the secondary service for more than 30 years. This question was included so that a participant's response could be related, if necessary, to legislation or societal forces relevant to the period that the response referred to.

#### **Question 5**

Participants were asked to record the number of schools in which they had taught. This question was asked to gain an indication of the possible number of schools being reflected in a participant's response, when this was not clear. Twenty-four percent of participants were still teaching in their first school. A similar 24% had taught in two schools; 19.5% had taught in three; 18% in four and 9% in five. None of the participants had taught in six schools but 3% had taught in seven. The percentages of participants who had taught in eight or nine schools were the same: each 1.5%.

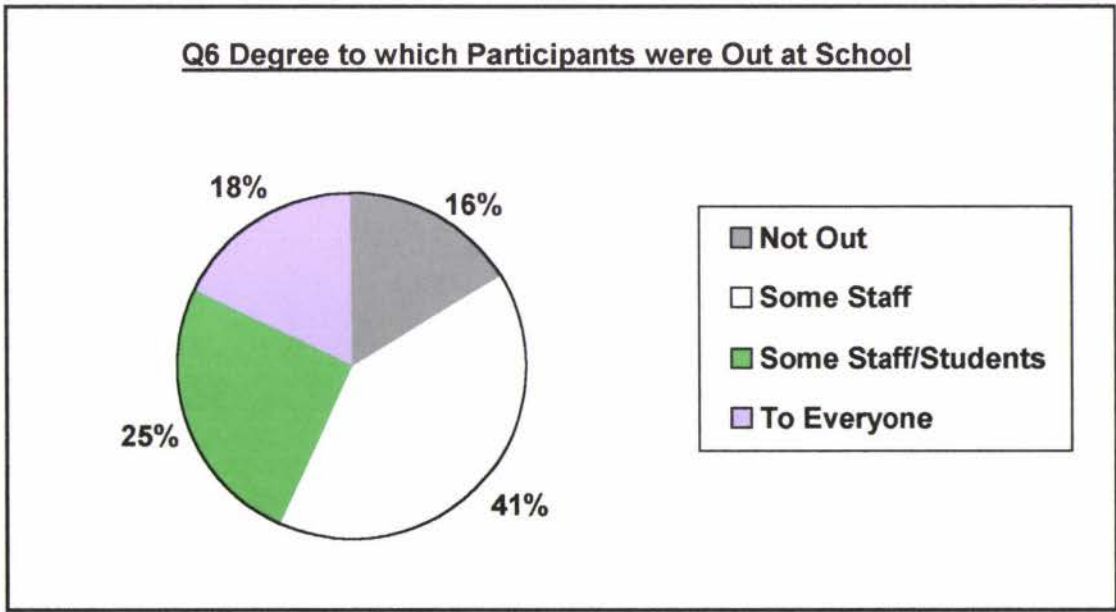
#### **Question 6**

Question 6 asked to what degree participants were out at their present school. The data gained from this question is central to the discussion of the survey results. The terms 'out' and 'closeted' were explained on the questionnaire as "By 'out' I mean you have told others of your sexuality" and "By 'closeted' I mean



you have told no one at school of your sexuality”<sup>16</sup>. The question also invited participants to comment on whether they felt they had been outed (see Glossary entry). This was explained as “someone else has, against your wishes, told others of your sexuality”. In Question 6, participants were given a choice of boxes to tick or offered “other – please explain”. The choices given were: “I am completely closeted at school”; “I am out to my close friends on staff”; “I am out to staff”; “I am out to some students”; “I am out to all students”, “I am out to everyone”. The second part of the question asked participants to “explain why you have decided to be closeted, out to some people and not others, or completely out.” The data for this question is revealing. As is shown in Figure 3 below, 16% of participants are completely closeted at school and 41% out only to some staff. A further 25% were out to some staff and students. Only 18% of the participants were out to everyone. No participant recorded that she was out to some or all students but not to some or all staff.

Figure 3



<sup>16</sup> The term ‘sexuality’ was ill-chosen and negatively commented on by some participants (see pages 65 and 66).

Even though the question contained definitions of the words 'out' and 'closeted', the responses showed that participants had various interpretations of these. Women in similar circumstances perceived the level of disclosure of their sexual orientation differently. However, within each of the categories participants recorded common reasons for their choices. For those who saw themselves as completely out, the most frequently given reasons were the need to be honest and true to themselves, and their perception that trying to hide would be senseless because gossip would circulate about their sexual orientation or because they looked stereotypically lesbian. Three participants also mentioned that the acceptance of difference in their schools was part of their decision to be out of the closet.

*I am who I am! It is part of everything I do, part of my values, colours every decision I make. In my first year I decided it was all or nothing – I needed to be true to me to make the most of my new career (QA 64).*

*I was 'outed' at my last school by students from the town of my previous school so I decided, "What the hell, it's better to be consistent and honest."*

*I can only operate in an holistic manner. I believe in effective communication and believe that students have the right to know my full story. I also feel I am obviously lesbian and I would be foolish to try to hide ( QA 7).*

*Three-and-a-half years ago some students asked me if I was a lesbian to which I said 'yes'. I haven't been asked since and I assume students know. I think they do know because of their actions/reactions. Such as kids not wanting me to touch them or pulling away when I touch them on the arm, between their shoulders or on the elbow to get their attention or tell them something. This is in a P.E. class where everyone is in action. Wouldn't occur if kids were behind desks. (The need to touch them.)*

*At my old school I was completely out – a co-ed, provincial school. I'd made a pact with myself if ever asked directly about my sexuality, I'd always answer truthfully. I was asked at least 5 or 6 times. At my new school my sexuality became an issue quickly as kids saw it as an 'Achilles heel'. It took quite a settling period and time to get supportive people around me. I am very out with staff as my research about the school made me aware it would be a supportive environment. Being single sex – girls has made me a little wary and*

*facilities can put me in a vulnerable situation – i.e. the gym office – you need to go through the changing room to get into it – therefore difficulty at beginning and end of lesson when kids are changing. The pavilion gear store is in a far corner – students also change in there but I need to get into the store to get gear out (QA 50).*

*The school grapevine is very quick and effective. I expect that if I come out to 3 to 7 students, by the next day 30 to 70 would know. Also, I look like and dress like a dyke – androgynous – and kids are pretty sharp. I expect that staff were slower to clue-up but I'm sure that 70% of the school would know by now.*

*I only come out to students if it is relevant and appropriate – i.e. once a year. I don't feel the need to put my sexuality up as a discussion point very often. I have come out to my close members of staff and senior management – because if anything did crop up – like harassment, I need to know I have their support – which I do (QA 40).*

There are also common themes to be found in the explanations of those participants who were out to staff and some students. For many, being in or out of the closet was not an issue.

*It was never a secret, but I didn't make a habit of 'coming out' to students, just relied on the very efficient student gossip network to get the message out, and I never denied it when asked. Having appeared on *Queer Nation*<sup>17</sup> and in the *Hero Parade*<sup>18</sup> got the word around (QA 6).*

*I was outed (when I was overseas) to staff by a colleague. I was surprised but not upset as the school is very supportive. I have been out to some classes of students but have had to put up with inappropriate remarks in class so I don't bother now. Of course if anyone asked I would say Yes, I'm a lesbian (QA 21).*

Others who were out to staff and some students, like participants who are completely out, recognised the gossiping that occurs in schools.

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<sup>17</sup> *Queer Nation* is a Television New Zealand magazine programme for and about non-heterosexual people.

<sup>18</sup> The *Hero Parade* was an annual parade of gays, lesbians and other non-heterosexual people which was first held in 1994 with the dual role of raising awareness in New Zealand of HIV/AIDS and affirmation for lesbian and gay people.



*It was easy to decide to be out to staff – just told people as it came up in conversation about partners – did not make a particular/special announcement.*

*Did not tell students – they guessed/ were told by other teachers? – don't know. If asked by senior students I answer truthfully. If asked by juniors, depends! Sometimes I change the topic or avoid, other times I tell the truth. Don't volunteer though (QA 13).*

Some participants recognised that there is a cost to coming out.

*I don't think I would like to be caught up in the politics of being up front and right out there (QA 8).*

*I'm out to the staff – I couldn't bear to change all my pronouns with my colleagues – but with students I'm only out to my seventh form. I teach Art History to them so it would be difficult not to mention homosexuality in the context of my lessons. Every year someone in this class seems to ask if I'm a lesbian. I can't lie to them so we talk about the problems of my being out to more junior students – I don't want to waste class time on their endless questions and ill educated comments. My sevenths seem to respect my privacy – maybe they're older (QA 25).*

Some participants, who were out to staff and some students, were out only to a select few students: those they knew well, or knew outside school.

*The only students who I am out to have lesbian mothers that I know.*

*I am out to my own department teachers but the others know too – fairly recent 'coming out'. I do not want students to know yet – particularly 4<sup>th</sup> Form boys! But when I am ready they will know too (QA 16).*

The sexual orientation of other participants was less widely disclosed. These participants are the 40.5% who were out to some staff (including one or two) when surveyed and the 16.5% who were not out at all. Again, the explanations of these women overlap, indicating a variety of interpretations of the terms 'out' and 'closet'. A number of participants included, as a reason for not being more widely out, fear of others' reaction if these people knew they were lesbian. Many commented on extra stress in the classroom should students know of their sexual orientation. Some feared that their safety would be compromised.

- 1) *Because generally students' maturity level is such that they would be judgmental and I would prefer to avoid the difficulties this would cause (& the embarrassment).*
- 2) *Basically, my sexuality is my business & I see it as quite irrelevant to how I perform my job hence only those that I have developed close friendships with are aware of it (QA 3).*

*I feel that to be completely out at this school compromises my safety in relation to student behaviours. Also I need to consider my partner's welfare and as the school is in an area close to where I live – I don't need the issues. The people at school that do know I have trust in and those others don't need to know because I don't need their judgment or otherwise (QA 66).*

*Lack of trust. Don't necessarily feel safe to come out. Also feel not particularly relevant to what I do. I would presume that most know anyway as the [principal equivalent] and one of the other teachers is gay. (Have little to do with management generally) (QA 14).*

Other participants, who were either completely closeted or out to only one or two very close friends on staff, commented on the special character of their schools.

*I have not told any of my current colleagues although I was out to close friends at my previous school.*

*My sexuality doesn't influence the way I teach so I don't tend to discuss it. 'Private' conversations are more difficult but I've been teaching in Catholic or 'special character' schools so it is safer not to acknowledge the fact that I am gay (QA 27).*

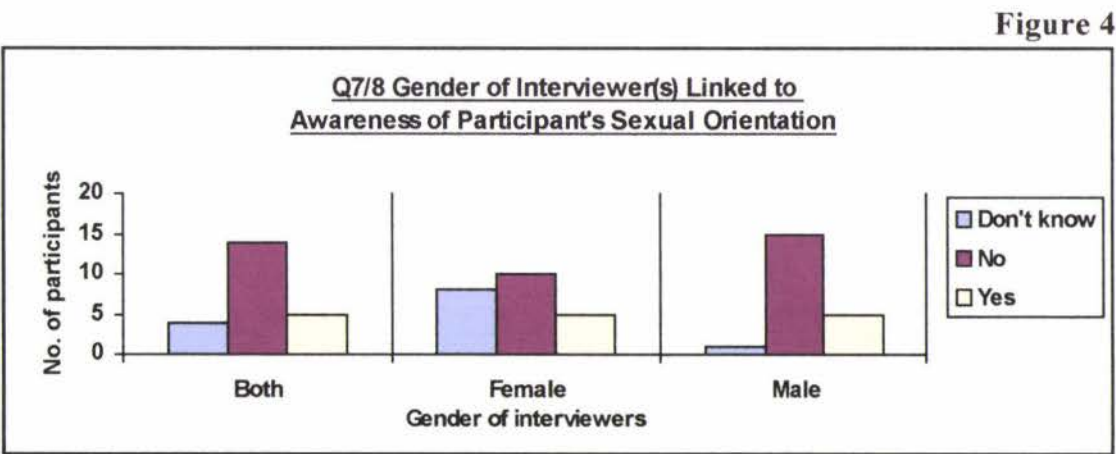
## **Questions 7 and 8**

Question 7 was designed to elicit whether women or men employed the participant at their present school and Question 8 to discern whether the interviewer(s) were aware of the participant's sexual orientation at the time of interview. These questions were included to reveal any relationship between interviewer gender and the interviewee's choice to come out or remain closeted at the interview. The questions also allowed for a comparison between type of school (Question 22) and for finding out whether the school type had any relationship to whether a participant was out at an interview.

In Question 8, if the participant recorded that the interviewer(s) were aware of her sexual orientation, she was asked to explain how this was known. If the participant had recorded that the interviewer(s) were not aware of her sexual orientation, she was asked first to say whether she had made a conscious decision not to mention her sexual orientation, and then to explain why or why not.

Compiled data from Question 7 shows that 34.5% of participants were interviewed by both men and women, 34.5% by women and 31% by men.

The data from Question 8 show that participants believed 58% of interviewers were not aware of the interviewee’s sexual orientation and 22.5% were aware. The remaining participants, 19.5%, did not know if the interviewer(s) were aware of their sexual orientation or not. The relationship between the two variables is illustrated in Figure 4 below.



Patterns are evident in Figure 4 above. The percentage of participants interviewed by both male and female interviewers, female interviewers only and male interviewers

only is similar. More interestingly, the percentages of participants who thought that the interviewer(s) knew of their sexual orientation were almost exactly the same in all three categories. In those interviews conducted by both female and male interviewers, 21.5% of participants thought that the interviewers knew of their sexual orientation. This figure was also 21.5% when the interviewer(s) was female and 23.5% when the interviewer(s) was male.

With all categories of interviewer(s), the highest percentage in all categories is “no, were not aware of the participant’s sexual orientation at the time of their job interview.” The statistics indicate that there may, however, be a relationship between the gender(s) of the interviewer(s) and a lack of knowledge about the interviewee’s sexual orientation. According to the responses, male interviewers were least knowledgeable, with 71.5% perceived as not knowing. Participants’ perceptions were that 61% of interviewers who were both male and female and 43.5% of those who were female did not know of the interviewees’ sexual orientation.

The third “don’t know” option in Question 8 was selected by 19.5% of participants, indicating that this proportion did not know if their interviewer(s) were aware of their sexual orientation or not. Thirty five percent of those interviewer(s) were female, 17.5% both female and male and only 5% male.

The data from Questions 7 and 8 suggest some relationship between gender of interviewer and the degree of knowledge of the interviewee’s sexual orientation.

What the data does not show is the relationship between gender of interviewers, their knowledge of the participant’s sexual orientation and how this influenced decisions



to appoint or not appoint the applicants. However, some illumination can be gained through reading the comments of participants.

The statistics discussed above throw no light on whether participants deliberately chose to disclose their sexual orientation at interviews or, in those interviews where their sexual orientation was known, how the interviewers became aware of this. However, many participants chose to write about these points and several themes emerge from their explanations. The following comment from a participant encapsulates many of these.

*At the time I didn't think so/know so. But evidently, 'Yes' they knew what they were getting. I found this out from a Guidance Counsellor. I gather one of my referees said something.*

*I chose not to say anything in the interview as I don't think they need to know. I did research to make sure there would be support in the school (colleagues) as this is important to me.*

*I applied for an HOD position in a provincial town in the S I (not the job now in). Got an interview. After the initial harrowing hours of what shall I wear, I went wearing moleskin pants, linen shirt, sleeveless vest, looking PE/outdoorsy. I guess if you think in the terms of sexuality – perhaps a little less than straight (see glossary entry). Had a good interview, met lots of people, had a good look round the school in action etc. Got rung a couple of days later to be told “No, not offering you the position. It's not because of who you are I hasten to add.” Interesting comment. Further to that, I found one of my referees answered a question a little strangely. I had to ask 3 people and had 2 from my current school, plus this person who actually used to teach me and I'd done a lot of work/coaching for her so she knows me well and how I interact with people but has never seen me in a formal teaching school role. It was a question about how I would get on with students, colleagues parents/caregivers. It was something to do with parents/caregivers once they got to know me it'll be fine. And that in itself was interesting for her as a gay woman to write that about me as a gay woman. She told me about it later ... and I didn't go into it in detail at the time, but I must talk with her about it again.*

*I'm now very much of the opinion if I couldn't be 'me' in a school or feel comfortable, well, I don't want to teach there (QA 50).*



The first of the common themes mentioned by this participant is that the interviewers had gained information about her sexual orientation from ‘outside’ the interview or her job application.

Secondly, many participants felt that those interviewing applicants for teaching positions “don’t need to know”. Others put this more strongly, saying that interviewers have “no right to know”. Some cited human rights legislation and the Secondary Teachers’ Collective Employment Contract in support of these views.

A third theme to emerge from participants’ comments in relation to Question 8 was that they had made a conscious decision not to disclose their sexual orientation at the interview. Six participants related this to their belief that interviewers had no need/right to know but also stated that, if asked about their sexual orientation, they would have answered honestly.

A fourth theme that emerged in participants’ comments about job interviews was that they researched the school at which they were applying to ascertain how ‘lesbian friendly’ it was. Many commented that they would not even apply to a school which had the reputation of being homophobic.

The question of how to present oneself at the interview was the fifth identifiable theme in responses to Questions 7 and 8. Some participants stated that they had attempted to present themselves visually as heterosexual or, more accurately perhaps, as not obviously lesbian. For some this involved wearing skirts and makeup which

they would not usually wear. Others, often those who recorded that they were out at their interview, made no mention of how they dressed for this.

The sixth theme to emerge in response to Questions 7 and 8 is that of passing as heterosexual (see glossary entry) when applying for employment. One aspect of this, dressing for the interview, has already been noted, but passing has more than one element.

*I mentioned I was recently separated from a marriage of 22 years, and had 'adult' children. (This was on my CV.) Any other information should not have affected my appointment, it certainly was not their business. Funnily enough though, I was out to the principal's secretary before I took up my position. She was the person corresponding with me and she asked if my partner and I would meet her at her church for a social evening using the words she/he. I came out in my response to her (QA 47).*

Five participants mentioned talking of children/grandchildren and two mentioned talking of husbands or ex-husbands in the application process.

The final theme to emerge from comments related to Questions 7 and 8 was the uncertainty as to whether sexual orientation was the reason for not being appointed to a position. As one participant pointed out, there can be many reasons why an application is unsuccessful and sexual orientation is only one of these. Three participants commented that, if sexual orientation was the reason for their non-appointment, this could not be articulated as it would indicate that those appointing were in breach of employment legislation.

### **Question 9**

This question asked the participant if her sexual orientation had ever been the reason for her not applying for a job in teaching. The second part of the question invited the

participant to explain her response to the first part. Sixty percent of participants recorded that their sexual orientation had been part of their decision not to apply for a job. Forty percent said that their sexual orientation had not influenced such a decision.

In their responses to this question, many participants indicated that they had researched attitudes to sexual orientation in the schools to which they were considering applying.

*I have always considered carefully where I apply for jobs. Of course I look at the place holistically but I specifically find out how gay staff are supported. I got it wrong in my first school and had an unhappy time especially enduring the homophobic comments and jokes in the staffroom. I only stayed a couple of terms and then moved on. A school's attitude to gays and lesbians says a lot about their general attitudes to diversity. Everyone deserves respect (QA 62)*

For the 40% of participants who answered, “no, sexual orientation has not been a factor in my decision not to apply for a job”, the most common themes in their responses were that their sexual orientation had no effect on the way they worked, what was important was their ability to do the job, and that their sexual orientation should not be relevant to any prospective employer.

*I consider my ability and qualifications to be more important to a school so if a job came up at any school I would apply for it. It wouldn't be based on my sexuality and whether or not I thought the type of school would be accepting of my sexuality (QA 52).*

Participants made such points regardless of whether their sexual orientation was known or unknown to interviewers.

*I have applied for jobs I have felt capable of doing. If my sexuality was going to be a problem it was for the other party to decide that. My referees have always known of my sexuality and I am aware of it being discussed between my principal and the principal of a school at which I applied for a job as an AP. It formed the basis of a tactfully phrased*

*question in the interview about how I would cope with life in a small town and lack of privacy. I was offered the job but turned it down for reasons other than my sexuality (QA 37).*

Of the 60% of participants who indicated that their sexual orientation had influenced a decision not to apply for a job, 80% mentioned the religious character of some schools. The comment which follows states this clearly. It is interesting that the participant quoted here works in an integrated (religious) school.

*[I did not apply to] a strong “Christian” based school in [x city]. I would have liked to work there, but their fundamentalist beliefs made me think twice and not apply. You also had to state that you were a Christian and which church you attended on the application form (QA 36).*

Other participants commented that their sexuality was the reason that they had chosen to work at particular types of schools.

*All-girls’ schools I think would be strange for me. Also that I look and present myself as quite dykey – I don’t feel like that would be acceptable at many prestigious or religious schools (QA 40).*

*I was very keen to work in a girls’ school as the environment is very much female (not only the students of course – but 80% of the staff as well!) (QA 39).*

Four participants responded that they had chosen to teach in lower-decile schools.

The comment which follows includes all the reasons given for this:

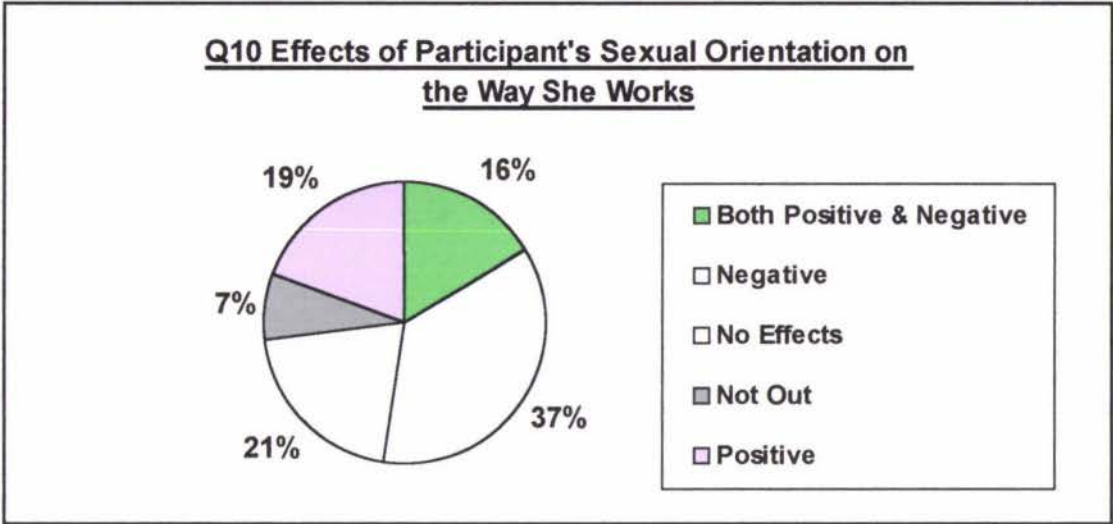
*I choose to work in low decile schools. My sexuality is part of the reasons for this. Lower decile schools are places of great diversity where difference is not only accepted but recognised and treasured – including sexuality. Our kids and parents are far more concerned about the basics – reading and writing and exams. They judge you on how well you teach, not on irrelevancies like sexuality. Our staff are a diverse lot too – we have to be to succeed with our kids (QA 59).*



**Question 10**

Question 10 asked how the participant’s sexual orientation affected the way she worked in her present school. The data from this question is summarised in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5**



Thirty-seven percent of participants feel that their sexual orientation (including others’ perceptions of it) had negative effects on the way they worked. Twenty-one percent felt that this had no effect on the way they worked, as do 7% of participants who stated specifically that there were no effects because they are not out at school. Nineteen percent of participants found that their sexual orientation had positive effects on the way they worked and 16% recorded that there were both positive and negative effects. Some participants recorded particular effects as negative while others recorded these same effects as positive.

Effects recorded as negative included the need to protect oneself against the possible allegation of sexual harassment/abuse of a student, the need to deal with (or accept) negative comments/verbal harassment from students, the need to work harder than

heterosexual colleagues, the stress of having to hide an essential part of oneself at school and having to endure staff room homophobic comments and jokes. The following participant comments typify those received.

*As a Dean, I am quite conscious of not placing myself in a situation with female students where I would be open to complaints. Would never be in a room alone with a female student who I did not trust/have any knowledge of.*

*With the staff, my sexuality makes no difference as far as I am concerned (QA 37).*

Emerging from the data is the negative effect of adapting one's teaching practice to avoid malicious complaints by students of sexual harassment or sexual abuse. These were of particular concern to some participants who were teachers of physical education or coaches/managers of sports teams.

*It has been very unpleasant with some groups of students – snide comments in corridors and when I first came to the school (mid-way through 2001) the stress from the kids got to me and I did spend some time with the counsellor – and got some stress days off. But I'm fine with my co-workers. The woman I most closely work with was uncomfortable at first, but she has since asked lots of questions, and we now work fine (QA 47).*

*I'm very aware that I need to be perceived as an effective teacher and as one who works hard. This may have been so anyway but, as a lesbian, I think it is even more important. I don't want to give them any excuse to block my promotion. There are only a limited number of schools in this area where I can work so it's a small network. If you get offside with one principal you can kiss goodbye any chance of getting a job with another (QA 7).*

*Only two of my close friends on staff know that I have a female partner the rest don't so the comments and jokes in the staffroom are sometimes not very P.C. I sometimes find it quite difficult to say nothing – especially when it's lesbian jokes but there is nothing I can do really. I try not to spend too much time in the staffroom and I suppose this has effects on the way I work. I don't always hear what's going on.*

*If they knew I was lesbian it would be very difficult as I teach in a school with special character and they don't have to employ me. I don't volunteer to do extra things in my department any more which in some ways is a positive I suppose – workload. My HOD is*

*really into rugby and often uses sexist language and jokes so working with him is a real trial. This does affect the way I work – I would give more if I didn't feel so uncomfortable around him (QA 21).*

For the 19% who recorded that their sexual orientation had positive effects on the way they did their work, these positives fell into two main areas. Firstly, several participants mentioned the camaraderie that exists in some schools between lesbian and gay members of staff and the positive effects this had on the way they taught. Secondly, some participants felt that they were positive role models for students, and to their school communities more generally. This resulted in students who were questioning their sexuality selecting these teachers as mentors/counsellors; staff also turned to them for advice about lesbian and gay students and sexuality education. These points were also mentioned by three participants as negative effects. Two stated that they were not qualified as counsellors and one of these that she received no time allowance for counselling. All three indicated that advising staff took valuable time and they did not enjoy the role of spokeswoman for the lesbian/gay community. The last positive effect that one participant mentioned is that she was able to choose teaching texts that are lesbian and gay positive.

*I choose to include poems, drama, texts, novels etc. that involve gay/lesbian characters or that have been written by gay/lesbian authors/poets (QA 5).*

The following comments are typical of those that participants offered in support of the idea that sexual orientation had a positive effect on the way they worked.

*Only in a positive sense. There are three other lesbians on the staff who all hold PR positions and so this provides an additional 'bond' that enhances the working relationship (QA 39).*



*Of course being lesbian has an effect on my teaching, I don't leave bits of me outside the classroom and lesbian is 'wot I am' – the kids know this and we all respect each other. There are no put-downs in my room be they based on sexuality or anything else. I quite often get students – males and females – come and chat to me. Sometimes they are curious but there are always two or three a year who are struggling with their own sexuality and want to know that it's ok. It's great that I can help them (QA 51).*

Twenty-one percent of participants stated that their sexual orientation had no effect on the way they worked but, even within this group, the comments made suggested some effect.

*My sexuality doesn't affect my teaching at all – nor should it. I'm there to deliver the curriculum to each student in the class as effectively as possible. Why should my sexuality matter at all? I suppose I am more sensitive about gay put downs in my class and students soon learn this and don't do it but this doesn't affect my delivery of curriculum (QA 41).*

The remark above is similar to those made by others who noted that they were more aware of the use of homophobic language by students and, to a much lesser degree, staff. Three participants observed that they were sensitive not only to homophobic language use but also negative language referring to other minority groups. There was a similar recognition of the importance of language use in the observation which follows. This participant included within her comment an acknowledgement of her own use of language.

*I am more aware of what I say in class that might offend gay students – obviously – and I am more aware of students using the word 'gay' in a negative way or when they are discussing in general but it doesn't affect my work (QA 52).*

This raises the question of whether the participant's 'awareness' extended to attempted modification of her students' negative use of 'gay'. If it did then there was an effect on her teaching.



Sixteen percent of the participants felt that their sexual orientation had both a positive and negative effect on the way they worked. Most of the reasons given for this are included in the comments above. One other participant mentioned that her sexual orientation affected her choice of teaching texts. Her reasoning was different from that used by the teacher above (QA 5, page 113).

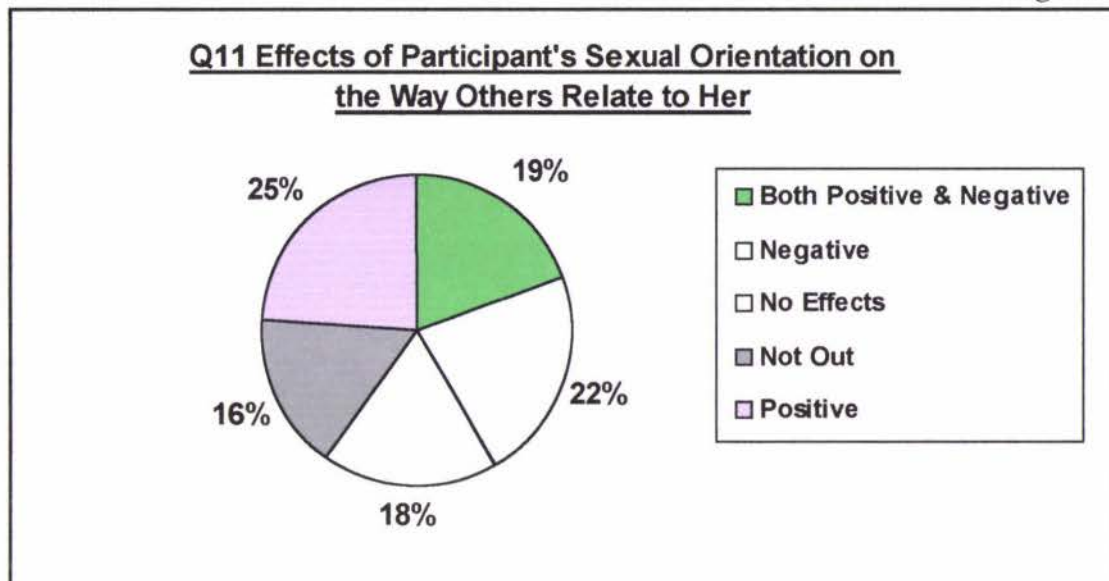
*I'm English HOD and there are certain texts that deal with homosexuality that I don't buy for the department - but primarily because I teach in a small rural town where attitudes to that issue are still pretty backward. (QA 3)*

As noted above, several participants felt that because their sexual orientation was not known to others, their orientation had no effect on the way they worked. This idea will be explored later in Chapter Seven.

### **Question 11**

This question asked participants to think of their present school and comment on how their sexual orientation affected the ways in which others (including students) worked with them or related to them at work. Participants' answers to this question are summarised in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6



Twenty-five percent of participants felt the effects on their school relationships were positive and almost as many, 22%, felt they were negative. Nineteen percent noted both positive and negative effects. Eighteen percent recorded that their sexual orientation had no effect on the ways others worked with them or related to them at school. A further 16% stated that, as they were not out at work, their sexual orientation had no effect on the way others worked with them or related to them. This last perception will be discussed in the following chapter.

Two participants' comments encapsulate those made by almost all others in relation to Question 11. These refer to the positive effects of lesbian and gay teachers working together and supporting each other, to homophobic staff and students making life unpleasant and stressful, and to the importance of having supportive management and an open and accepting environment.

*Occasionally, the Guidance Counsellor may ask my advice etc. over lesbian students or, in one instance, talk to a student who came out.*

*I have had two separate instances where female students have been deliberately*

*obnoxious to me and set out to cause trouble. The first one “came out” as a lesbian a year after leaving school. I await an outcome from the second student!!!*

*One Maori male staff member deliberately set out to create a barrier between myself and a Maori family where I had a guidance relationship with the female student as he's Dean and teacher. This ended in a complaint by me to the principal as the nature of the allegations he made to the family were racist and homophobic. The complaint was upheld and an apology made.*

*In 2000, a Year 13 student who chose me to mentor her turned out to be quite homophobic, in spite of knowing I was lesbian. I had taught her elder sister and got on well with her. She was a devout Roman Catholic and no doubt the teachings of her church led to her position on gays and lesbians. It was difficult to discuss the matter with her in any rational, logical way but we managed to survive through to the end of the year.*

*There may be a perception that I am unsympathetic towards male students from some male staff of the chauvinistic variety. However, I believe that the way others relate to me has more to do with my personality traits, work ethic etc. than my sexuality (QA 37)*

The second comment mentions the support of other staff and makes some very different points as well.

*My sexuality has had an effect on the way some others work with me. Some of these effects have been positive which is great but others have been quite stressful even soul destroying. Gay and lesbian staff work well together in my school. We seem to have a common bond.*

*As we work in a number of different departments and at different levels of the hierarchy this has resulted in a number of positive things for students like developing cross curricula studies based on a common theme – we did the work and took it back to our departments.*

*It's always great to have an empathetic ear when I need it and great that there is more than one pair of these. We have a large staff and some are right wing and sometimes homophobes but most are accepting and inclusive and I work well with most and we respect each other. In fact most staff are sensitive about students' name calling and nastiness so there is not much name calling etc. I had one member of my department refuse to work with me when I first came to the school (8 years ago). This caused me a great deal of stress and adversely affected how I did my job but he was given an instruction by the principal to treat me respectfully. He left the school shortly after (to a job with a [\*\*\*\*\*] company).*

*In the small school I first taught at (10 years ago) I had a dreadful time with some of the junior students and a small group of parents who complained about me to the principal. It was a city school so I had not expected the negativism. The principal seemed to support*

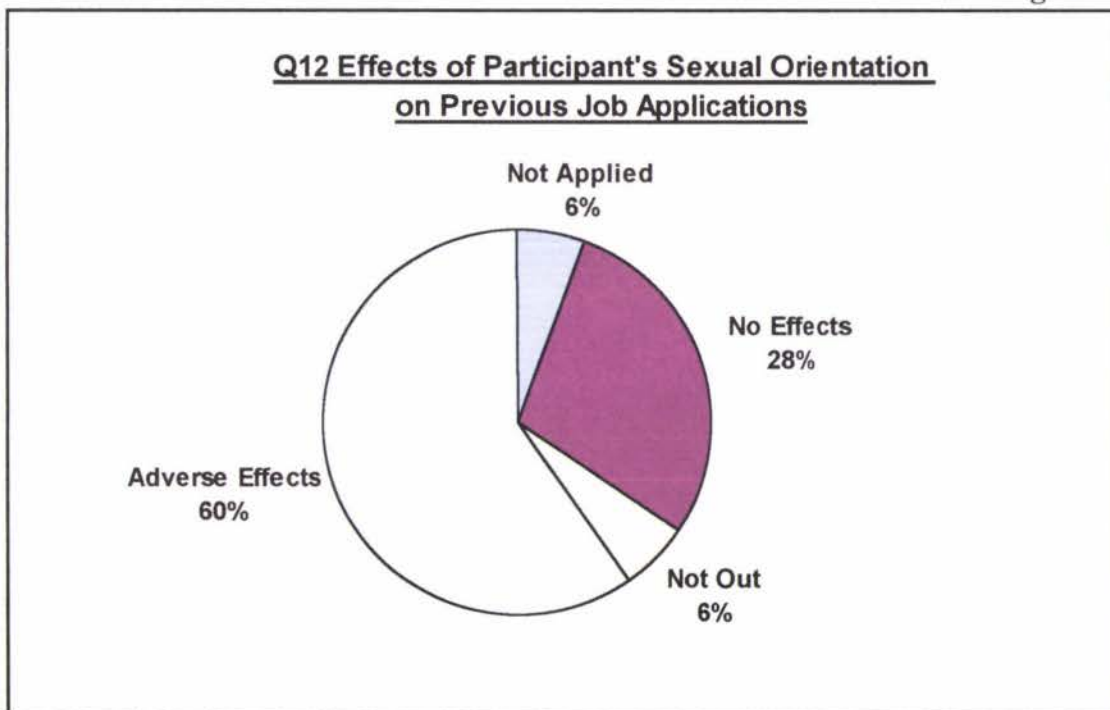
*the parents but we had a great PPTA person and she helped me sort it out. (The principal was friends with some of the parents outside school.) I was told by the principal that I would have to learn to put up with the nasty behaviour of some junior students – this was just normal teenage (male) behaviour. I was relieved to find a job in another school (QA 34).*

Some of the points included by QA 34 will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

## Question 12

This question asked if the participant felt that her sexual orientation had ever affected how she applied for a job. The responses are summarised in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7



As shown in Figure 7, 60% of participants felt that their sexual orientation had affected the way they had applied for a job. Twenty-eight percent felt that it had not. Six percent stated that this was not a relevant question because they were not out, therefore their sexual orientation was unknown and had no effects on how they



applied for employment. Six percent of participants had not been required to present themselves for an interview in person. They had been appointed after a telephone interview. These participants felt that sexual orientation, not asked about, was irrelevant to their appointment process.

Those who commented that their sexual orientation had not affected the way they applied for a job commented, most often, that this was irrelevant to the employment process. Some opined that to be asked about this was against employment legislation.

*I've never thought about my sexuality when I've applied for a job. My CV is about me as a teacher and has nothing to do with my sexuality, nor should it. Under H. R. legislation my sexuality or marriage status is not an appropriate question to be asked (QA 28).*

Participants who did feel that their sexual orientation had affected the way they applied for a job divided these effects into those connected to the application process and those connected to the job interview.

Some of these participants commented that the way they applied for a job included strategies to conceal their sexual orientation. These strategies included not using an honorific (Ms.), not mentioning family/partners on their application form or deliberately mentioning husbands/ex-husbands or children/grandchildren, not including an email address which might have led the employer to question the applicant's sexual orientation, and being careful to list referees who either did not know of the applicant's sexuality or would not mention this.

*I thought hard before I filled in the application form. The job was important to us. We had not long been together and were moving from [provincial centre] to [city]. I was still*

*coming out to myself (4 yrs ago) I certainly didn't want the embarrassment of being asked if I had a same sex partner. I used Mrs on the form (I still was) and included my children and my involvement with Brownies. I wore a really smart suit and heels (and makeup!) to the interview. As it happened it was probably all a waste of time – the BOT rep at the interview was a lesbian I had met at a friend's place the day before. I don't know whether she said anything. I got the job (QA 19).*

As recorded above, a number of participants mentioned the special care that they took to dress for the interview in a way that did not appear typically lesbian. One mentioned having to go out and buy a skirt because she did not own one and felt it was necessary when applying for a deputy principal position. Some participants mentioned, as noted earlier, that others had disclosed their sexual orientation to the interviewer(s).

*I applied for a counselling job in a school where I was a teacher. The principal felt it necessary to tell the BOT that I was a lesbian. I was extremely upset and felt it had a definite part in not getting the job. Early 90s (QA 25).*

*I had got as far as being short-listed and interviewed for an HOD job I really wanted. I had spent hours on research and practice interviews and so forth. It was all going superbly until one of the board members asked me why I hadn't included my work with Rainbow Youth<sup>19</sup> and Rape Crisis on my CV. It completely threw me. I made a complete mess of the rest of the interview. I still don't know where he got the information but I'm certain it's why I didn't get the job (QA 27).*

### **Question 13**

This question asked if the participant's sexual orientation had ever affected her promotion or professional recognition of the work she did. As shown in Figure 8

below, 43% of participants stated that they had never applied for promotion, 33% said that their sexual orientation had not affected their promotion and a further 9% recorded that, because their sexual orientation was hidden, it had no effect on their promotion. Fifteen percent of participants felt that their sexual orientation had hindered their promotion. Of the 33% of participants who recorded that their sexual orientation had not affected their promotion, most stated that their performance at work was the key to their promotion.

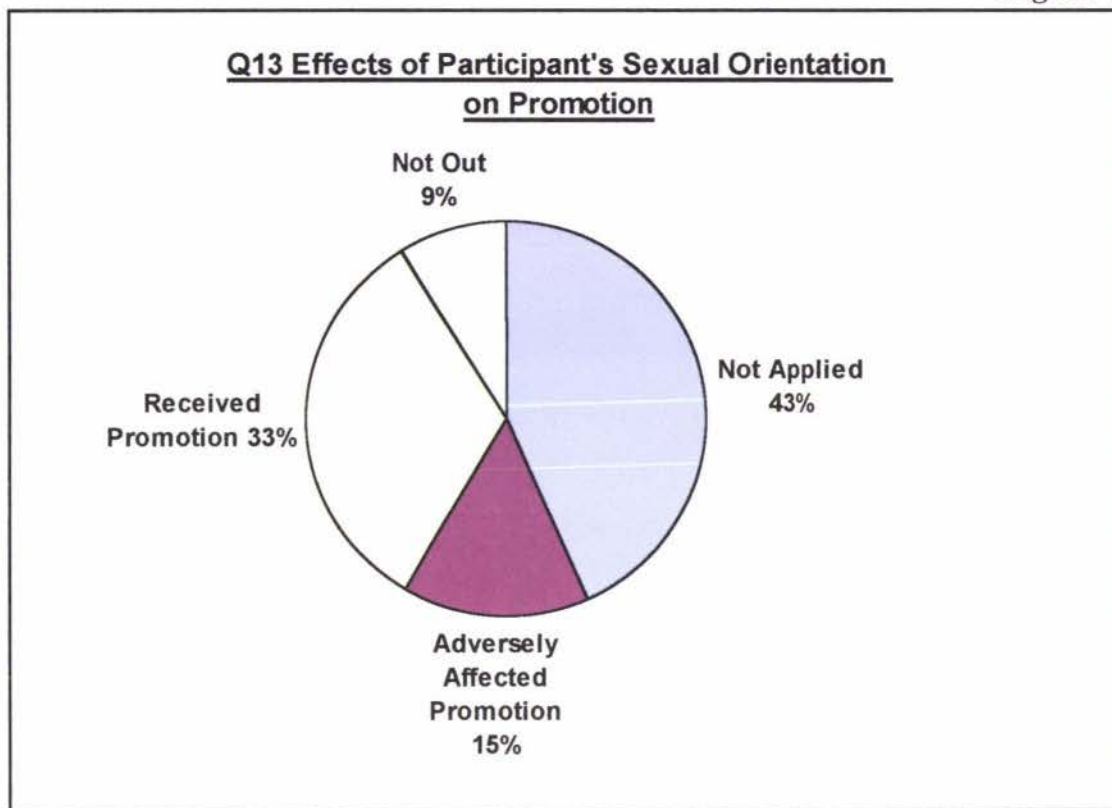
*Why should my sexuality affect promotion? Surely promotion depends on one's ability to do the job and the principal's evaluation that one is capable of so doing. (Silly question!)*  
(QA 19).

Apparently, this participant did not perceive homophobia as a possible reason for failing to secure promotion.

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<sup>19</sup> Rainbow Youth is a New Zealand support organization for young (under 27) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. They have welfare and educative functions and work widely with other agencies such as Auckland Sexual Health, Child Youth and Family and the Methodist Mission.

Figure 8



The 15% of participants who felt that their sexual orientation had negatively affected their promotion included specific examples of when they had perceived this to be so.

*Currently (with new management) I feel that both my gender and my sexuality are being used against me. When speaking to my principal, if a male (hetero) is present then the conversation will primarily be addressed to him. Programmes that I had running were sidelined when the new principal was appointed and some are no longer running due to lack of principal support. I have been told that the principal is scared of me! Don't know how much this is to do with sexuality or being a woman with a brain.*

*I am now looking for a job outside my current school as I feel I have been sidelined where I am and that my career path has been blocked (QA 7).*

*Homophobic HOD and AP in school some years ago. Extreme harassment by these individuals. Manipulation of capna [see glossary entry] to push me out. This despite my (teaching) success in outside exams including top student in combined schools for new subject introduced that year. PPTA involved (QA 14).*



*I was in the closet when I came to this school three years ago. At the interview the principal stated that should I reach certain performance goals related to improvements in student attendance and qualification attainment that I would be promoted to AP and given two more units. I came out a year or so ago – just before my annual review. The principal had previously intimated that my promotion was certain (I had achieved the set goals and even exceeded them) but after the review he told me that the BOT had vetoed my promotion (QA 23)*

*I've been at [school] for 4 years. During the last 2 I've applied for 3 jobs as a dean. I have done PD<sup>20</sup> to make sure I'm qualified but each time I've failed to get the job. After my last failure I found the nerve to ask the principal why and he suggested that if I wanted promotion that I apply for positions where there was less direct contact with parents. I asked him why this would help but he became evasive and told me that I really didn't want advice. I was that angry that I considered going to the union but once I'd cooled down I decided to look for a job somewhere else. I'm still looking (QA 48).*

None of the participants above included concrete evidence that their sexual orientation had been the reason that they had failed to gain promotion. Such evidence would be difficult to obtain in circumstances where it is illegal for an employer to discriminate. However, it is clear that they each perceive their sexual orientation to be the cause.

#### **Question 14**

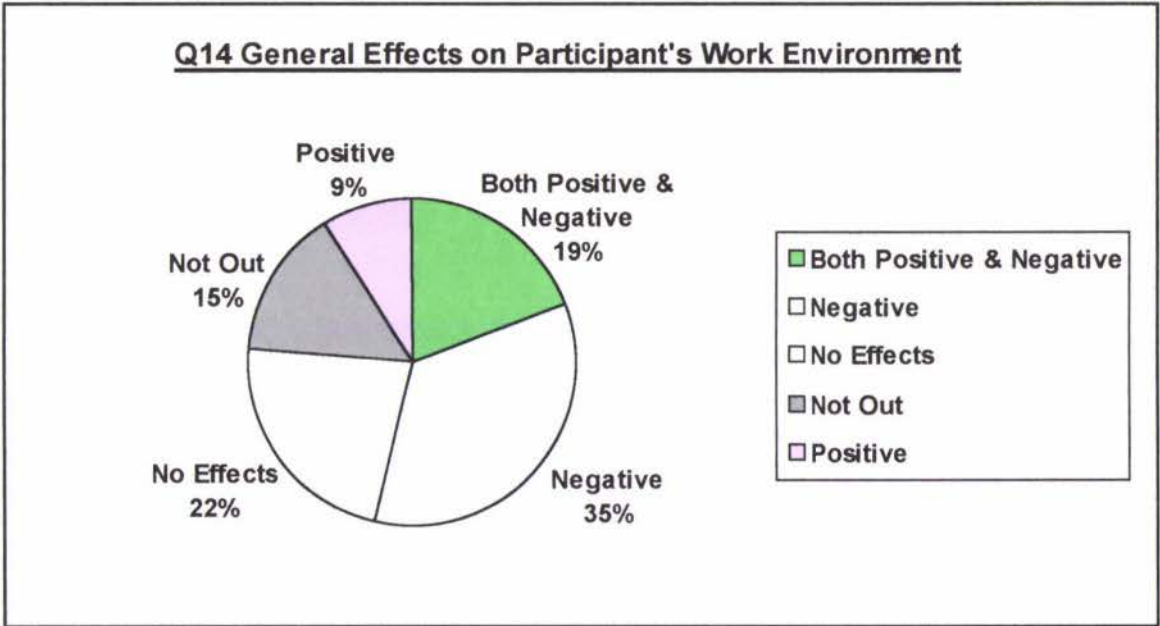
This question asked if, generally, the participant's work in secondary schools, her working conditions or the way others treated her at work had been affected by her sexual orientation. The information collected by this enquiry is valuable in itself but the question was also included to compare with the answers given in Questions 10 and 11, as a test of validity. As can be seen in Figure 9 below, 35% of participants

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<sup>20</sup> Professional development

recorded that their sexual orientation had had negative effects on their work, the treatment they had received from others, and/or their working conditions. Twenty-two percent said that their sexual orientation had had no effects. Fifteen percent recorded that because they were not out at school their sexual orientation had had no effect on their work, treatment or conditions. Nineteen percent recorded both positive and negative effects and 9% positive ones only.

Figure 9



The effects recorded by participants answering this question are in some ways similar to those recorded for Questions 10 and 11 which ask about the effects of participant's sexual orientation at work. Participants who commented on positive aspects of the way others treated them included points like the fact that some staff were careful about what was said when they were present. This, two participants suggested, was positive: it made those who might be homophobic more aware of their language and the potential for this to have negative effects on those who were lesbian or gay (or

<sup>20</sup> Professional development

who belonged to other minority groups). One participant commented (as quoted below) on the differences in attitudes between those at urban schools and those in rural ones. Collegiality amongst lesbian and gay staff was also mentioned again, as were the positive (and negative) aspects of helping students who are questioning their sexual orientation.

Negative comments made by participants refer to: verbal harassment and lack of management support when this occurred, the less friendly and supportive environment in a rural school, nasty gossip, and the inability to relax when teaching. One participant commented on the difficulties she had during the passage of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill in the mid-1980s and another on a principal who recognised heterosexual rites of passage only. The following comments encapsulate those which were made.

*I can't relax completely and enjoy my teaching. My sexual orientation is my business – no one knew I was gay then I was on holiday in Sydney with my partner and we were spotted by a couple of my fourth formers. Now I'm getting snide remarks in the corridor and about the place and a bit of provocative anti-gay language in class. I don't bother responding. They'll get tired of it soon (QA 67).*

*In the 80s when the Homosexual Law Reform Bill was going through – things got a bit tense, (Although I wasn't treated any differently by staff – it was really difficult for me to treat pleasantly those staff who had publicly identified themselves as opposed to the Bill) (QA 39).*

*Sometimes it is lonely, but it would be for anyone new to a small school (400+ students) – rural. A lot of the staff have been here for 20+ years – very set in their ways. Yet, I have had real positive response from some teachers. At my last school (where I first came 'out' to the world) there was a real close knit gay and gay friendly group, this school was low decile, inner city, but there was real support there – I miss it (QA 47).*



*Staff, student and parent gossip can be extremely scary and sometimes damaging. However, I have also seen that happen to young female heterosexual teachers so it is not exclusive to being gay. People are sometimes more careful what they say around you than before you come out and they guide all students with issues (about their sexual orientation) toward you (QA 69).*

*Our principal always recognises “straight” personal achievements of staff eg. Weddings, engagements, birth of children/grandchildren,. I feel that my relationship with my partner or decisions to commit in similar ways have not been recognised (QA 14).*

*Name calling “leso”, “faggot” “pervert” – nasty notes on desk for a time which I think were left by fourth form boys – gossip that suggested I was abusing girl students (QA 13).*

*Over the years 1992-1994 whilst I was teaching at a co-ed school in the lower North Island I felt isolated by the management in the school and totally unsupported when I was having difficulties with students who were name calling (‘lemon’ ‘lessie’ etc) and hassling me.*

*Many staff were supportive within the staffroom but none took a proactive role to help alleviate the problem*

*It was a dangerous environment for me as there was a climate of bullying.*

*That school was difficult for anyone who was different.. It was one of the most unpleasant experiences I have ever had teaching (QA 28).*

## **Question 15**

This question asked if the participant’s sexual orientation had been the reason or part of the reason why she had changed jobs, either within a school or to a new school.

Seventy-two percent of participants responded “no” to this question, 28% “yes”.

The majority of those who recorded that their sexual orientation was a factor in a change of jobs moved either because they felt they had to change schools or because they thought they would be happier elsewhere. However, three recorded that they were dismissed; two through the abuse of the redeployment procedures (capna – see glossary entry) used to reduce staff in schools with falling rolls.

*I 'came out'/formed my first serious relationship in a South Island town (i.e. <30,000 pop'n.) and as the mother of the person I was going out with worked with me, I felt it was appropriate to move on. Also in the late 80s small town N.Z. was not exactly accepting of lesbians or gays. A large city seemed a better alternative and also 'housed' a larger lesbian community (QA 37).*

*In 1999 I knew I could not survive in my marriage any longer, so I went to teachers' college to give myself a career to support myself, so I saw the 'education sector' as a 'safe' place to come out in. I had always wanted to be a teacher (I have two older brothers who are), but my real push came as an escape route (QA 47).*

*Absolutely – 2001 – having gone from being a "heterosexual" teacher to a "closeted lesbian" teacher in the same school I felt I had to move schools. It was almost the sole reason for me moving. I was able to gain a promotion to H.O.D. which covered up the reason I was leaving (QA 69).*

*The only person who has ever treated me poorly at work is my partner's brother-in-law. We taught at the same school and he made very rude comments about my relationship/sexuality to other colleagues. I left the school for another position at a different school because of his behaviour (QA 33).*

*I had to leave the school because the capra process was manipulated to ensure that I did. PPTA would have fought it for me but I decided that I didn't need the stress. Some staff were really supportive especially the DP who was a closet gay. He was the only person on the management who was honest about why I was got rid of (QA 11)*

## **Question 16**

Question 16 asked, firstly, if the participant's school had a policy on sexual harassment. Eighty-two percent of participants said that their school did have such a policy, 3% said that their school did not and 15% did not know. Of the percentage of participants who worked in state schools, 90% recorded that their school had a sexual harassment policy, 10% that they did not know if the school had one. For private, secular, schools the figures were 56% "yes", 22% "no" and 22% "don't

know”. Of the percentage of participants who taught in ‘religious’ schools, 67% recorded that their school did have a policy on sexual harassment and 33% did not know. Given the small numbers of participants from private schools, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from this data.

It is interesting that some participants recorded that their school did not have a policy on sexual harassment when this is a mandatory requirement under the “good employer” provisions of the State Sector Act 1988, the Employment Relations Act 2000 and also under National Administration Guidelines<sup>21</sup> (Educational Management Solutions, 2002). It may be that all schools do have a sexual harassment policy and that this was not known by some of this study’s participants.

The specific inclusion of lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgendered people in the school’s sexual harassment policy formed the second part of Question 16. This question differentiated between “sexuality” as a general term, meaning all variations of human sexuality, and coverage specifically of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgendered people.

Of participants who indicated that their school had a sexual harassment policy, 46% said that this included general reference to sexuality, 27% that the policy included sexual orientation (15% that gay and lesbian were specifically mentioned), 20% said that there was no inclusion of sexuality or sexual orientation and 7% did not know if there was inclusion or not. No participant mentioned the inclusion of bisexual or

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<sup>21</sup> Private schools also operate under the National Administrative Guidelines so are required to have a policy on sexual harassment.



transgendered people in her school's sexual harassment policy. However, one participant made the following comment:

*I co-wrote it. There was a conscious decision not to specify sexualities because it is impossible to be all-inclusive. So our clause reads, "... on the basis of sexuality." However, in Health classes the definition is explored with students (QA 54).*

Twenty-four participants, 35% of the total sample, noted that they had been involved in the writing or revision of their school's sexual harassment policy. Five of these, each out to everyone at school or to all staff, noted that their participation had been at the instigation of a member of the management team.

#### **Question 17**

This question asked if the participant had come out (i.e. disclosed her lesbian sexual orientation when she had previously been assumed to be heterosexual) during the time she had been teaching. Those participants who had not done so were asked to skip to the classification data on the following page. Fifty-one percent of participants had not come out while teaching at a school, and 49% had.

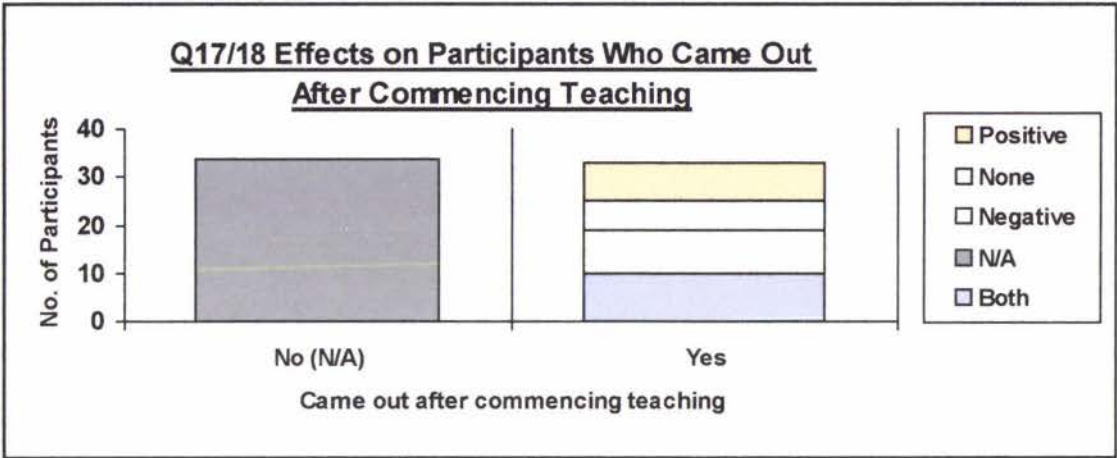
#### **Question 18**

Question 18 asked those teachers who had come out whilst teaching to note any changes in the way staff, pupils or other members of the school community related to them. Those participants who recorded that others related to them in both positive and negative ways comprised 30.5% of the sample, 27% reported that others related negatively, 24% positively and 18% recorded that there were no changes in the ways others related to them after they had disclosed their sexual orientation at school.

These statistics are summarised in Figure 10 below. The "No (N/A)" on the diagram

refers to those participants who have not come out to people at a school while they were teaching there.

Figure 10



Participants who noted positive effects frequently cited respect for their honesty as one of these. Some of their comments mentioned being supported and/or defended by some staff and students, and that they were welcomed into the lesbian/gay staff sub-group.

The participants who noted negative changes included homophobic comments by students, loss of friends, non-supportive principals and negative comments from Christian fundamentalists.

The following participants' comments highlight both positive and negative changes in the ways others treated them once they had come out at school.

*My world had finally tipped the right way up. I was no longer concealing an important part of my core being. I was sublimely happy in my new relationship and more confident about myself and my abilities. I felt relieved that I was being honest with especially myself but others as well. The feeling is indescribable. Numbers of people commented on how happy I was and even the students noticed I was enjoying teaching. Another positive was the way*



*gay and lesbian staff included me and [partner's name] in out of school social activities. They also supported me in school (QA 58).*

*I think the only person who related unfavourably was the principal and even then, only when sexual orientation was openly discussed.*

*Our staff is, I believe, genuinely one where a person is judged on their work ethic and professionalism rather than their sexuality. There are currently three lesbians and two gay men on the staff – all highly competent and committed teachers.*

*Some parents are also aware of my sexual orientation and to my knowledge it has not caused a problem. It is always impossible to know what has been said to others about one though (QA 3 ).*

*It depends what you classify as coming out – I told at least six staff at my last school when it happened.*

*Two people who I had considered close friends no longer kept in contact with me – I had been a friend for 8 years. The other people I told were extremely supportive and caring and acknowledging of my choice. Two in particular continue to be so. I always knew I would have to lose some to win others in my decision to disclose my sexuality. It doesn't make it any easier though (QA 69).*

*Both positive and negative. There were the usual baiting comments/snide asides etc. from students. Some staff, particularly Christian fundamentalists, had problems, however my senior students were actually quite protective of me making 'defending' statements to others who tried to make negative comments. Also some (following my being re-deployed) wrote angry letter to the board (without my knowledge I might add) on my behalf. Also many staff supported me in a school that was known for very homophobic attitudes. Myself and another gay staff member worked very hard to overcome these resulting in a very positive EEO policy (QA 14).*

*They were relieved I was finally being honest as they had been pussyfooting round me for years. No negativity whatsoever at the time. If anything my relationships were improved.*

*Also my (female) partner is employed on a casual basis by the school as a relief teacher/data processor – she is a mature student completing her doctorate. She has been welcomed by the (school) community. We go to school functions as a couple and the students have been known to refer to her as my wife (QA 54).*

For one participant, however, acceptance had a slightly negative side.

*It does encourage 'liberals' to tell you about their gay sister, brother, uncle, neighbour etc.  
(all very tedious) (QA 39).*

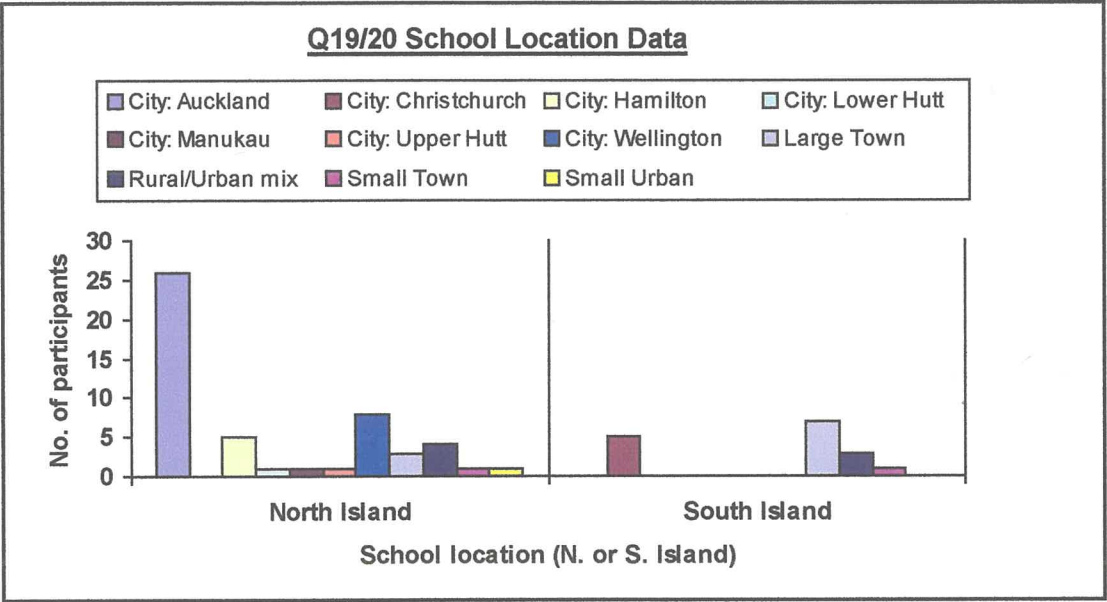
**Questions 19 to 23**

These questions were included primarily to enable the validity of the survey sample through comparison with national statistics.

**Questions 19 and 20**

Responses to these questions established, in general terms, the location of participants' schools. Question 19 asked the participant to record whether she worked in the North or South Island. Question 20 asked the participant if she worked in a city and, if so, to record the name of this. If the participant did not work in a city she was asked to record the size of the settlement in which her school was located. Results from these questions are shown in Figure 11 below.

**Figure 11**



These findings gain significance when related to participants' comments to the open-ended questions in Questions 11, which asked how the participant's sexual orientation affects the way others work with her and Question 14 which asked if the participant's work, working conditions or the way others treat her within her place of work have been affected by her sexual orientation. The participant comments below are examples of responses to these questions.

*I was in a relationship with a woman who was completely 'closeted' in my last school. Our close friends all knew and we were definitely outed by at least one close friend because with the grapevine the staff at my second teaching school in (small provincial town) knew about our relationship as did my friends down there resulting in an abusive phone call from a male friend. As a result I have changed schools and now no one knows except my one close friend who is actually the principal and his wife (QA 49)*

This participant identifies the way that gossip circulates in small towns. Presumably, the telephone call referred to was most unpleasant – it, and the gossip which motivated it, caused the participant to flee to, presumably, an environment she perceived to be safer.

*In a rural school I was bullied and victimised by parents and students and some teachers. The concerns were not voiced as "she is a lesbian and we don't tolerate lesbians." The school community accused me of no less than child abuse (well I viewed their concerns in that light). I was not supported by BOT or senior management (SM) and I had asked SM for help. I was forced to resign.*

*I drove through [town] and I was given the finger and called 'dyke bitch'. I complained to the police. The officer concerned was openly homophobic and sided with the student, (he is a parent of a pupil at the school who also bullied me at school). Management did not stop this happening; rather they disclosed information to him that caused me more problems. I shall never again apply, or try to teach, in a rugby dominated rural district (QA 2).*

The participant did not indicate when this occurred but she has only been teaching for four years so it was after the passing of the Human Rights Act 1993. It may have



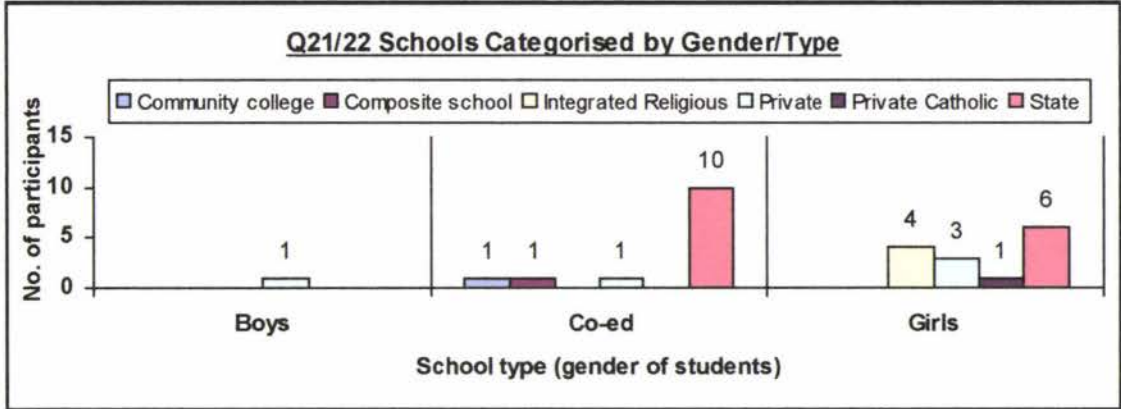
been before the passing of the Employment Relations Act 2000 which incorporates the provisions of the Human Rights Act. One has to wonder if she approached the Human Rights Commission for advice.

*I am completely closeted at school and in the area in which I live. My partner and I both teach and as far as everyone is concerned we are flatmates. We want to keep our jobs – I don't suppose for a moment that we would be fired for being lesbian – at least it wouldn't be the reason given – but I'm sure that we would soon be on our way. We saw what happened to a couple of gay men who bought a life style block in this area – they were ridiculed and the local red necks gave them a very unpleasant time – they lasted less than a year before they gave it away and moved back to [city]. Their sheep were let out and their dog was run over and no one was friendly. Most refused even to talk to them. When they went into the local pub people moved away and left them sitting on their own. You can imagine what the response would be if we came out – we teach their kids for God's sake. If we didn't enjoy our lifestyle so much I suppose we could move to a larger settlement but we manage by escaping during holidays (QA 8).*

Questions 21 and 22

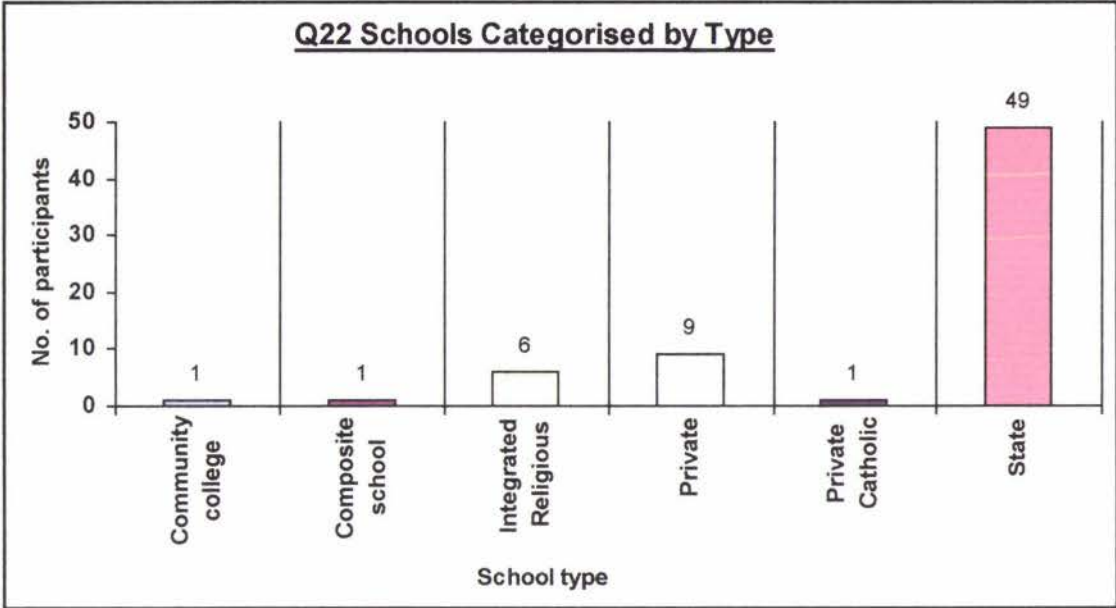
Questions 21 and 22 asked the participant to record the type of school at which she was teaching. Data from these questions is recorded on Figures 12 and 13 below.

Figure 12



What is obvious in figure 12 above is that only one participant choose to teach in a boys' school. This was a private school. Twenty-six participants taught at girls' schools and 40 at co-educational schools.

Figure 13



The small number of participants teaching at integrated religious and private Catholic schools might be explained by the exclusion that these schools have from legislation that protects the employment rights of non-heterosexual teachers. This exclusion is established in the Human Rights Act 1993, particularly section 28, the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975, and the State Sector Act 1988. Their special status is summarised by the New Zealand Catholic Education Office on their web site..

The Government recognises the Association as the official negotiating body for matters affecting Integrated Schools in general. Integrated Schools are schools within the State system of education which have a special character. This is normally of a religious nature or one which reflects a particular educational philosophy (The New Zealand Catholic Education Office, no date)

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As in the examples below, there is often reference to such schools' "special character", in job advertisements placed in the Education Gazette<sup>22</sup>.

**St Mary's College (I) - (10 Mar 2003)** Y7–13 integrated Catholic school for girls.

**Physical education**, LTR maternity position to begin term.

Applicants are required to have a commitment to high academic standards and the school's co-curricular programme. The successful candidate will be expected to support the special character of the school (Education Gazette On-line, 2 March, 2003).

**St Paul's Catholic School, Richmond - (10 Feb 2003)**

**Reading recovery**, 0.3 fixed-term for 2003, untagged Y3 class, 1½ hours every day. A willingness to uphold the special character of our school is a condition of employment (*Op cit.*).

**Cullinane College (I) - (24 Feb 2003, 10 Feb 2003)**

A new state integrated coeducational Catholic college Y7–13. Roll 480. **Assistant teacher biology to Y13 and general science**. We require an enthusiastic and innovative person to complement our new science facilities. A willingness and ability to support the special character of the school is a condition of appointment (*Op cit.*).

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<sup>22</sup> It is a Ministry of Education requirement that all teaching vacancies in New Zealand state schools, including integrated schools, be advertised in the New Zealand Education Gazette.



An integrated Catholic school principal with whom I talked denied that references in job advertisements to “special character” are designed to prevent the appointment of lesbian and gay teachers. She stated that “special character” referred to the fact that such schools are built on the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and, because of this, they employ staff who share this faith. However, one participant in this study noted that, following her failure to get an interview for a job at an integrated Catholic school, she approached the principal for an explanation. He told her that her application (which included her partner’s name) was not considered because she had a female spouse. He stated that his school was exempt from the human rights legislation and that this had been clearly stated in the job advertisement through reference to “special character”.

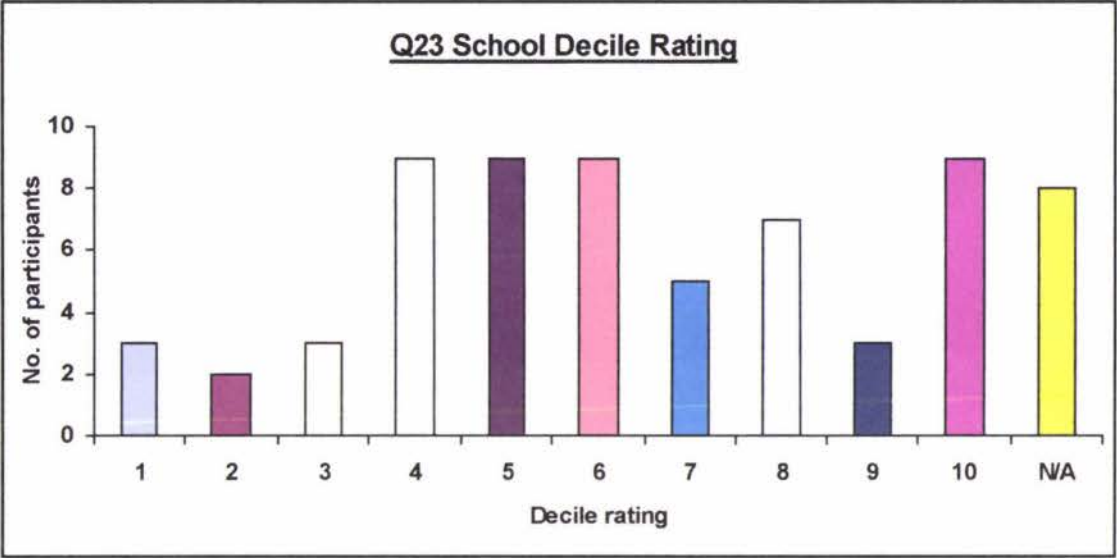
The exemption of schools of “special character” from those parts of legislation that protect the employment rights of non-heterosexual teachers is state sanction of discrimination. Lesbians employed in schools of “special character” work with the real threat of dismissal should their sexual orientation become known. This, and the general condemnation of homosexual practice by the Roman Catholic Church, may account for the relatively closeted nature of participants who work within such schools, and for the relatively low percentage of participants from such schools.

### **Question 23**

Question 23 asked participants to record the decile rating (see glossary entry) of the school in which they were teaching. Those participants teaching at private schools recorded that their schools did not have a decile rating (shown as N/A). Results from this question are found on Figure 14 below.



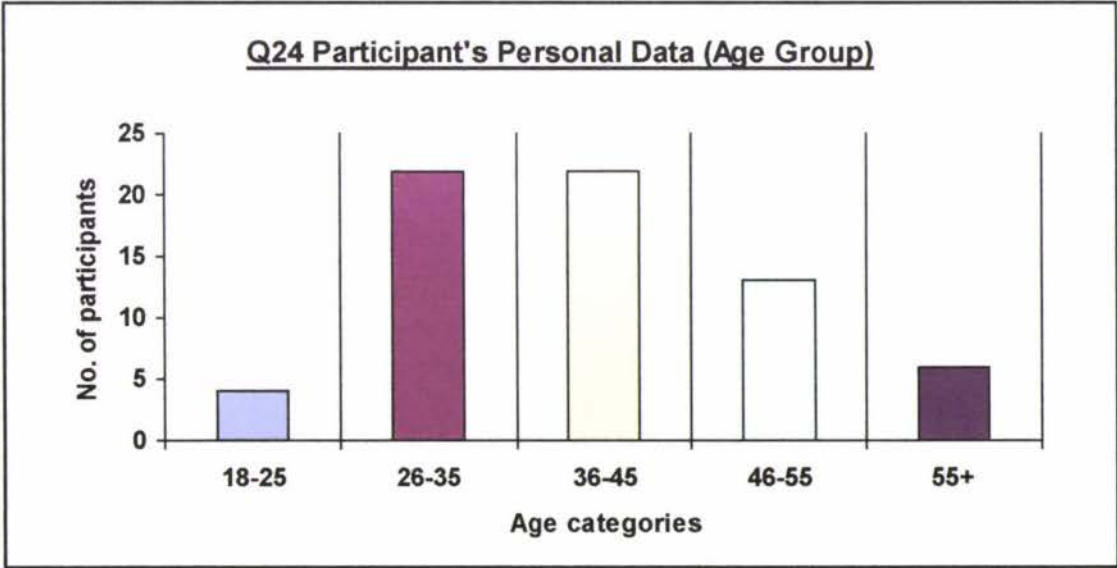
Figure 14



**Question 24**

This question asked the participant into which of five age groups her age fitted. Data from this question is shown in Figure 15 below.

Figure 15



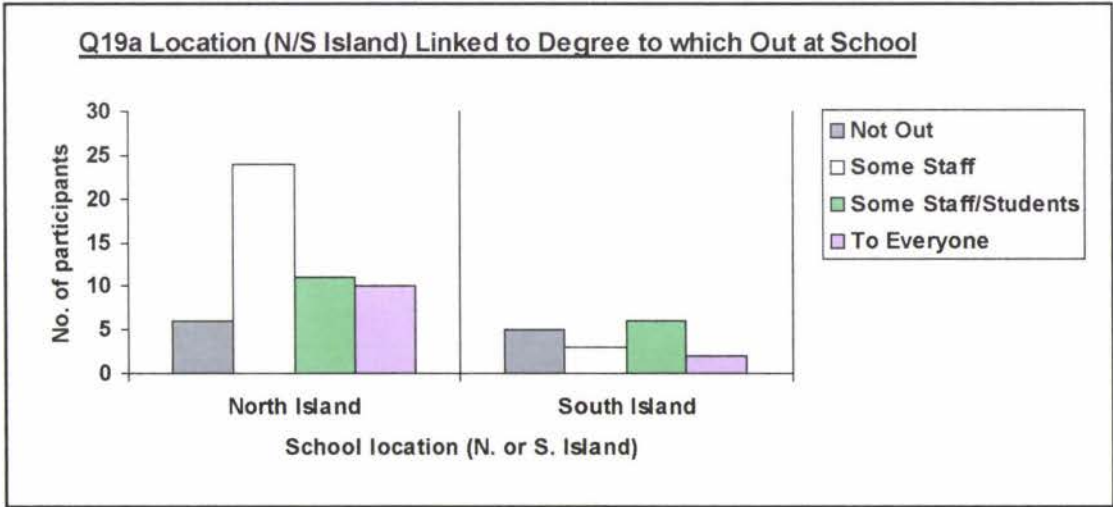
6.3 Disclosure of Sexual Orientation Related to Other Factors

The following data identify any relationships between the degree to which participants had disclosed their sexual orientation within their place of work and other variables such as the geographic location of their school, the participants’ age or the type of school in which they taught. Discussion of these findings will follow in Chapter Seven.

6.3.1 Disclosure of Sexual Orientation: North and South Island

As can be seen in Figure 16 below, the statistics indicate disparity in the degree to which participants were out in North and South Island schools.

Figure 16

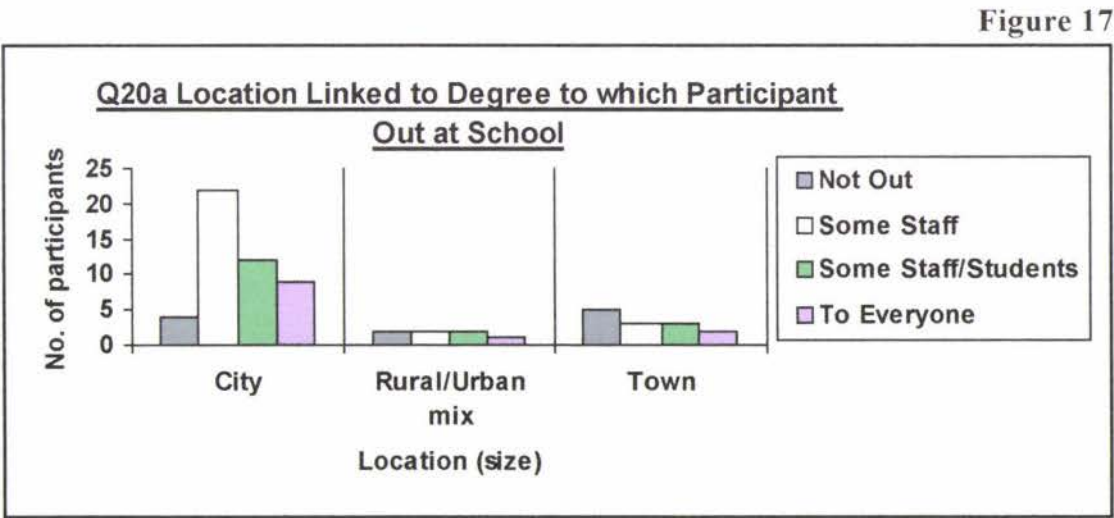


Eighteen percent of South Island participants were in the closet at school while in the North Island only 6% were. There is also disparity in the degree to which North and

South Island participants were “out to some staff” or “out to some staff and students”. Nineteen percent of South Island participants were “out to some staff” compared with 59% of those in the North Island. This difference is reversed when considering those who were “out to some staff and students”. Forty-four percent of South Island participants and 16% of North Island participants were out to some staff and students. Similar percentages of North and South Island participants were, however, completely out in their schools: 19% of South Island participants were completely out compared with 19.5 % in the North Island.

6.3.2 Disclosure of Sexual Orientation: Rural/Urban, Town and City

Figure 17 below shows a strong relationship between the degree to which participants were out and the type of settlement their school served.



The smaller the population base, then the greater chance there was that participants would be in the closet at school. In cities only 4.5% of participants were completely in the closet at school. For those in towns the figure increases to 15.5% and for those

in a mix of rural and urban settlement it increased further to 28.5%. The latter is exceeded only by the figure relating to participants who taught in schools with a religious affiliation (67%).

A reversal of the pattern described above is noticeable in the statistics that show the number of participants who were completely out in their schools: 21.5% in cities, 15.5% in towns and 14% in rural/urban mix areas. Also of note, when comparing responses from areas of different population bases, are the differences between those out to some staff or to some staff and students. In cities, 55.5% of participants were out to some staff. This fell to 38.5% in towns and to 28.5% in areas of rural and urban mix. The pattern for "out to some staff and students" is not spread as widely as that for "completely out at school"; 19.5% of city participants, 30.5% of town participants and 28.5% of rural urban mix participants are out to some students and some staff.

## **6.4 Degree of Disclosure Categorised by School Type**

### **Completely in the Closet**

Nine percent of the total sample was completely in the closet at school. When examined by school type, the pattern, though predictable, is alarming. One third (33.33%) of participants who taught in schools with religious affiliation, either integrated or private, lived their professional lives in the closet. This compares with 11% of those who taught in non-religious private schools and 9% of lesbians teaching in state schools.

### **Completely Out of the Closet**

The findings here are interesting. The participants who stated that they were completely out at school comprised 19.5% of the total. Twenty-two percent of participants from private (non-religious) schools were completely out of the closet while 20.5% of state school participants were completely out. None of the participants who taught in religious schools was completely open at school about her sexual orientation.

### **Out to Some Staff**

The compiled statistics here include those who were out only to one or a small number of their colleagues, as well as those who were out to many. Of the total sample, 49.5% of the participants were out to some staff. A notable difference is found when comparing teachers in different school types. Of the participants teaching in religious schools, 66.5 % were out to some staff. This compared with 47% in state schools and 44.5% in private schools. This difference may be explained by noting that, in schools with religious affiliation, no participant was completely out, nor was any out to students: participants in these schools were either out to staff only or completely closeted. It should be noted that participant numbers in this group were small which may have created an atypical result.

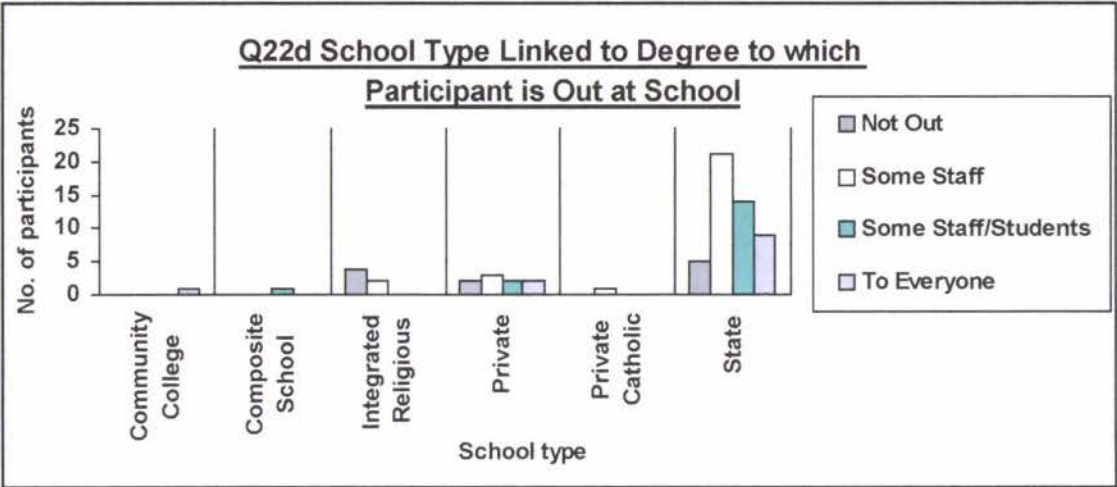
### **Out to Some Staff and Some Students**

Again, the major difference is found between the responses from participants in religious schools and those teaching in state or private schools with no religious affiliations. Twenty-two percent of the total sample was out to some staff and some



students. In state schools and private schools with no religious affiliations, the figures were 26.5% and 22% respectively. This may not, however be a major difference: with a sample of fewer than 100, the actual difference may only be one or two participants and therefore not noteworthy. Figure 18 below summarises the statistics from this comparison.

Figure 18



However, the comments included do indicate that some participants live with significant amounts of stress related to the concealment of their sexual orientation.

*My sexuality has nothing to do with the way I do my job. Schools are places of value judgment anyway so why should I give them something else to judge me on.*

*It is bad enough living with the negative opinions of my family and the rest of the community so why would I want to add my colleagues and the kids and their parents to the list?*

*Gay people often get a raw deal. I have been at a school where a gay man was accused of molesting a child – the accusation was proved to be unfounded but he went through hell while the complaint was investigated. The management seemed to believe the boy without question even though ... had been teaching at the school for 6 years. Even when the student admitted that he had told lies just to get back at ... , the teacher felt he had to leave the school. I am not going to leave myself open to this sort of heartache. If everyone presumes*

*you are het it won't happen.* (QA 64 The participant is completely closeted at school.)

This participant obviously did not feel safe at school. She perceived her work environment as a place where it was possible to be falsely accused of molestation and then not receive support from her school's management team. For her, school was a place which judged gay men and lesbians negatively. She saw the presumption that she was heterosexual as a way of staying safe. It would seem that, to maximise her feeling of safety, this participant lived her professional life in isolation from her private life, dividing her existence into public and private spheres. Passing as heterosexual, however, was her strategy to ensure her sexual orientation remained hidden (see Figure 2, page 39, "Lesbian and Gay Teachers – Identity Management Strategies). She might often have to have used defensive strategies at work to ensure her secret was kept. This might have had adverse effects on her general functioning and, as noted above, might have caused a distortion in her sense of self.

School was not the only place that this participant encountered homophobia. She also experienced it in her private life, from her family and "the rest of the community" (presumably the general community in which she lived, not the lesbian community). The participant acknowledged the stress that she would feel if she was falsely accused of molestation, "I am not going to leave myself open to this sort of heartache" (*Op. Cit.*), and the unhappiness generated by her family's non-acceptance of her sexual orientation, but not the stress that living two separate existences might have brought her.



The following participant had also witnessed other out homosexual people treated in a negative manner.

*I was in a relationship with a woman who was completely 'closeted' in my last school. Our close friends all knew and we were definitely outed by at least one close friend because with the grapevine the staff at my second teaching school in [small provincial town] knew about our relationship as did my friends down there resulting in an abusive phone call from a male friend. As a result I have changed schools and now no one knows except my one close friend who is actually the principal and his wife.*

*I have only had one relationship and it was complicated by grief issues as well, also my partner was closeted so it had a huge influence on the way I perceived things at the time. I have seen huge discrimination against colleagues in schools I have worked in who are out so I am still in two minds about my work situation. It makes my life difficult and my out friends all tell me I will feel relieved when it is no longer an issue. I am sure they are right – I just have to take that step. (QA 49 This participant lives almost completely in the closet at school).*

This participant's comments highlight the reality of many others. Despite a wish to remain in the closet she was outed. The effects of this were so traumatic she felt the need to change schools. She, like the previously quoted participant, had also witnessed other non-heterosexual teachers being treated negatively. These people were out. Her observation of others receiving harmful treatment was a factor in her decision to remain almost completely in the closet. What is especially interesting is that this woman recognised that coming out is a process, ("I just have to take that step") and she accepted the wisdom of out friends who told her that, "I will feel relieved when it is no longer an issue". However, her fear of negative consequences overrode her understanding that to come out would have positive consequences for her.

This participant's comments also illustrate another theme that was common in many responses. She was from a small provincial town and implied that this was a reason

that the gossip relating to her sexual orientation travelled so quickly to those she regarded as friends. This was also noted in the following comment by another participant.

*Students know because they live in my small town as well (population) so most students know by the way of gossip. I am out – obviously – to my baby-sitter (a student). It has not been appropriate to 'out' myself to the students in general, this is a very red-necked area and I am having a hard time already being new to the area. I do not deny my sexuality to students. I am open about my sexuality to staff. (QA 47 Out to staff and some students.)*

Both these participants reflect the findings of Juul (1993) He notes that the type of community in which gay or lesbian teachers work has significant effects on both stress levels and degree of openness about sexual orientation. He comments on the greater stress levels and reduced openness about sexual orientation among rural and suburban teachers compared with those who work in urban areas. Rural and suburban lesbian and gay teachers, he says, live in more fear of exposure and subsequent job loss and are less accepting of their identities. This relationship between fear of exposure and non-acceptance of self is also noted by Mayer (1993). Rural teachers also show a lowered sense of personal accomplishment, higher rates of depersonalisation from their students, and have higher levels of mental exhaustion. Juul (op cit.) concluded that the type of community in which gay and lesbian teachers work strongly affects the parts of an individual's identity. This is supported by the findings of this research, which also reflects Juul's finding that many gay male and lesbian teachers choose to work in large, urban settlements.

In this chapter I have recorded the results of a postal survey which was completed by New Zealand teachers who are lesbian. In Chapter Seven I will summarise these findings and discuss their significance.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This study provides significant new insights into the professional lives of New Zealand secondary school teachers who are lesbian. Participants recorded the homophobia and stress-creating actions of institutions, managers, colleagues, students and parents. They mentioned the research they had conducted individually into attitudes towards sexual orientation, attitudes held by the schools at which they were applying for work. Participants told of the lengths to which they went in order to be perceived as straight (see glossary entry) at interviews. These teachers recounted their need to move from one school to another, or from one area to another, to ensure their safety or to make certain that they felt comfortable and accepted.

The new information provided by this study is an indictment of New Zealand society and its education system. Members of a significant section of the secondary school teaching population, teachers who are lesbian, are suffering the results of ill-founded prejudice. This adversely affects their lives and the education of students and also restricts the ability of some schools to provide effective and enthusiastic teachers.

Despite legislation which makes it illegal for employers to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation, teachers who are lesbian face barriers to appointment and promotion based on this.

Despite major state funding, Roman Catholic and other religious schools which are allowed to discriminate against teachers who are lesbian. This clearly communicates that the state supports the prejudicial treatment of one group of its citizens.

Despite chronic teacher shortages, some principals and boards of trustees desperate to appoint effective and efficient New Zealand-trained teachers, are reducing their options by allowing their schools to foster homophobic climates. Even if these schools are willing to employ teachers who are lesbian, the teachers choose not to apply for positions at them because they are aware of their negative environments for non-heterosexual teachers.

Despite a legal requirement that boards of trustees be 'good employers', and further requirements under health and safety legislation, there are still schools where women feel it is unsafe to be open about their sexual orientation and, in some cases, unsafe to stay.

Until this study there has been no New Zealand research into the professional lives of teachers who are lesbian. Until now, anyone interested in the professional lives of these teachers has had to assume that they are similar to those of their sisters overseas, especially those who work in other English-speaking first-world economies. However, none of these countries has the conditions of employment, the legislation or the education system that exist in New Zealand.

This research has found differences from overseas studies, especially in the ways that some schools do value their teachers who are lesbian (see Elliot, 1996, Fassinger,

1993 and Harbeck, 1992 for examples of workplaces where lesbian teachers are not valued). Some New Zealand teachers who are lesbian, 18% in this study, are completely out at school. Many such teachers feel accepted and valued by their boards of trustees, management, colleagues, students and their wider school communities. (No overseas study that I reviewed established the percentage of teachers who were out at school. What was noticeable was that few studies mentioned any participant who was open about her sexual orientation.)

It is disappointing is that, as with overseas research I have reviewed, participants in this study attested that many New Zealand secondary schools are places where diversity of sexual orientation is not accepted (let alone encouraged) – where it is not safe for lesbians to be open about their sexual orientation. In fact, participants showed many schools to have homophobic environments that impinge negatively upon the professional lives of the lesbians who work within them. This research also identifies (perhaps for the first time) the strategies used by lesbians to conceal their sexual orientation when applying for jobs.

This chapter continues by discussing the findings of this research in relation to the employment process: application, appointment, working in a school, promotion and changing jobs.

### **7.2.1 *I used 'Mrs' on the form***

As noted in Chapter Six, well over half (60%) of all participants in this study felt that their sexual orientation had affected the way that they had applied for jobs. Their

actions, often driven by a need to conceal their orientation from those who were interviewing them, encompassed how they filled in application forms, how they dressed, and what they said or chose not to say.

Fifteen participants, 22%, mentioned that they researched schools at which they were thinking of applying, to ascertain the climate for homosexual people within these schools. Some participants stated that they did not apply at schools which, they perceived, had negative environments for lesbians.

Following research into schools at which they were thinking of applying, participants completed the application form carefully, often omitting details that would allow readers to identify their sexual orientation or to suspect that this was other than heterosexual. Omitted details included the honorific 'Ms', a partner's name or gender, and involvement with organisations such as Rainbow Youth (see footnote, page 117) or Rape Crisis. Other details were added to the application. These included the use of the title 'Mrs', references to children, or involvement with mainstream organisations such as Brownies.

Fifty-eight percent of participants felt that interviewers were not aware of their sexual orientation. They did not disclose their orientation at interviews; many went to some lengths, in fact, to hide this from interviewers. These participants recorded that at interviews they used some of the same strategies to pass as heterosexual as those used when filling in the application form. Other strategies used at the interview were participants' extreme care in dressing heteronormatively, and their mention not only of children but also of grandchildren, husbands and ex-husbands. Some participants



also noted that they avoided questions about their personal lives, especially any related to their family circumstances.

This non-disclosure suggests many participants felt that their sexual orientation would have affected their chances of employment had the interviewer(s) been aware of it. This was especially so for participants who applied for employment at schools with special (religious) character.

I have found no other research which investigates the ways that lesbians apply for jobs, so I am unable to relate these findings to other studies.

### ***7.2.2 I'm certain it's why I didn't get the job***

The results of this study, recorded in Chapter Six, show that some participants believed their sexual orientation substantially affected their appointment to teaching positions. This had two dimensions. Firstly, eight, 12%, recorded that they failed to gain appointments to jobs for which they had applied. They construed that the reason for these failures was their sexual orientation. The second dimension, non-application, is evident in the 13 participants, 19.5%, who had not applied for positions in schools that they perceived to have environments hostile to lesbians, or to non-heterosexual people more generally (see also 7.2.2.1 below). These findings support those of Diamant (1993) and Elliot (1993) both of whom note employer prejudice as a barrier to appointment and also the reluctance of lesbians and gays to apply for jobs in workplaces where homophobia would restrict their enjoyment of work.

Participants also noted it would be difficult to prove that non-appointment was based on their sexual orientation. Given human rights and employment legislation, boards of trustees or others making appointments would clearly be in breach of the law had they articulated sexual orientation as the reason for non-appointment.

The barrier to appointment was seen by participants as higher in schools of special (religious) character and schools located away from cities. Conversely, participants identified state schools in cities as more accepting of diverse sexual orientations. A number also noted that low-decile schools, which generally serve a racially diverse population, are more accepting of all diversity, including diverse sexual orientations.

#### **7.2.2.1 *I would never work in a school that does not value diversity***

A quarter of participants recorded that they would not apply for positions at Catholic or other schools with religious affiliations. The main reason they gave for this was that such schools are homophobic, prejudiced and unhappy places for lesbian and gay people. These 25% of participants generally felt that, had they applied to such institutions with their sexual orientation known to those making appointments, they would not have been offered positions. Additionally they perceived that, if they had secured employment, they could not have been open about their sexual orientation. They would not, participants noted, be happy working in such environments. However, some teachers who are lesbian do work in such schools.

### **7.2.3 *I would never be in a room alone with a female student***

Participants recorded that their sexual orientation had both positive and negative effects on their work and lives within schools.

Those who felt that their orientation impinged negatively on their professional lives, and the way they did their job, recorded effects such as: the need to take more steps than other teachers to protect themselves against allegations of sexual assault on students; the need to accept or deal with homophobic harassment and behaviours; the need to work harder than colleagues in order to ensure that their value was recognised; and coping with the stresses of having to hide an essential part of themselves. These findings support those of Herek (1991, 2003), Quinlivan (1994), Simoni (1996), Engstrom & Sedlace (1997), Town (1998) and Shaw (2000), all of whom found schools to be homophobic institutions where teachers employ various strategies to remain safe. Specifically noted by Shaw (2000) and Epstein & Johnson (1998) is the widely held misconception of a strong connection between homosexuality and paedophilia. Fear of an accusation relating to the sexual abuse of students may lead non-heterosexual teachers to take extraordinary measures to ensure that they remain above suspicion. The need that participants in this study felt to work harder than heterosexual colleagues is also identified by Fassinger (1993).

Nineteen participants also noted that their sexual orientation had positive effects on their work. These women noted the camaraderie that existed between lesbian and gay staff in their schools. This provided not only personal support but also positive educational outcomes for students as the staff worked cooperatively on unit-planning, class trips and other joint activities. Also recorded was the satisfaction that out

teachers gained from mentoring/counselling lesbian and gay students and those questioning their sexuality. Furthermore, participants were generally happy that their heterosexual colleagues asked for their advice when dealing with lesbian and gay students or issues. Some commented that they felt they were positive role models; not only for students but also for their colleagues and, more widely, for the school community.

#### **7.2.4 *The B.O.T. vetoed my promotion***

Ten percent of participants felt that their sexual orientation had a negative effect on their prospects for promotion within their schools. Some recorded specific incidents where this had been the case. It seems that lesbian sexual orientation can be a barrier when seeking promotion into senior management or positions such as deaning where the appointee will have frequent contact with parents and other adults outside the immediate school environment. Participants who commented on the negative effects of their sexual orientation on their promotion mentioned that they felt qualified for the positions applied for but had failed, often more than once, to gain appointments. Three mentioned specifically that they were better qualified than those who did gain the jobs. Two recounted that they had undertaken professional development to further develop the skills needed for particular positions, but that others who had not completed professional development were appointed. One participant noted that her principal had suggested to her that she look for promotion in areas where parental contact was not integral to the job. Schools thus appear to value conservative, homophobic forces more highly than they value liberalism and diversity. This idea concurs with a statement made by Spraggs (1994) that schools are extremely conservative institutions.

It is interesting to note that 43% of the participants had not applied for promotion. Seven such participants mentioned that those making appointments knew of their sexual orientation and that this was part of the reason they would not apply. Three of these participants stated that they did not want the heartache of not being appointed and two of these three that if they were not appointed, they would never know if their sexual orientation had been the reason. Some participants, then, identified sexual orientation as a barrier to promotion.

### ***7.2.5 I left the school because of his behaviour***

Twenty-eight percent of participants indicated that they had changed schools and that their sexual orientation was the reason, or part of the reason, for the change. Some participants developed a relationship with another woman before changing their job. Sometimes this was their first same-sex relationship. A change of jobs, often involving relocation to a new area, was explained in terms of needing to move away from people who had known the participant as heterosexual. For others, the motivation to change schools was discriminatory treatment by management or homophobic actions by colleagues or students. Two participants mentioned losing their jobs as the result of a manipulated capna process (see glossary entry). Both these participants felt that their sexual orientation was at least part of the reason that their jobs were identified as surplus to the school's needs. One participant recorded how small-town homophobia had driven her from her school and the community in which she lived.

It is not difficult to enlarge upon the comments of participants who noted sexual orientation, or responses to this, as a reason for their changes in jobs. Each one must

have experienced stress and unhappiness. This was obvious in some of the responses given. If one finds oneself in a workplace which is accepting of diversity, the dangers of moving must surely play a part in a decision to stay – even if this restricts career opportunities. Teachers who have hitherto faced challenges related to their sexual orientation may be more inclined to stay in a ‘safe’ workplace once they are there. The inclusion of an additional survey question – “Has your sexual orientation ever been the reason you have stayed at a school?” – could have established whether this is the case.

The research on which these findings are based is new. As far as I know, there has been no similar research conducted either in New Zealand or overseas. I set out to ‘take a snapshot’ of the employment conditions/the professional environments of New Zealand secondary teachers who are lesbian. This research has succeeded in doing this. It generally supports the conclusions of many overseas studies discussed in Chapter Three. This study also gives detail which expands on Shaw’s (2000) research on the positioning of sexual diversity in New Zealand secondary schools.

Some aspects of this study have previously been explored by other academics: the locations in which lesbian and gay teachers choose to work and the effects of living one’s professional life in the closet. These two aspects will be discussed in the next section.

#### ***7.2.6 ...it is safer not to acknowledge the fact that I am gay***

This study shows that there is a strong relationship between the religious or non-religious character of the school in which teachers work and the degree to which they



are out. The highest rate (67%) of participants completely in the closet at school was recorded by those participants who worked in schools with religious affiliation, especially the integrated Catholic schools. No participant working in a school with a religious affiliation was out to all her school community. Such schools sought and gained exemption from sections of human rights legislation on the basis of their 'special character'. Within them it is legal for employers to discriminate on the grounds of non-heterosexual orientation.

Also evident is a strong correlation between the degree to which participants disclosed or hid their sexual orientation and the geographic location of their schools.

#### ***7.2.7 In a rural school I was bullied and victimised by parents and students***

There was significant disparity between the degree to which participants were out in North Island schools and South Island schools, and in city schools and those located in areas of more scattered population bases. The participants' comments give insight into the reasons why many who taught in rural or small-town schools chose to remain in the closet. They noted the homophobia present in such communities and the ways that this was reflected in local schools. Some mentioned homophobic parents; either B.O.T. members or parents of the students they had taught, or both. The comments of these participants support the findings of Juul (1995) and Mayer (1993), both of whom conducted extensive research into the geographic locations in which gay and lesbian teachers choose to work and the personal ramifications of their choices (see pages 42 and 43).

My review of existing literature and collection of new data have caused me to believe that the degree to which lesbians are open about their sexual orientation within their place of employment is a crucial indicator of the environment in which they work. Additionally, I believe, the degree of openness can be indicative of both their own level of acceptance of their sexual orientation and the health status that results from this.

### **7.2.8 *It's none of their business***

The degree to which participants were out raises major concerns about: their employment conditions; levels of acceptance within their schools of non-heterosexual orientations; and participants' perceptions of themselves, their sexual orientation, and the settings in which they work. As Repetti & Cosmas (1991), Andrisani & Shapiro (1978), Ellis & Riggle (1995) and Crosby (1992) (see Chapter Three) suggest, an environment in which lesbians and gay men feel the need to remain closeted is less supportive than one in which they can be open.

The need for so many of this study's participants to stay in the closet suggests that major changes need to occur in many New Zealand secondary schools to ensure the safety of all teachers who work within them. This is a major finding of this study and gives the basis for the indictment made at the beginning of this chapter.

## **7.3 Research Problems**

The concluding section of this chapter will discuss the problems encountered during the completion of this study.

The major concern about the research that forms the basis of this study is the comparatively low number of participants who volunteered their involvement. The research was designed with an anticipated 100-plus survey responses; 67 form the sample of the study.

The low numbers, however, were not detrimental to the research. Analysis of the sample showed that it comprised a wide cross-section of teachers from all levels of schools' hierarchies and all New Zealand secondary school types. The age range of participants was also wide, as was the range of geographic locations in which they taught. Most importantly the participants provided rich and comprehensive qualitative data. It is with gratitude that I note that their written responses to the open-ended questions of this study's survey were intelligent, articulate and far-reaching. They provided the evidence for the findings of this study.

The findings of this study may be criticised because they are based on participants' perceptions. Participants' perceptions cannot provide an exact gauge of the level of discrimination in schools. However, they are indicative of it. No school B.O.T. appointments sub-committee or principal is likely to admit to prejudiced practice. Their response to why a particular applicant has been chosen over others is likely to be, "We appointed the best person for the job". My experiences in a variety of schools over more than 20 years suggest that many people's prejudices are hidden (even those who hold them may not be aware that they are affecting their decisions). What is obvious from the statistics in Table 1, page 29, "Number of state Secondary School Teachers, Designation and Gender" is that the 'best' person for the job is very

often male. Further reading of Limerick & Lingard (1995) or Shakeshaft (1987) would suggest that this male is also white, middle-class and heterosexual.

One participant wrote: "How can you draw conclusions based on people's perceptions of other possible perceptions?" (QA 64). My answer to her is that I believe that the perceptions of participants are based on their experiences and that even if these perceptions are erroneous, they are sufficiently powerful to have major effects on the professional (and personal) lives of those who hold them.

Consequently, employers need to recognise the disquiet and create environments where diversity is truly, overtly valued and the need for people to hide in closets becomes a thing of the past. This is acknowledged by those working in New Zealand in the field of diversity education. "The key thing [in creation of non-homophobic workplaces] is actually the attitudes held by managers and colleagues." (Thompson, quoted by Gummer, 1999). Furthermore much valid and respected research, especially within stigmatised populations, is based on participants' perceptions. An example of such a study (Irwin, 1999 and 2002) is the recent major Australian research on the workplace experiences of lesbians, gay men, and transgendered people.

The final chapter in this thesis will contain the implications of this study and recommendations for future actions.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The reasons for this study were established in Chapter One. I wished to describe conditions as they exist now in New Zealand secondary schools for teachers who are lesbian. I wondered if these conditions are the same as those described in overseas literature for similar teachers or if, given New Zealand's human rights legislation (now nearly a decade old) and its integration into employment legislation and the Secondary Teachers' Collective Employment Agreement, teachers enjoy conditions that are free of the employment barriers which homophobic attitudes create and maintain.

The key findings from this study are discussed in the previous chapter. I conclude by arguing that all those connected with the secondary teaching service must now take practical steps to ensure that the provisions of the legislation and contract become usual and unremarkable professional practice. My argument is not new. It reinforces the assertions of Kathleen Quinlivan(1994), Shane Town (1998) and Cynthia Shaw (2000). Action is well overdue.

In Quinlivan (1994) and Town (1998) secondary students who were gay and lesbian articulated their concerns about homophobia in secondary schools, and its consequences for those whom schools are charged with protecting and nurturing. This study adds the voices of teachers who are lesbian. Their experiences show that changes must occur in non-heterosexual teachers are to be recognised as the professionals they are and so be able to contribute fully to the life of our schools.

## **8.2 Recommendations**

### **8.2.1 Recommendations For Schools**

1. Boards of trustees and all staff at schools should explore 'best practice' for strategies to deal with heteronormative assumptions and homophobia.
2. During the B.O.T.'s policy review process, policies (especially sexual harassment and EEO policies) should be reviewed to ensure that they recognise the roles of heteronormative assumption and homophobia. The resulting policies, and procedures which support these, should be disseminated to all staff.
3. Diversity education, including that of diverse sexual orientations, should be introduced as a regular part of the staff development programme. All staff, including support staff, should be required to attend these workshops. Because of the inherent power imbalance between trustees and staff, separate workshops should be held for members of the board of trustee should also be encouraged.
4. Senior administrators and those responsible for the welfare of staff should study the health implications for staff, and students, of homophobic and heterosexist environments. They should work towards the elimination of such environments with the same degree of commitment that is/has been given to the elimination of racism and sexism.



5. As part of the elimination of heteronormative and homophobic practice, senior administrators should support out members of staff through similar public recognition of rites of passage and important family events to that given to heterosexuals in recognition of their important occasions. (However, as is done by sensitive managers now, the staff member concerned should be consulted before any announcement is made.)

### **8.2.2 Recommendations for Teacher Training Establishments**

1. Teacher trainees should be taught to recognise the inherent discourses within schools and the heteronormative environments which these support. Once student recognition is achieved, then the expression of heteronormative forces should be discussed and evaluated.
2. Diversity education, including that of diverse sexual orientations, should be integral in programmes delivered to teacher trainees.
3. Teacher training establishments should consider the inclusion in their courses of a 'diversity' component. Consideration should be given to a restricted graduation, or non-graduation, for trainees who express intolerance for diversity, including diversity of sexual orientation. This could be made analogous to the use of inappropriate language or expression of racist views in a classroom or staffroom setting.

### **8.2.3 Recommendations for School Trustees' Association**

The School Trustees' Association should deliver diversity training, including on sexual orientation, for boards of trustees. This training should not only communicate the legislative and contractual requirements of boards of trustees with regard to non-heterosexual teachers (and other employees, students and parents) but also highlight the need to appoint the best applicants, based on their professional attributes, to each available position. (There are now a number of professionals specialising in diversity training including Eugene Moore of Full Spectrum. This organisation describes itself as "an equal employment opportunity consultancy" whose clients include the New Zealand Navy, the Police Force, the Customs Service and the Australian Defense Force.)

### **8.2.4 Recommendations for the Education Review Office**

As part of its review of schools, the Education Review Office should (as at present) ascertain that schools have Equal Employment Opportunity and Sexual Harassment policies, and procedures which give practical effect to these. Both policies should include reference to diversity of sexual orientation. Furthermore the reviewers need to ensure not only that such policies and procedures are in place but also that schools are genuinely and honestly meeting the requirements of their EEO and Sexual Harassment policies. The reviewers should also check that these policies, and others, have been widely disseminated to staff .

### **8.2.5. Recommendations for the Post Primary Teachers' Association**

P.P.T.A. has the potential to be a real catalyst for change. It was P.P.T.A. women who drove forward the improvements that have been gained for women and girls in New Zealand schools, changes that have now permeated much of New Zealand society. P.P.T.A. has the ability to drive forward positive change for non-heterosexual teachers.

P.P.T.A. should continue and expand the work of the Safe Schools Task Force to increase safety in schools for people of all sexual orientations. P.P.T.A. also needs specific policies and practices to ensure that, as with incidents of sexism and racism, field officers encourage members to action complaints.

### **8.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

1. Further research is needed into the most effective way to deliver diversity training in secondary schools. Following this work, recommendations about such training must be made to P.P.T.A., B.O.Ts. and principals' and school trustee's organizations.
2. Qualitative New Zealand-based research should be undertaken to investigate further the relationship between teaching in rural areas or areas of rural/urban mix, and the degree of openness about sexual orientation. This investigation needs to establish any causal link between openness about sexual orientation and effects of this on health and well-being.

3. A study or series of studies be undertaken in middle and intermediate schools to investigate the process of New Zealand children's acquisition of heteronormative and homophobic attitudes by New Zealand children and the effects of these on children.

It is my ardent wish that the recommendations of this study will be actioned. Only through action will heteronormative, homophobic environments change and our schools become safer places for non-heterosexual staff and students. These changes should be the responsibility of all who are involved in our secondary education service.

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## APPENDICES



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

Department of Social and  
Policy Studies in Education  
Albany Campus  
Private Bag 102 904,  
North Shore MSC,  
Auckland,  
New Zealand  
Telephone: 64 9 443 9688  
Facsimile: 64 9 443 9717

My name is Carol Bartlett. I am a student at Massey University, Albany Campus, and am studying for a Masters in Educational Administration (M.Ed.Admin).

As part of my course work, I am required to conduct research. As a secondary school teacher who is lesbian, I have experienced both prejudice and employment discrimination based on my sexuality. My research aims to find out if my experiences are isolated or part of a general pattern.

I want to find out if other New Zealand secondary school teachers who identify as lesbian feel that their sexuality has affected their employment or promotion within New Zealand schools.

I am seeking the help of New Zealand secondary teachers who identify themselves as lesbian ('out' or 'closeted'). The extent of this help would be to complete a postal questionnaire. This should take about 30 minutes. The questions are related to your perceptions of how sexuality has affected your employment and promotion. They also ask for information about your position in your school and the extent to which you are 'closeted' or 'out'. In order to generalise the findings against other factors that may have affected your employment, there is also a section which asks you to record some information about your school.

Details that may lead to the identification of you or your school will be omitted from the final report.

Each participant has the right to remain anonymous and to use a pseudonym. The information she gives will be confidential to the research and any publications resulting from it. I will be collating and analysing the collected data myself so there is no possibility that others will see it.

Questionnaires will be kept in a locked cupboard at my home. At the completion of the study, all questionnaires will be incinerated.

#### FINDINGS

The findings of the research will be printed as a MedAdmin thesis which will be available in the Massey University libraries at both Palmerston North and Albany.

#### YOUR RIGHTS

As a prospective participant in this research, your rights are as follows:

- To decline to participate
- To refuse to answer any question in the study at any time during your participation
- To ask any questions about the study at any time during your participation
- To provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used in the findings
- To agree to take part in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

Sometimes revisiting old hurts can be painful. PPTA has counselling available for members that can be accessed via a Field Officer. This is given at no charge to members.

I am pleased that you have chosen to contact me for information about this research. I will be delighted if you choose to complete a questionnaire.

If you accept the terms above, please complete the information below and post it to me at [redacted] Auckland or email me at [redacted]

Should you require further information, my home number is [redacted] Auckland [redacted] This line is in my office and only I answer calls on it.

I would be grateful if you would pass copies of this letter to other lesbian secondary school teachers you know.

Researcher: Carol Bartlett  
[redacted]

Supervisors: E. Anne Jones  
Assistant Lecturer  
  
Dept. of Social & Policy  
in Education  
Albany Campus  
Massey University  
Phone 09 443 9700

Dr Mollie Neville  
  
Dept. of Social & Policy  
in Education  
Albany Campus  
Massey University  
Phone 09 443 9700

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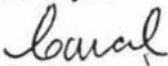
Please send me a Questionnaire

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

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Please place tear-off section in the enclosed envelope and then post it.

Thank you.  
  
Carol



## **Psssssssssssst..... Please, Pass It On!**



Lesbian secondary teachers from a variety of schools all over NZ are wanted for a confidential questionnaire on their appointment, employment conditions & career advancement.

The researcher, Carol Bartlett, is a lesbian secondary teacher undertaking this survey for her Master's thesis in Educational Administration.

Participants' anonymity is protected through processes approved by the Massey University Ethics Committee.

If you are interested in taking part, please write as soon as possible to Carol Bartlett at [REDACTED] or email her at [REDACTED]

Thank you for helping with this study. Please be assured that your responses are confidential and used only in summary form. (Please tick, circle or comment as appropriate.)

**First section – your position in your school. (Please tick as many as appropriate.)**

- |    |   | Please                              |
|----|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | I teach in a New Zealand Secondary school   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | The following best describes my present position in school<br>(Please <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> as many as are appropriate) | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
|    | - Teacher   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
|    | - Teacher with unit(s)<br>Please specify number of units  | <input type="checkbox"/><br>_____   |
|    | - TIC<br>Please specify number of units   | <input type="checkbox"/><br>_____   |
|    | - HOD<br>Please specify number of units   | <input type="checkbox"/><br>_____   |
|    | - Dean<br>Please specify number of units  | <input type="checkbox"/><br>_____   |
|    | - Guidance Counsellor<br>Please specify number of units   | <input type="checkbox"/><br>_____   |
|    | - Senior teacher (S. M.)<br>Please specify number of units  | <input type="checkbox"/><br>_____   |
|    | - Deputy Principal<br>Please specify number of units  | <input type="checkbox"/><br>_____   |
|    | - Principal   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
|    | Other (please specify) .....  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
|    | Please specify number of units  | _____                               |
| 3. | Time employed in present school (please write in)   | _____                               |
| 4. | Number of years in secondary teaching (please write in)   | _____                               |
| 5. | Number of secondary teaching positions (please write in)  | _____                               |

How “out” are you at school?

I recognise that coming out is an ongoing, lifelong process but I would like to ascertain how widely others at school know of your sexuality.

By “out” I mean you have told others of your sexuality.

By “closeted” I mean you have told no one at school of your sexuality.

You may like to comment if you feel you have been “outed” – by this, I mean that someone else has, against your wishes, told others of your sexuality.

		Please <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> As many as needed
6.	I am completely closeted at school	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I am out to my close friends on staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I am out to staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I am out to some students	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I am out to all students	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I am out to everyone	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other – please explain

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Please explain why you have decided to be closeted, out to some people and not others, or completely out. Please answer as fully as possible.

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You may continue on the other side of the sheet if you need to. Please clearly record question number.

7. Thinking of your appointment to your present school

Who appointed you?

BOT committee ☐

BOT members, Male or Female or Both? M F B

The principal ☐

Male or Female? M F

The Principal and HOD ☐

Male or Female or both? M F B

Other, please explain ☐

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8. Thinking of the person/people who appointed you

was this person/ were these people aware of your sexuality? Yes No

- If **yes**, please explain how they gained this knowledge.
- If **no**, please state if you made a conscious decision not to mention your sexuality and then explain why or why not.

EXPLANATION

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9. Has your sexuality ever been part of your decision not to apply for a job?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain ('yes' or 'no' response)

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10. Thinking about your present school and the position(s) you hold within it, how does your sexuality affect the way you work?

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11. Still thinking about your present school and the position(s) you hold within it, how does your sexuality affect ways others at school (including pupils) work with you/relate to you?

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12. Thinking about all the times you have applied for a position, do you feel that your sexuality has ever affected how you have applied for a job?

Yes ☐No ☐

Please explain ('yes' or 'no' response)

[illegible]

13. Thinking about internal promotion / award of units. Do you feel that your sexuality has ever effected your promotion or professional recognition of the work you do?

Yes ☐No ☐

Please explain ('yes' or 'no' response) Please include year as appropriate.

[illegible]

14. Thinking generally about your work in secondary schools, has your work, your working conditions or the way others treat you within your place of work been affected by your sexuality?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain ('yes' or 'no' response) Please include year as appropriate.

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15. Thinking about all of your teaching career in New Zealand Secondary Schools, has your sexuality been the reason, or part of the reason, for a change of jobs either within a school or to a new school?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain ('yes' or 'no' response) Please include year as appropriate.

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16. Does your present school have a policy on sexual harassment?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If “yes”, does this policy SPECIFICALLY mention lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgendered people?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Or sexuality generally?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If you wish, please comment

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17. Have you come out during the time you were teaching at a school?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If you have answered no, please go over the page to "Classification Data".

18. When you came out during the time you were teaching at a school, did you notice any changes in the way other staff, pupils or other members of your school community related to you?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain ('yes' or 'no' response) Please include year as appropriate.

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**Classification Data**Your school Geographical location (Please tick, circle or comment as appropriate)South Island ☐North Island ☐

City, please write in which .....

Large town (population 55,000 to 100,00) ☐Small town (population 10,000 to 54,999) ☐Urban area of less than 10,000 ☐Rural/urban mix ☐Other, please specify ..... ☐

Type of school (Please tick, circle or comment as appropriate)

Single sex - girls ☐Single sex - boys ☐Co-educational ☐State ☐Integrated - religious ☐Private ☐Other, please specify ..... ☐

Decile rating of your school (Please circle)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

**Personal**

Please indicate to which of the following age groups you belong

18 to 25 ☐

26 to 35 ☐

36 to 45 ☐

46 to 55 ☐

Older than 55 ☐

The extra sheet (over the page) is for any further comments you may choose to include.

**Thank you. I know how busy all of us are in teaching and I really appreciate you giving the time to fill out this questionnaire.**

Please, now, place it in its envelope and then into the stamped addressed envelope and put it into the post.

Carol Bartlett.

[illegible]

# Strengthening branches

**P**ROGRAMMES to empower PPTA members in their workplaces will be developed over the next two terms by West Coast executive member Steve Farrow.

Steve, on secondment to PPTA's Palmerston North office, is "adding flesh" to a three-stage union education programme to be delivered on a regional basis.

"The outline of the programme was written last year by a working party of PPTA members and staff. My job is to add the flesh of case studies and supporting resources. When I finish I will leave behind fully developed courses for delivery in any region around the country."

The programme should enable members in any branch to ensure the



Steve Farrow

enforcement of the Collective Agreement in their own workplace.

"The Collective Agreement is a national thing but enforcement of it has

to happen locally and informed members are able to make that happen."

"The overall objective of the programme is to develop branch capacity to respond to members' issues in the workplace by empowering active members through building knowledge, skills and confidence."

Although Steve will help run the courses initially, ultimately PPTA regional officers and field officers will deliver the courses in regions.

Members interested in taking part in union education courses should contact their regional committee or local field office.

## Lesbian teachers survey

**P**ARTICIPANTS are needed for a national survey on how attitudes to sexual orientation affect the employment of lesbian secondary teachers.

Auckland secondary teacher Carol Bartlett hopes lesbian secondary teachers throughout the country will complete a confidential postal questionnaire on the impact of their lesbian orientation - or perceptions of it - on their appointment, employment conditions and career advancement.

She is undertaking the study for her Master's thesis in Educational Administration.

"My own experiences in previous workplaces have suggested to me that sexual orientation may be a barrier to appointment, promotion or even staying in a job. If this is the case it's important to gather information about it at first hand, especially as schools

are required to operate under the Human Rights Act which outlaws employment-related discrimination based on sexual orientation.

"So far, most academic research, both here and overseas, relating to gays or lesbians in schools has focused on students. There's a dearth of information about teachers.

"However, the validity of my conclusions depends on having as many as teachers as possible participate. It's also crucial that a wide range of people respond so that the sample is representative. For instance, it would be good to hear from teachers who are not 'out' on the job as well as those who are, rural teachers as well as urban, and women who prefer terms such as 'gay' as well as those who self-identify as lesbian."

Carol said participants could be assured that their anonymity would be

protected through processes approved by the Massey University Ethics Committee.

Lesbian teachers interested in taking part can write to or e-mail Carol. She will send them the questionnaire, a consent form and a letter for other potential participants.

Write to: Carol Bartlett, PO Box 19415, Avondale, Auckland, or e-mail [carol.b@xtra.co.nz](mailto:carol.b@xtra.co.nz)



TAMAKI MAKAUARAU

## LESBIAN

NEWSLETTER

New Contact details:  
PO Box 78-267  
Grey Lynn  
tim@news.xtra.co.nz



VOL 12 NO 8 June 2002

## Survey of Lesbian Teachers Needed

**Wanted, ASAP:** lesbian secondary teachers from all over NZ to participate in a survey on their appointment, employment conditions and career advancement.

Auckland lesbian Carol Bartlett, a west Auckland teacher, is organising the confidential postal survey to show how attitudes to sexual orientation affect the employment of secondary teachers who are lesbian. Her Master's-level thesis in Educational Administration will detail the results.

"My own previous experiences have suggested to me that with a lesbian orientation it is harder to be appointed, secure promotion or even stay in a job," says Carol. "If this is the case, it's important to gather information about it at first hand, especially as schools are required to operate under the Human Rights Act which outlaws employment-related discrimination based on sexual orientation."

The validity of Carol's conclusions depends on having as many teachers as possible complete the questionnaire. "It's also crucial that a wide range of women respond so that the sample is representative. For instance, it would be good to hear from teachers who are not 'out' on the job as well as those who are; rural teachers as well as those in towns or cities; and women who prefer terms such as 'gay' as well as those who self-identify as lesbian."



*Inside:  
The  
illustrated  
guide to  
Dyke  
spotting*

Carol hopes secondary teachers from a diverse range of institutions - private, state, integrated, composite or other schools - will take part.

"As a lesbian working in a secondary school, I am very aware of the need for confidentiality and anonymity in this research. Participants can be assured that their anonymity will be protected through processes approved by the Massey University Ethics Committee."

Carol will send those interested the questionnaire and a letter for other potential participants.

Information: phone Carol Bartlett on her private line, ph 820 2332, write to her at PO Box 19-415, Avondale, Auckland or email her at [carol.b@xtra.co.nz](mailto:carol.b@xtra.co.nz).

## News

# Lesbian teachers surveyed

A national survey aims to show how attitudes to sexual orientation affect the employment of secondary teachers who are lesbian.

Teacher Carol Bartlett hopes lesbian teachers all over New Zealand will complete a confidential postal questionnaire on what impact their orientation - or perceptions of their lesbianism - has had on their appointment, employment conditions and career advancement.

Bartlett, a senior dean and teacher of English, is undertaking the study for her master's-level thesis in educational administration.

Important to gather information about it at first hand, especially as schools are required to operate under the Human Rights Act which outlaws employment-related discrimination based on sexual orientation.

So far, most academic research relating to gays or lesbians in schools has focused on students. "There's a dearth of information about teachers," Bartlett says. "I hope that my study will help to fill this gap."

Bartlett's biggest challenge is gaining enough participants to make her survey sample large enough. "It's also crucial that a wide range of women respond so that the

towns or cities, and women who prefer terms such as 'gay' as well as those who self-identify as lesbian."

She hopes secondary teachers from a diverse range of institutions - private, integrated, state, composite or other schools - will take part.

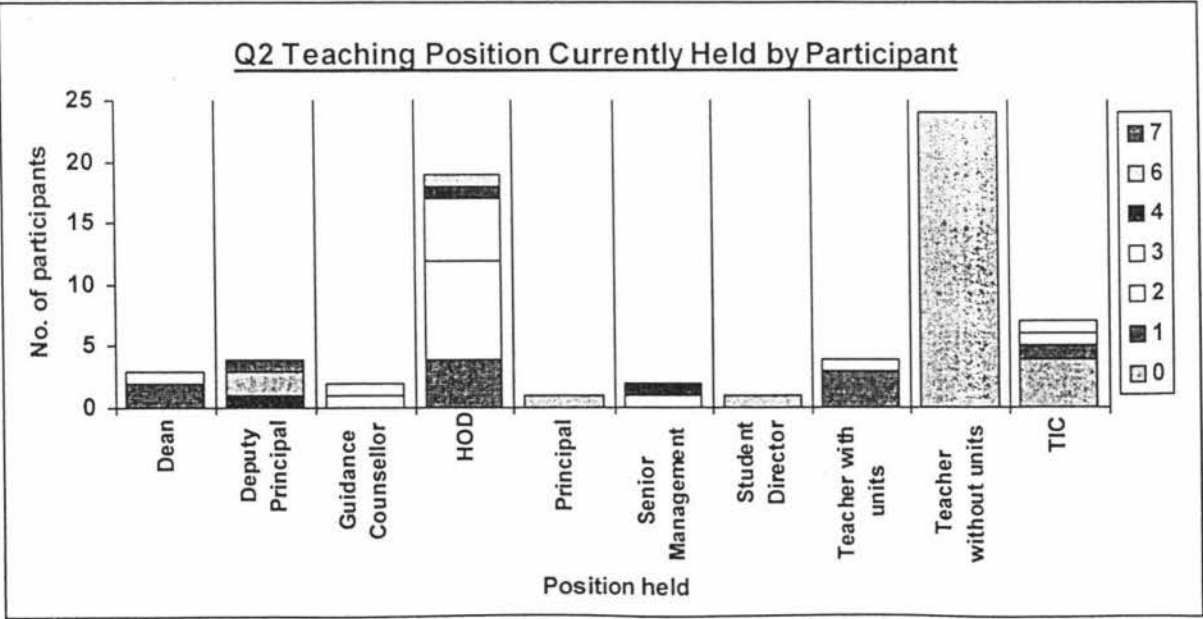
"As a lesbian working in a secondary school, I am very aware of the need for confidentiality and anonymity in this research. Participants can be assured that their anonymity will be protected through processes approved by the Massey University Ethics Committee."





Teaching Position Currently Held by Participant Q 2

Teaching Position	No. of Units	Total	Percentage
Dean	1	2	4.48%
	3	1	
Deputy Principal	4	1	5.97%
	6	2	
	7	1	
Guidance Counsellor	2	1	2.99%
	3	1	
HOD	1	4	28.36%
	2	8	
	3	5	
	4	1	
	6	1	
Principal	0	1	1.49%
Senior Management	3	1	2.99%
	4	1	
Student Director	6	1	1.49%
Teacher with units	1	3	5.97%
	2	1	
Teacher without units	0	24	35.82%
TIC	0	4	10.45%
	1	1	
	2	1	
	3	1	
Grand total		67	100.00%



# Position Linked to Degree to which Participant is Out at School

Q2k

Report covers 2 pages

## Dean

Not Out	1	1.49%
To Everyone	2	2.99%
Total:	3	Percentage: 4.48%

## Deputy Principal

Not Out	2	2.99%
Some Staff	2	2.99%
Total:	4	Percentage: 5.97%

## Guidance Counsellor

Some Staff	2	2.99%
Total:	2	Percentage: 2.99%

## HOD

Not Out	1	1.49%
Some Staff	6	8.96%
Some Staff/Students	9	13.43%
To Everyone	3	4.48%
Total:	19	Percentage: 28.36%

## Principal

Not Out	1	1.49%
Total:	1	Percentage: 1.49%

## Senior Management

Some Staff	1	1.49%
To Everyone	1	1.49%
Total:	2	Percentage: 2.99%

## Student Director

To Everyone	1	1.49%
Total:	1	Percentage: 1.49%

Position Linked to Degree to which Participant is Out at School

Q2k

Report covers 2 pages

Teacher with units

Not Out	1	1.49%
Some Staff	1	1.49%
Some Staff/Students	1	1.49%
To Everyone	1	1.49%
Total:	4	Percentage: 5.97%

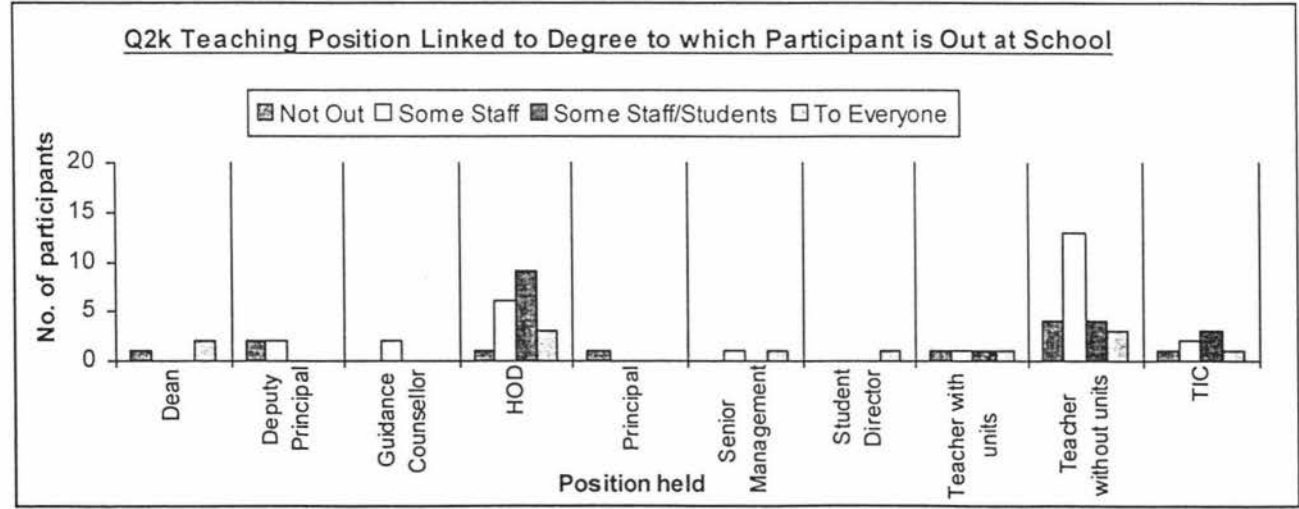
Teacher without units

Not Out	4	5.97%
Some Staff	13	19.40%
Some Staff/Students	4	5.97%
To Everyone	3	4.48%
Total:	24	Percentage: 35.82%

TIC

Not Out	1	1.49%
Some Staff	2	2.99%
Some Staff/Students	3	4.48%
To Everyone	1	1.49%
Total:	7	Percentage: 10.45%

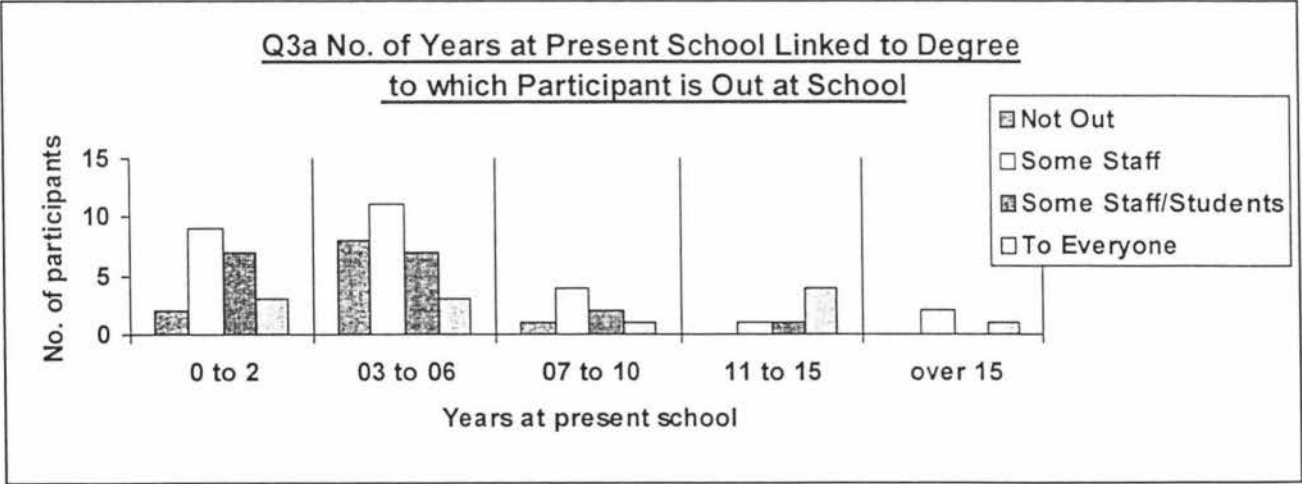
Grand Total 67 100.00%



Number of Years at Present School Linked to Degree to which Participant is Out at School

Q 3a

0 to 2	Years at Present School:	Total:	21	Percentage of Total:	31.34%
<hr/>					
Not Out			2		
Some Staff			9		
Some Staff/Students			7		
To Everyone			3		
03 to 06	Years at Present School:	Total:	29	Percentage of Total:	43.28%
<hr/>					
Not Out			8		
Some Staff			11		
Some Staff/Students			7		
To Everyone			3		
07 to 10	Years at Present School:	Total:	8	Percentage of Total:	11.94%
<hr/>					
Not Out			1		
Some Staff			4		
Some Staff/Students			2		
To Everyone			1		
11 to 15	Years at Present School:	Total:	6	Percentage of Total:	8.96%
<hr/>					
Some Staff			1		
Some Staff/Students			1		
To Everyone			4		
over 15	Years at Present School:	Total:	3	Percentage of Total:	4.48%
<hr/>					
Some Staff			2		
To Everyone			1		
<hr/>					
Grand Total			67		100.00%

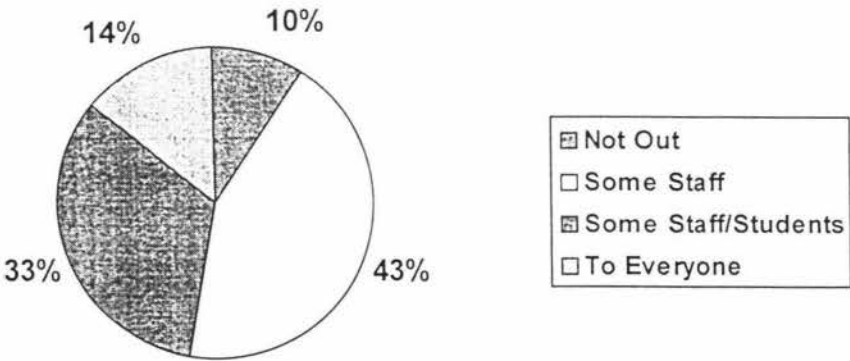


No. of Years at Present School (0 to 2 Years)  
Linked to Degree to which Participant is Out at School

Q 3b

Not Out	2	9.52%
Some Staff	9	42.86%
Some Staff/Students	7	33.33%
To Everyone	3	14.29%
Grand Total	21	100.00%

Q3b No. of Years at Present School (0-2)  
Linked to Degree to which Participant is Out at School

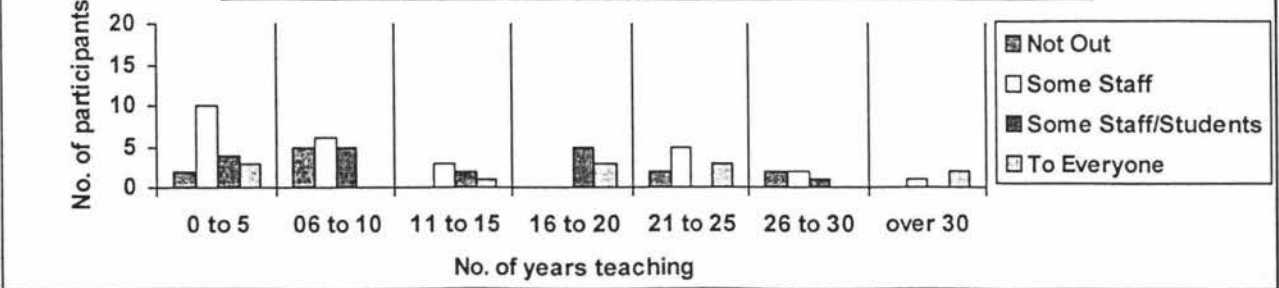


Number of Years Teaching Linked to Degree to which Participant is Out at School

Q4a

No. Years Taught: 0 to 5		Total: 19	Percentage: 28.36%
Not Out		2	2.99%
Some Staff		10	14.93%
Some Staff/Students		4	5.97%
To Everyone		3	4.48%
No. Years Taught: 06 to 10		Total: 16	Percentage: 23.88%
Not Out		5	7.46%
Some Staff		6	8.96%
Some Staff/Students		5	7.46%
No. Years Taught: 11 to 15		Total: 6	Percentage: 8.96%
Some Staff		3	4.48%
Some Staff/Students		2	2.99%
To Everyone		1	1.49%
No. Years Taught: 16 to 20		Total: 8	Percentage: 11.94%
Some Staff/Students		5	7.46%
To Everyone		3	4.48%
No. Years Taught: 21 to 25		Total: 10	Percentage: 14.93%
Not Out		2	2.99%
Some Staff		5	7.46%
To Everyone		3	4.48%
No. Years Taught: 26 to 30		Total: 5	Percentage: 7.46%
Not Out		2	2.99%
Some Staff		2	2.99%
Some Staff/Students		1	1.49%
No. Years Taught: over 30		Total: 3	Percentage: 4.48%
Some Staff		1	1.49%
To Everyone		2	2.99%
Grand Total		67	100.00%

Q4a Years Teaching Linked to Degree to which Out at School



Gender (F) and Position of Interviewer(s)

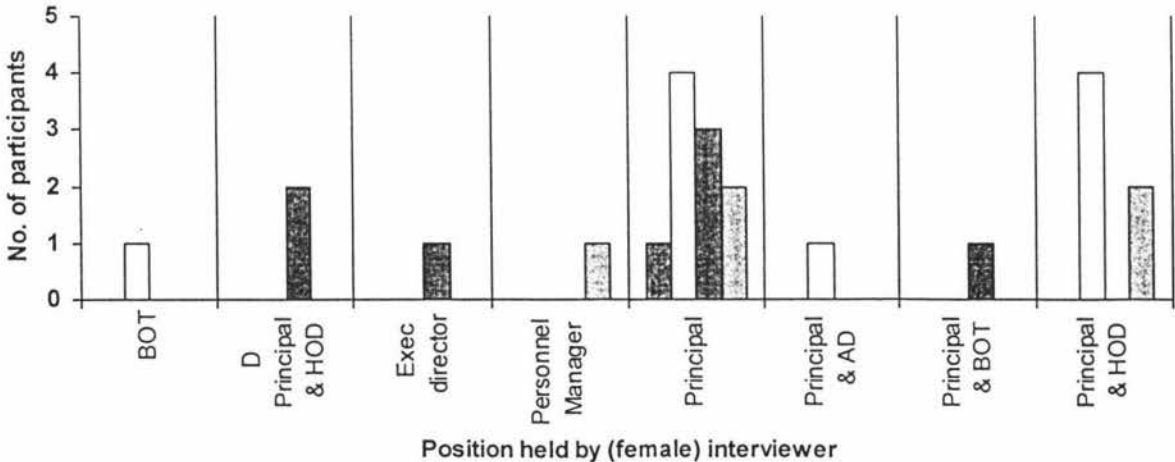
Q 7a

Linked to Degree to Which Participant is Out at School

	Appointed by	Total	Percentage
Not Out	Principal	1	
	Subtotal	1	4.35%
Some Staff	BOT	1	
	Principal	4	
	Principal & AD	1	
	Principal & HOD	4	
	Subtotal	10	43.48%
Some Staff/Students	D Principal & HOD	2	
	Exec director	1	
	Principal	3	
	Principal & BOT	1	
	Subtotal	7	30.43%
To Everyone	Personnel Manager	1	
	Principal	2	
	Principal & HOD	2	
	Subtotal	5	21.74%
Grand total		23	100.00%

Q7a Gender (F) and Position of Interviewer(s)  
Linked to Degree to which Participant is Out at School

Not Out    Some Staff    Some Staff/Students    To Everyone



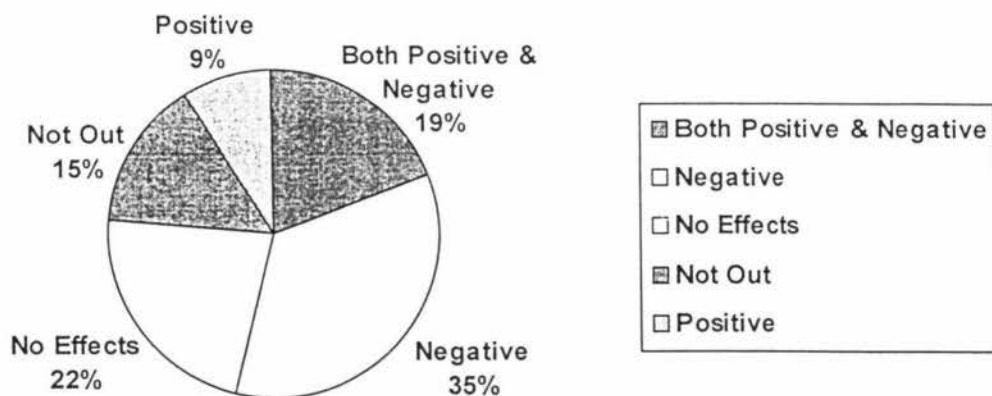


## General Effects on Participant's Work Environment

Q 14

<u>General Effects</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Both Positive & Negative	13	19.40%
Negative	23	34.33%
No Effects	15	22.39%
Not Out	10	14.93%
Positive	6	8.96%
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Q14 General Effects on Participant's Work Environment

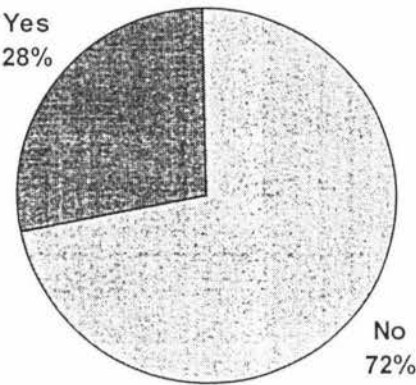


Change of Job Necessitated by Participant's Sexual Orientation

Q 15

<u>Caused Change of Job</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
No	48	71.64%
Yes	19	28.36%
<u>Grand total</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>100.00%</u>

Q15 Change of Job Necessitated by Sexual Orientation



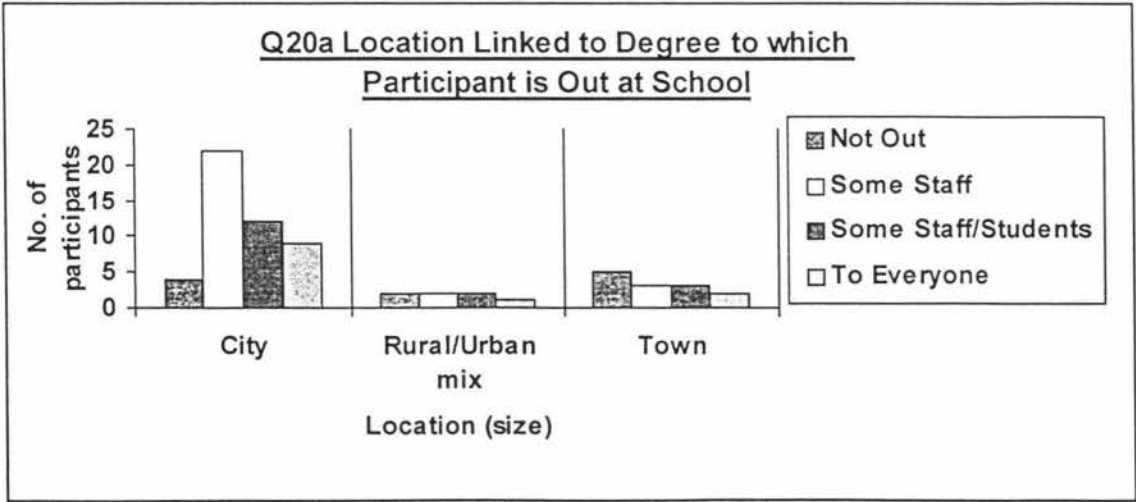
Location Linked to Degree to which Participant is Out at School

Q 20a

City	Total	Percentage
Not Out	4	5.97%
Some Staff	22	32.84%
Some Staff/Students	12	17.91%
To Everyone	9	13.43%
Total for Type of Location: 47		70.15%

Rural/Urban mix	Total	Percentage
Not Out	2	2.99%
Some Staff	2	2.99%
Some Staff/Students	2	2.99%
To Everyone	1	1.49%
Total for Type of Location: 7		10.45%

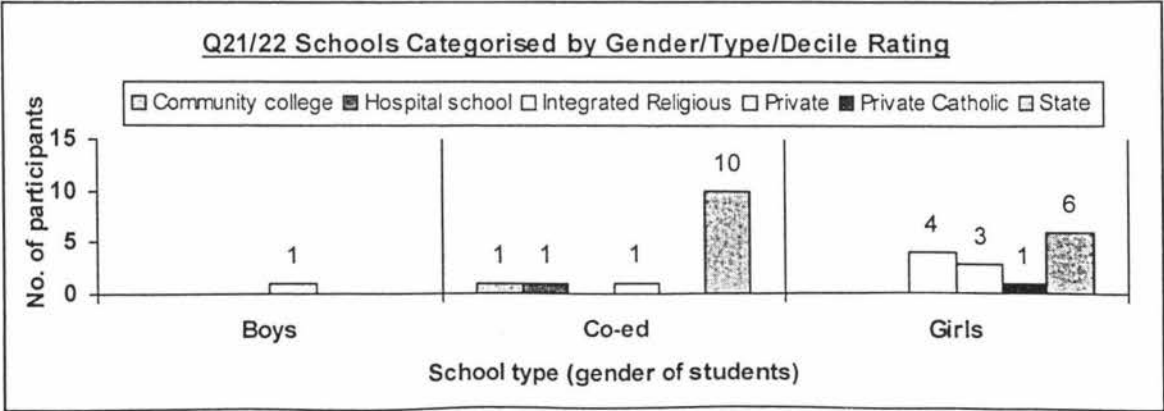
Town	Total	Percentage
Not Out	5	7.46%
Some Staff	3	4.48%
Some Staff/Students	3	4.48%
To Everyone	2	2.99%
Total for Type of Location: 13		19.40%
Grand Total	67	100.00%



Schools Categorised by Gender/Type/Decile Rating

Q 21/22

<u>Boys</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Decile Rating</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
	Private	N/A	1	1.49%
<u>Co-ed</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Decile Rating</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
	Community college	06	1	
	Hospital school	N/A	1	
	Private	N/A	2	
	State	01	3	
	State	02	2	
	State	03	3	
	State	04	7	
	State	05	4	
	State	06	6	
	State	07	2	
	State	08	4	
	State	09	2	
	State	10	3	
				59.70%
<u>Girls</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Decile Rating</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
	Integrated Religious	05	1	
	Integrated Religious	07	1	
	Integrated Religious	08	2	
	Integrated Religious	10	2	
	Private	07	1	
	Private	08	1	
	Private	N/A	4	
	Private Catholic	10	1	
	State	04	2	
	State	05	4	
	State	06	2	
	State	07	1	
	State	09	1	
	State	10	3	
				38.81%
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>67</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



Decile Rating Linked to Degree Out at School

Q 23a

Decile Rating	01			
Some Staff		3		
	Total	3	Percentage of Sample	4.48%
Decile Rating	02			
Some Staff/Students		1		
To Everyone		1		
	Total	2	Percentage of Sample	2.99%
Decile Rating	03			
Some Staff		2		
To Everyone		1		
	Total	3	Percentage of Sample	4.48%
Decile Rating	04			
Some Staff/Students		4		
Some Staff		3		
Not Out		1		
To Everyone		1		
	Total	9	Percentage of Sample	13.43%
Decile Rating	05			
Not Out		3		
Some Staff/Students		3		
Some Staff		2		
To Everyone		1		
	Total	9	Percentage of Sample	13.43%
Decile Rating	06			
Some Staff		4		
To Everyone		3		
Some Staff/Students		2		
	Total	9	Percentage of Sample	13.43%
Decile Rating	07			
To Everyone		3		
Some Staff		2		
	Total	5	Percentage of Sample	7.46%
Decile Rating	08			
Not Out		4		
Some Staff		3		
	Total	7	Percentage of Sample	10.45%
Decile Rating	09			
Not Out		1		
Some Staff		1		
To Everyone		1		
	Total	3	Percentage of Sample	4.48%
Decile Rating	10			
Some Staff		4		
Some Staff/Students		4		
Not Out		1		
	Total	9	Percentage of Sample	13.43%
Decile Rating	N/A			
Some Staff		3		
Some Staff/Students		3		
Not Out		1		
To Everyone		1		
	Total	8	Percentage of Sample	11.94%

Grand Total 67

