Visibility and lesbian women working in U.K. schools at the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century

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Abstract

This thesis explores the lived experiences of lesbian teachers in U.K. schools from the 1970s to the present day. The study examines the extent to which the participants declared their lesbianism and were visible as lesbian teachers during their careers. It considers different influences determining the degree of their visibility; for example, legislation, social relations and school culture.

This is a qualitative study involving a series of semi-structured, narrative interviews with nine self-identified lesbian teachers. Thematic, narrative and psycho-social analysis has been used to understand and present the data.

A key concept developed in this thesis is the notion of a 'liveable professional life'. This conceptualisation extends the work of Cox et al. (2009): a study that explored how a 'liveable life' may be fostered (or damaged) at the intersections of identity, place and social relations. Cox et al. (2009) suggest that visibility is calibrated in response to safety and risk factors found at those intersections. This research explores the nature of a 'liveable professional life' at the intersections of legislation, geographic place and social relations in the school workplace. It illustrates how lesbian visibility is calibrated, and a liveable professional life generated, in response to those intersections.

Furthermore, the thesis argues that schools should be conceptualised as networks of social relations. These networks are bounded by school role (teacher, pupil, parent, governor etcetera) but have porous boundaries. This may result from individuals holding multiple roles (for example, worker and parent) or because personal social relations may transcend organisational boundaries. As a consequence, the study has demonstrated that lesbian women may have reduced control over the calibration of their lesbian identity in the school workplace. It is suggested that this loss of agency is understood as 'coerced visibilisation' and should be considered a form of neo-oppression of lesbian teachers.

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1   Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Context

This thesis explores the lived experiences of lesbian teachers who have taught in UK schools over a forty-year period, from the 1970s to the present day. Drawing on in-depth qualitative interview data with nine women, the thesis examines the extent to which the participants have declared their lesbianism and been visible as lesbian teachers during their careers. The study examines different influences that have determined the degree of visibility experienced by these individual women in the school workplace; for example, legislation, social relations and school culture. It also considers how the participants have responded to, or integrated, such influences within their professional identity and work-life.

As a former Headteacher and lesbian woman my interest in the study is personal as well as academic. I have lived and worked through changing political times and altering social norms. Indeed, I have become more visible as a lesbian during the period spanned by the research project partly because of such changes. Thus, the thesis is driven, to some extent, by reflexive curiosity: I wanted to understand what has influenced the visibility of other lesbian teachers and how they have managed their visibility in school.

1.2 Research aims and questions

Four research questions underpin my examination of the visibility of lesbian teachers:

- o   Has a changing political and legal context influenced the visibility of lesbian women who work in U.K. schools?
- o   Are there additional or other influences on the visibility of lesbian women in the school workplace?
- o   What strategies do lesbian women in the school workplace use to manage their visibility? Have these strategies changed over time?
- o   How do lesbian women who lead schools navigate visibility?

The first two questions examine factors that may influence lesbian visibility. The first question considers the impact of political policy and legislation: this is because of the significance of Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality by Local Authorities in the U.K. Crucially this legislation contributed "to a climate of fear and self-censorship among sexual minority groups in schools" (Edwards et al. 2014, p.2). The act was repealed in 2003 and replaced, over time, with a raft of more permissive equalities' legislation.

As well as the fundamental importance and influence of legislation on lesbian visibility in schools, other factors may also be significant: this is addressed by the second question. Although I examine potential influences on lesbian visibility by asking two distinct questions, I anticipated that different effects might combine to generate a composite influence on lesbian visibility in the school workplace.

When lesbian teachers fear prejudice and harassment because of their sexuality, they may manage their professional life in a way that denies or masks their lesbianism. That is, they adopt a strategic approach to identity management and "self-censorship" (Edwards et al. 2014, p.2). Question three examines the ways in which lesbian teachers may adjust or calibrate their visibility in order to protect themselves from homophobic harm. This question also asks whether identity-management strategies have altered over time, particularly as legislation and social norms have changed.

The fourth and final research question asks how lesbian leaders navigate visibility in the school workplace. The question distinguishes leaders from teachers and other workers because of the higher public profile inherent in their roles. Perhaps attempts at masking a lesbian identity, or even declaring one, pose different challenges and opportunities for school leaders.

In addition, the role of leader and manager may require an individual to engage with other people's lesbian visibility; for example, if a worker experiences homophobia in the school workplace. Thus, the lesbian leader may manage her own lesbian visibility while, to some extent, managing that of other people. Thus, question four offers the opportunity to examine this 'double helix' of lesbian visibility.

I describe in greater detail the iterative process of generating and articulating the research questions in Chapter Three Section Two.

1.3 Summary of methods and methodology

This is a small-scale qualitative study. I recruited and interviewed nine self-identified lesbian women through a snowballing method. The participants ranged in age from mid-seventies to mid-forties; one woman was black, had been born in Africa and moved to the U.K. in the 1970s; the other women were white British. Their professional experience spanned primary, secondary and special schools. Two-thirds of the women had also worked outside of schools and education at some point during their careers.

I conducted semi-structured narrative interviews with each of the participants. Undertaking narrative interviews offered the opportunity to have wide-ranging conversations in which the participants could describe and analyse their personal experiences of being lesbian teachers. I also had an interview 'prompt sheet' that listed key or 'sensitizing' issues that might be of relevance to the research questions: these helped to give a loose structure to the interviews.

I recorded the interviews and then transcribed the content in order to carry out data analysis. In the first instance I analysed the data through thematic analysis; for example, social relations emerged as a key influence on lesbian visibility and the participants had much to say about a changing legislative context.

However, I also extended the analysis by examining two rich and lengthy narratives through the use of narrative analysis and psycho-social analysis. The narrative analysis enabled me to consider both the structure and personal meanings of the narratives; while the psycho-social analysis enabled me to reflect upon the narratives set within the context of the whole interview. Through using psycho-social evaluation I could also examine possible sub-conscious processes informing both the content of the narrative and the process / purpose of narration.

1.4   Theoretical perspectives

This study is informed by theoretical perspectives on the nature of 'lesbian identity' and 'lesbian visibility'. Here 'lesbian identity' is understood to be a social and discursive construction rather than an essential and immutable identity trait. It is also considered to be intersectional: as Gilchrist et al. (2010, p.8) observe "different aspects of our identities *intersect,* combining and modifying each other in the process". Thus, for example, the outlook and experience of a white lesbian teacher may be quite different from that of a black lesbian prison officer.

From a theoretical perspective, this thesis is predicated on the concept that 'lesbian visibility' is relational, contextual and adjustable. Thus, when social relations are supportive and the social / physical context appears safe, a lesbian woman may calibrate her visibility to more clearly declare her lesbian identity. However, where those conditions are lacking, she may 'tone down' her visibility in an attempt to protect herself from homophobic harm. Importantly this study extends the notion of adjustability by considering how other people may influence the degree of an individual's lesbian visibility.

A further theoretical influence is the idea of generating a 'liveable life'. Cox et al. (2009, pp. 175 - 176) argue that:

> Liveable lives involve both being able to be literally alive – that one's life is not ended, for example, through a violent homophobic or racist attack – and being able to live in a way that is not 'loathsome' (Butler, 2004a: 3, 2004b) to the individual.

I extend this notion to consider how the lesbians in this study sought to create a 'liveable professional life'. I argue that a liveable professional life is one where the lesbian teacher is institutionally recognised and protected, through both legislation and school policy, from homophobic abuse. Furthermore, a liveable professional life means that she is able to function in the workplace "in a way that is not 'loathsome'" (Cox et al. 2009, pp. 175 – 176) because day-to-day practice and social relations enable her to flourish both as a teacher and lesbian.

Chapter Two Section One provides further discussion of the theoretical foundations of this research.

1.5   Overview of structure

This introductory chapter is followed by eight further chapters. Chapter Two is a literature review focused on the research questions, while Chapter Three considers the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of the study. Chapter Three also describes the practical methods and activities deployed to generate the research data.

Chapter Four introduces the participants and also discusses their understanding of 'lesbian' and 'visibility' as concepts applied to themselves.

Chapters Five to Eight are analytic chapters and answer each of the research questions in turn. Thus, Chapter Five considers the participants' visibility in a changing political and legal context; specifically, it examines the participants' view of their visibility before, during and after the Section 28 years. However, this chapter also captures the breadth of the participants' observations as they reflect on wider LGBTQ visibility in schools as legislation has changed.

Chapter Six considers other influences on the participants' visibility as lesbians working in schools; for example, the region or locality of the school; the 'micro-culture' of the individual school, and social relations all influence lesbian visibility in the school workplace.

Chapter Seven considers how the participants have made strategic use of dress and appearance in an attempt to calibrate their visibility in school. The chapter also includes an analysis of the symbolic nature of dress and appearance at the intersection between lesbian identity and the professional (Headteacher) identity.

Chapter Eight further develops the discussion of the relationship between lesbian identity, professional (Headteacher) identity and professional relationships. To do this I take a methodological turn using narrative analysis and, following Hollway and Jefferson (2000), psycho-social analysis to consider extended narratives. Ideas of visibility, vulnerability and achieving a liveable professional life are central to the analysis.

Although I address the research questions in order and discreetly, I synthesise the findings to make the substantive arguments of the thesis in Chapter Nine. It is here that I summarise the findings of my research

bringing together theoretical and practical insights. Crucially, I demonstrate the original conceptual and applied contributions of my work.

2   Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides a critical review of the academic / research literature and in so doing provides the context for my study and thesis. In the first instance this chapter examines the concepts of 'identity' and how these relate to 'lesbian identity': central ontological notions in my work. Of ontology Stanley (1990, p.14) observes that it describes "a way of being in the world"; while Grix (2004, p. 59) argues that to explore the ontological is to study "claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other". Thus, in Section 2.1 I examine the nature of identity, both more broadly and in relation to lesbian identity.

As I have framed the research questions around notions of 'lesbian visibility', I shall also explore the concept of 'visibility' in Section 2.1. I will offer a definition of 'lesbian visibility' and relate it to the concept of 'lesbian identity'.

Then, in the following sections, I review and analyse the existing research literature in relation to my four research questions. Thus Section 2.2 examines the political and legislative context before, during and after the 'Section 28 era'. The section also considers the influence on the construction, policing and visibility of lesbians in the school workplace. Section 2.3 examines other influences on lesbian visibility, such as the local culture and practices of schools. Section 2.4 reviews lesbian identity-management strategies and approaches to the performance of a lesbian identity. Finally, Section 2.5 considers Jane Brown: a lesbian and a Headteacher in London in the 1990s. Brown's refusal to accept tickets for her pupils to attend a performance of 'Romeo and Juliet' was scandalised and led to her vilification as a lesbian Headteacher. Jane Brown's experience is the most well documented research that considers a lesbian Headteacher in the U.K. Consequently, it offers a starting point for discussion of the ways in which lesbians who lead schools may manage the intersection of 'lesbian' and 'professional (Headteacher) identity'.

2.1   Conceptualising Identity

The conceptualisation of 'identity' is neither straightforward nor static; as Wetherell (2010, p. 3) argues:

> …we treat identity as an open problematic – a site gathering together a wide range of concerns, tropes, curiosities, patterns of thoughts, debates around certain binaries and particular kinds of conversations.

Indeed Wetherell (2010) describes changing theory and altering conceptualisation of 'identity'; she suggests identity has been examined as an individual, personal entity, specifically as "a felt sense of personal place, continuity and location…" (p.3).

Identity has also been considered from the social role or position in a group, "with group membership, either ascribed by others, or avowed through sometimes passionate affiliation" (p.4).

Finally, identity has been described from an ethical or political perspective and "continues to be the place where collective action, social movements and issues of inequality, rights and social justice come into focus and demand attention" (p.4).

Furthermore, within contemporary sociological analysis, the following are key principles in the conceptualisation of identity:

- Identity is neither rigid nor rooted in some fundamental essence of being (for example Hall 1990).
- Identity is discursive; that is, identity is shaped by, and responsive to the social, while also influencing those same social relationships and social constructs (for example Hall 1996).
- Identity is constructed and, hence, can be deployed strategically (for example Wilton 1995).
- Identity is intersectional (for example Gilchrist et al. 2010).

I shall consider these sociological principles as I explore the conceptualisation of identity and, specifically, the nature of lesbian identity.

In rejecting notions of essentialist cultural identity, Hall (1990, p. 226) embraces cultural identity as constructed, malleable and conditional:

> …cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no

> fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin
> to which we can make some final and absolute return…It is
> always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth.
> Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable
> points of identification or suture, which are made, within the
> discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a
> *positioning.*

In arguing for created rather than essential identity, Hall suggests that identity must be in flux and never 'finished'; it is contextual and a 'plotting' of self which is "always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 222). To create and plot an identity, elements must be included while others are excluded; for example, Hall (1996, p.3) describes this process as "the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'".

Furthermore, in emphasising the contextual and discursive, Hall (1996) suggests that 'positioned identity' results from the combined 'pull' of social discourses and 'push' towards individual subjectivity.

If the concept of a non-essential, discursively constructed cultural identity is extrapolated to sexual identity, it may be argued that there is no fundamental or archetypal lesbian identity. For example, Wilton (1995, pp.3 - 4) observes:

> Sexual identity is a reflexive self-narrative profoundly dependent
> on cultural, economic and social factors…all of which are subject
> to quite dramatic shifts, sometimes over remarkably short
> intervals.

Thus, lesbian identities are made, (wo)manufactured or self-fashioned (for example Wilton 2004).

In addition, Wilton (2004, p. 185) argues that if sexual identity is self-fashioned and (following Butler) gender is performed, then "there is no such 'thing' as a lesbian, a heterosexual, a gay man or a bisexual. In short… homosexuality is a social role…". Consequently, a particular version of sexuality once adopted may be subject to change and, even dismissed; for example, Wilton (2004, p.187) comments:

> …younger women in this study…were generally quite relaxed in
> describing their sexuality as to do with choice, fluidity and
> circumstance, and as remaining open to further change in the
> future. 'Lesbian', from within this more recent paradigm, seems
> less an identity than a statement of intent.

As a consequence of conceptualising sexual identity in this way, Wilton (2004) argues that sexual desire should be re-theorised around central notions of 'preference' and 'taste'.

Although not all commentators would adopt Wilton's perspective on sexual taste and preference, a number of analyses relevant to my research have been framed within the essentialist versus social constructionist debate. This can be illustrated through an introductory analysis of Section 28 of the UK 1988 Local Government Act (to which I shall return in greater detail later in the chapter).

Section 28 was introduced by a right-wing government that wished to implement specific education policies; for example, a reduction in the power of local education authorities (Wilton 1995); minimising the impact of equal opportunities policies, particularly in left-wing councils (Wilton 1995); and, the reform of schools to reduce 'moral degeneracy' (Epstein and Johnson 1998). Informing these policies were ideologies of identity: specifically, the 'heterosexual family' was fetishized while the 'homosexual person' was demonised. For example, Wilton (1995, p. 191) argues:

> For a politic which attempts to structure the social arena around an idea of the nation as family, the idea of the homosexual as enemy within – the embodied challenge to the naturalness of familial ideology – is a necessary fiction…If homosexuals did not exist it would be necessary for the New Right to invent us. And invent us they have done, cleverly cobbling together a veritable Frankenstein's monster, howling in the outermost darkness around the embattled hearth of the Happy Heterosexual Family.

In 'creating' a version of 'homosexual', a non-essential perspective of homosexual identity was propagated in society and enshrined in legislation. As Wilton (1995, pp. 192 - 3) observes Section 28 "assumed [the] nature of same-sex desire. You cannot promote something unless it is *learned behaviour"*. As a consequence, Wilton argues, there was a strategic regression towards, and deployment of, essentialism:

> The reaction of lesbians and gay men and their supporters was to organise around a putative homosexual essence… While this retreat into essentialism was derided by a vocal section of the lesbian and gay community…it was a direct response to the whole spirit of Section 28, which is predicated upon a non-essentialist model of homosexuality as something which may be learned, taught or 'promoted' (p. 45).

Even after the repeal of Section 28, and with the introduction of new equalities legislation, a 'commitment' to essentialism continued. As Wilton observes:

> Human rights legislation emanating from the European Union, and the different varieties of same-sex partnership registration proposed or enacted by certain states, all assume an essentialist sexual orientation. Lesbians and gay men, in short, constitute a distinctive group with distinctive rights, much as do disabled people or those from minority ethnic communities. Activists and lobbyists base their claims for human and civil rights on essentialist models (Young-Bruehl 1996) (pp. 183 – 4).

In considering the discursive nature of identity, the work of several psycho-social researchers has been instructive to this study. For example, Hollway (2010, p. 216) asserts that she takes "relations as the core formative principle, not social relations but rather relationality (specifically unconscious intersubjective dynamics) as a founding principle for identity formation and transition". Furthermore, Wetherell (2010, p. 11) suggests that psycho-social researchers

> paint a picture of the ways in which identities are saturated with emotion and investment, full of affect, and describe the highly complex transformations which take place as new social roles clash with old narratives of the self, already existing partial and conflicted identifications, and accumulated psychosocial history. This work argues that social material is not simply 'internalized' but is transformed as it passes through the individual psyche and is worked on by psychological processes.

One example of psycho-social research is Walkerdine's (2009) account of her study of Steeltown. In this research, Walkerdine examines the impact of the closure of the town's major employer (the steel works) and the "relation of work identity to community by thinking about the role of trauma and affect in the production of forced identity change" (p. 59). In her conceptualisation of identity, Walkerdine explains that "that specific ways of being are produced through the affective relations of community, formed in specific cultural and historical circumstances" (p.60). Specifically, Walkerdine suggests that the community

> has developed affective practices which are familiar in character, in the sense that these practices provide basic containment and have developed to deal with the specific circumstances of the steel works and its demands, as well as being a unit through which mutual support could be contained…the communities practices provide a form of basic containment of anxieties, which both helps to support integration and which also provides a buffer against un- and disintegration…(p.64)

A number of methodological assumptions inform psycho-social research, and these are examined In Chapter Three Section Six.

A further fundamental principle in contemporary sociological analysis of identity argues that identity is generated and performed at intersections. A series of ERSC-funded studies highlight "the intersectional nature of identity, the entangled affiliations people articulate across identity categories, the diversity of standpoints in response to ethnicised and other classifications, as well as the importance of understanding the variable geography of these things" (Wetherell 2009, p. 4). In examining the visibility of lesbian women in U.K. schools, I pay particular attention to the intersection of 'lesbian' and 'teacher'.

One example of an ESRC-funded study that has influenced my research is that of Cox et al. (2009). Their work illustrates how women with differing sexual and ethnic identities may negotiate "the multiple strands of their identities in place and through relations with others" (p. 189). Furthermore, they seek to illustrate how "women perform and (re-iterate) social identifications and manage 'liveable lives'" (pp. 175 – 176). In exploring 'liveable lives' Cox et al. observe:

> Liveable lives involve both being able to be literally alive – that one's life is not ended, for example, through a violent homophobic or racist attack – and being able to live in a way that is not 'loathsome' (Butler, 2004a: 3, 2004b) to the individual. (pp. 175 – 176).

Their study examines several points of intersection and the consequences of those intersections; for example, the inter-relationship between sexuality, place and the possibility of homophobic violence. Furthermore Cox et al. observe that the lesbian and bisexual women in their study sought to "balance…'blending in' and 'standing out'…[since]…sometimes being 'cloaked' is easier and safer and the different areas/spaces of London can determine how cloaked or visible they feel" (p.189). Thus, to generate 'liveable lives' (both in the sense of protecting their physical safety and their psychological and emotional well-being), these women adjusted their identity management strategies to either high-light or diminish their visibility as lesbians at different times and in different places.

Such findings may resonate with some or all of the participants in my work. Indeed, I shall take the idea of a 'liveable life' and apply it to the

intersection of 'lesbian identity' and 'professional, teacher identity'; in doing so I will examine the concept of a 'liveable (lesbian) professional life'. In developing this concept, I shall suggest that for the lesbian, a liveable professional life is one where she is institutionally recognised and protected, through both legislation and school policy, from homophobic abuse. Furthermore, a liveable professional life means that she is able to function in the workplace "in a way that is not 'loathsome'" (Cox et al. 2009, pp. 175 – 176) because day-to-day practice and social relations enable her to flourish both as a teacher and lesbian.

Other studies of identity may also help to understand and theorise my findings. For example, there is a body of research that examines how sexual identity is both socially constructed and policed. Rutherford (1990, p.11) observes that "The Right (and Thatcherism) always have promised strong defences and well-policed frontiers against the transgressive threat and displacements of difference". Indeed, I shall argue later in this chapter that Section 28 was a Thatcherite mechanism for policing and, potentially, punishing lesbian and gay teachers.

Other commentators examine themes of identity production but from the perspective of children and young people in school. For example, DePalma and Atkinson (2008, xi) draw together research about:

> …making, breaking and contesting boundaries of identity, sexuality and gender…[they]…focus mainly on schools, perhaps the single most influential institution in children's lives, and the one which has been entrusted with the combined tasks of 'encouraging children to recognise, understand, celebrate and respect similarities and differences between people [and] challenging stereotyping, prejudice and bullying in all its forms…'(DfES 2005, p. 35).

While the focus of my work is on lesbian adults who work in schools (rather than the sexualities of their pupils) my participants may discuss how the intersection of personal sexual identity and professional identity is performed in relation to pupils and in the context of school. They are also likely to encounter pupils' attitudes to their own and others' sexualities, as well as to other aspects of identity such as gender and race; as Epstein and Johnson observe (2008, p.34):

> …practitioners in, for instance, caring, teaching or medical professions are directly and actively involved in the identity

construction of their young clients, students or patients in the same moment as they construct their own professional identities.

Thus, Epstein and Johnson consider that teachers hold a 'creative responsibility' towards the children and young people with whom they work. As their pupils generate and perform aspects of their own identities "teachers need to be aware of how their practices construct possibilities and spaces for young people's identity production in school contexts and, in this context, of how their own practice constructs identity in relation to the sexual" (p. 46).

Thus, in reflecting on the nature and generation of lesbian identities, I conclude that "…sexuality remains an ontologically contentious category…" (Patton 2010, p.361). This being the case, I need to be alert to the participants' own perspectives on their lesbian identities; for example, whether they have an essentialist or non-essentialist / discursively constructed understanding of sexual identity (or indeed any other aspect of identity); how they construct and perform the intersection between 'lesbian' and 'teacher' / 'school leader'; whether the participants feel, or have ever felt, that their sexual identity was policed and punished in the school workplace; and, how they manage the inter-sections of identity to produce a 'liveable professional life'.

Furthermore, as my research questions coalesce around the notion of 'visibility', I need to explain how I understand 'visibility' and its relationship to 'identity'. In doing this I return to the work of Cox et al. (2009). Their study examined the performance of intersections of identity in a specific geographical place (London) to generate 'liveable lives'. Importantly, when lesbians in the study were fearful of harassment, they muted the visibility of their lesbianism. Cox et al. (2009, p. 186) note:

> Fear of harassment can overshadow exertions of one's own sexual identity and adds to the inner conflict of 'coming out' not just to family and friends but also to neighbours, thus determining how individuals engage with their neighbourhoods.

Consequently Cox et al. conclude that the women in their study adjusted the visibility of their sexuality according to levels of threat.

Thus, I understand lesbian visibility to be related to the performance of a lesbian identity. Visibility is relational since it involves recognition and

response; sometimes the response validates, while on other occasions it condemns or threatens. As well as relational, visibility is contextual and calibrated as lesbian women 'turn up' or 'tone down' their performance of 'lesbian' in order to generate 'liveable lives'. As with the overarching concept of 'lesbian', the participants in my study may have different perspectives on how to generate their own version of a liveable professional life; if so, I shall reflect these in the data analysis.

2.2   The political and legislative context

To understand the influence of a changing political and legislative context on the participants' visibility as lesbian women in the school workplace at the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, the nature of those changes must be described and analysed. I shall argue that a single piece of legislation in the U.K. was pivotal and had a profound effect on the visibility of LGBTQ identities in schools: Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. This section examines the influences leading to the introduction of the legislation. The impact of Section 28, its subsequent repeal and replacement by a raft of equalities legislation is scrutinised in relation to the impact on the identity and visibility of lesbians who work, or have worked, in U.K. schools.

2.2.1 The Pre-Section 28 Years

The Wolfenden Committee was established by the U.K. Home Office in 1954 to review 'homosexual offences' and sentencing policy (Kollman and Waites 2011). The Committee recommended the partial de-criminalisation of homosexual acts between men: this helped to inform the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. The 1967 Act decriminalized "in England and Wales, homosexual acts that took place between two men over twenty-one years of age 'in private'" (Roseneil et al. 2013, p.175). Roseneil et al. (2013) argue that the 1967 Act legitimised (male) same-sex relationships and started a process of normative change. This move towards liberalisation emboldened grass roots activists; for example, to campaign for equal age of consent for men (Kollman and Waites 2011).

However, Waites (2005, p. 324) observes that "the age of consent for sex between women… was extremely rarely the subject of attention…this

marginalization and neglect also reflected the continuing social invisibility of lesbianism". Thus, although lesbianism had never been criminalised in the U.K. it was still taboo and invisible in mainstream culture.

Activist campaigning of the 1970s was led, primarily, by the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Many GLF members identified with Marxism and likened "the struggle for gay liberation with other struggles against capitalism" (Lent 2003, p. 29). However, the Gay Liberation Front not only railed against aspects of the State but against other, less politically strident and overtly lesbian and gay people. For example, Lent (2003, p. 30) observes that "GLF was as much a rebellion against the conventions of the old, closeted way of life for gay men and lesbians as it was a rebellion against straight prejudice and hostility".

Such activism provided 'background noise' to the political world of the late 1970s and early 1980s in the U.K. (Epstein 1994). This period saw the rise of New Right politics and policies under successive Conservative governments. At the same time sections of the right-wing press played "a central role in whipping up moral panic [about homosexuality and left-wing activism]" (Greenland and Nunney 2008, p. 243). HIV/AIDS also emerged[1] during this period (for example Squirrell 1989). As a result, the reform symbolised by the 1967 Sexual Offences stalled while "the Thatcher government [engaged] in openly homophobic policies" (Roseneil et al. 2013, p. 169).

In relation to sex and sexuality, the New Right presented 'progressive' schools and teachers as culpable in the moral decline of young people and society (for example Epstein and Johnson 1998). Hence one reason for the New Right's emphasis on reducing the influence of 'progressive' local authorities and the perceived need for greater involvement of central government in curriculum and teaching (Epstein and Johnson 1998). In this way schools and teachers could be reformed "to act as the moral saviours of the nation" (Epstein and Johnson 1998, p. 30).

Commentators have noted the 'supporting role' played by sections of the right-wing press in promoting the New Right agenda (for example Epstein 1994; Epstein and Johnson 1989; Squirrell 1989; Greenland and Nunney

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[1] A virus transmitted via bodily fluids. It first became evident amongst gay men. In the 1980s, there was little information about the nature of the virus and no effective treatment. It was scandalised as a 'gay plague'.

2008). Citing Curran et al. (2005), Greenland and Nunney (2008, p. 244) argue that the press promoted the idea that certain books and other resources in schools supported "militant left-wing homosexuals trying to recruit and/or seduce innocent children…".

Growing awareness of HIV/AIDS compounded the prejudice and homophobia expressed, mainly towards gay men, by right-wing politicians and press. For example, Squirrell (1989, p. 89) quotes Lord Fitt's comments in a House of Lords debate: "I have no doubt that a significant number of present AIDS carriers within our society were given positive education in homosexuality when they were at school".

Thus, a perfect storm of "prejudice, misinformation and mythology" (Ferfolja 2009, p. 383) opened the way for the introduction of Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act.

2.2.2 The 1980s and 1990s: Section 28 in action

Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988) made the promotion of homosexuality by Local Authorities in the U.K. illegal. Specifically, the Act stated that "a local authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship".

As noted in Section 2.1, Section 28 of the 1988 Act constructed the 'homosexual' as non-essential and predatory. In addition, Wilton (1995, p. 45) comments:

> It was also, for the first time in British Parliamentary history, an attack on homosexual *identities and lifestyles* rather than homosexual acts and was the first Act of Parliament to target lesbians.

Furthermore, Wilton suggests that the concept of 'family' was 'heterosexualised', with lesbian and gay men only able to 'pretend' to have family relationships. Thus, Wilton concludes:

> The implication that a lesbian mother may only *pretend* to a family relationship with her child exposes with appalling viciousness the extent to which a homophobic administration is simply able to write homosexuals out of the human race. (p. 192)

However, Epstein (2000) argues that Section 28 was poorly drafted and, therefore, unenforceable. For example, there was lack of clarity about the meaning of 'promotion' of homosexuality. In addition, Epstein explains that schools, rather than Local Authorities, were responsible for sex education. Therefore, arguably, Local Authorities could not be deemed to have directly promoted homosexuality in schools.

Despite this, the Act "generated a great deal of confusion and uncertainty among teachers" (Greenland and Nunney 2008, p. 244) about what they could teach pupils and how they might address homophobic bullying (for example Greenland and Nunney 2008; Epstein 2000).

For LGBTQ teachers Section 28 generated fear of harassment and discrimination. Clarke (1996, p. 191) observes of Section 28 that "it has clearly had a major impact on the lives of lesbian and gay teachers causing many of them to fear for the continuation of their employment should their sexuality be revealed".

Writing much later, and after the repeal of Section 28, Edwards et al. (2014, p. 2) confirm that Section 28 contributed "to a climate of fear and self-censorship among sexual minority groups in schools". Thus, many lesbian and gay teachers deployed the "silence of self-censorship" (Nixon and Givens 2007, p. 457) to hide their sexuality. As I argued in Section 2.1, a sense of safety is often required to declare or highlight a lesbian or gay identity.

Edwards et al. (2014, p. 2) cite Foucault to generate a theoretical view of Section 28, arguing it functioned "as a *panoptic schema* of surveillance". From their perspective Section 28 was a 'panoptic schema of surveillance' since it created a sense of being watched and monitored. In this way Edwards et al. argue fear was instilled into teachers and other LGBTQ workers in schools; consequently, they ensured the requirements of Section 28 were fulfilled. Furthermore, the lack of clarity in the drafting of the Act led to uncertainty about how, when and by whom non-compliance might be punished. Thus Edwards et al. suggest:

> …the fear of retribution for one's observed actions becomes incorporated into an individual's consciousness. Over time, this transforms behaviour towards an expected social norm…this encouraged teachers to self-censor their own behaviours in case they were 'seen' to be in some way promoting homosexuality in schools.(p. 2)

On the other hand, Section 28 generated the unintended consequence of promoting a new and different wave of gay activism (for example Stacey 1991; Epstein and Johnson 1998). Thus Stonewall[2] was founded in 1989 to campaign for the repeal of Section 28 (Roseneil et al. 2013) and OutRage developed as "a deliberately non-ideological organisation committed solely to fighting homophobia wherever it appeared, rather than acting on the basis of sophisticated analyses of social oppression" (Lent 2003, p. 32). Thus far from minimising the visibility of lesbian and gay people in schools, Epstein (1994, p. 7) asserts that "Section 28 has had contradictory effects…it actually succeeded in promoting homosexuality".

With the 'politicization' of personal sexuality, 'New Labour' of the 1990s positioned itself rather differently from the New Right and Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s. Epstein and Johnson (1998, p. 65) describe this opposing view as "social liberalism". They argue that, while social liberals supported the idea the State could intervene in matters sexual, sexuality and the nature of that intervention were understood differently. For example, Tony Blair[3] asserted in 1994 (Epstein and Johnson 1998, p. 66) that he did "not believe that sexuality is determined by persuasion". Thus, he was adopting a more essentialist concept of (homo)sexuality than the one represented in Section 28: as noted in Section 2.1 essentialism considers that sexual identity is 'born not made'. Furthermore Wilton (2004, p. 182) observes that "policy-makers have begun extending long-overdue recognition of civil rights to lesbian and gay citizens, but such political gains lie firmly within the parameters of essentialism".

In adopting an essentialist perspective, it would be possible to conclude that Section 28 was founded on a flawed thinking: if someone cannot be converted or persuaded to homosexuality there is little point in criminalising so-called 'promotion'. Although not all social liberals shared the same beliefs about the nature of sexuality and its relationship to the State, Epstein and Johnson (1998, p. 66) argue that this tentative move

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[2] Stonewall is an LGBTQ rights charity in the U.K. It was named after the Stonewall riots in New York.
[3] Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party in 1994. He led the party to electoral success in the 1997 general election.

created "a space for arguing for the injustice of discrimination and for claiming equality of recognition for lesbians and gay men".

Indeed, the Labour Party Manifesto of 1997, while not making specific mention of LGBTQ rights, declared the intention to introduce a Human Rights Act (for example Kollman and Waites 2011). This manifesto commitment, plus Chris Smith's[4] presence in the Labour shadow cabinet, offered the possibility of change (for example Epstein and Johnson 1998).

2.2.3 21st Century Equalities Legislation

Since as Epstein (2000, p. 388) argues "…the repeal of Section 28 [was] always on the agenda of social liberals within New Labour", it is unsurprising that legislation to enact repeal was drafted during the first parliament of the 1997 Labour government. However, the draft Bill faced significant and reactionary challenge. For example, Epstein (2000, p. 389) observes that a "flood of moral traditionalism…has been unleashed in the pages of several U.K. national newspapers and in the House of Lords itself by the attempted repeal".

Despite this 'local' objection European Union policy hastened the repeal of Section 28 in the Local Government Act (2003) and helped to usher in further equalities legislation in the U.K. (for example Roseneil et al. 2013). Roseneil et al. (2013, p. 173) argue these statutes continued the process of normative change by providing "the *protection* of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people and the *recognition* of intimate relationships". For example, protective legislation included the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 and the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act 2010 made it illegal to discriminate in the workplace on the grounds of 'protected' characteristics' which include gender reassignment, civil partnership status and sexual orientation. It also "introduced a single 'public duty' which requires all publicly funded bodies to proactively promote equality across the board" (Colgan and Wright 2011, p. 550). Nixon and Givens (2007) had argued previously that this proactive 'public

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[4] Chris Smith was the first openly gay British MP, coming out in 1984. In 2005 he became the first MP to acknowledge that he was HIV positive.

duty' was needed to uproot the deeply embedded discrimination still evident in schools.

Recognition was provided in the Civil Partnerships Act 2004 and the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 equalised same-sex marriage and heterosexual marriage. Same-sex marriage could be solemnized through civil or religious ceremony (if the religious organisation had opted into the process). Unlike the earlier equalities legislation this was enacted by a Conservative-led coalition government. It could be argued that this was remarkable given the homophobic and discriminatory Conservative policy evident in the U.K. in the 1980s and 1990s. However, Edwards et al. (2014, p. 1) observe that "if U.K. policymaking is a barometer for its prevailing culture, then attitudes towards sexual diversity have shifted over the last decade".

On the other hand Neary (2016, p.768) asserts that "the prime minister of the U.K., David Cameron, advocated same-sex couple access to marriage *because* he is a conservative not *in spite of* being a conservative…".Neary makes this claim based on the idea that normalization and assimilation through the institution of state-validated marriage "(re)produces an 'acceptable' sexual citizen" (p.757). She goes on to conclude:

> The emphasis on normalization and the notion that progressive change is about an 'eradication of the idea that we're in any way different'…signals a reliance on a model of equality based on sameness rather than difference…It is rooted in the idea that a certain sameness with heterosexuality is required in order to be considered legitimate grounds for equality…[this in turn] renders diversity invisible (p. 773).

Thus, the heterosexualisation of 'family' promoted in Section 28 was unravelled and replaced with a more sexually- and gender-neutral version. This was now the State-validated version of acceptable sexuality and family-relationships.

On the other hand, there is still a limit to the political and legal protection and recognition offered to LGBTQ teachers who work in some schools with a religious foundation. For example, Government guidance ('Staffing and employment advice for schools', 2017) distinguishes employment status on the grounds of religious belief in voluntary-aided schools; it states:

> 6.1 The governing body in a voluntary-aided school may give preference with regard to the appointment, remuneration and promotion of teachers at the school, to persons whose religious opinions are in accordance with the tenets of the school's religion…
>
> 6.2 The governing body may also have regard, in connection with the termination of the employment of a teacher at the school, to any conduct by the teacher which is incompatible with the precepts of, or with the upholding of the tenets of the school's religion.

However, Governing Bodies must "ensure that the application of these powers does not contravene employment law" (6.8). Thus, LGBTQ workers in faith schools that condemn same-sex relationships may continue to seek invisibility for fear of harassment, discrimination and dismissal.

Writing of similar legislation in Australia, Ferfolja and Hopkins (2013, p. 317) observe that "the exemption in anti-discriminatory legislation complicates lesbian and gay teachers' working lives". Furthermore, Ferfolja and Hopkins argue that "the legal exemptions for religious organisations from the Anti-discrimination Act must be overturned to ensure equitable and socially just work environments for lesbian and gay teachers" (p. 321).

With a changing political and legislative context, it might be expected that the visibility of lesbian women working in many U.K. schools has shifted and changed. As Colgan and Wright argue (2011, p. 548) changing legislation "has undoubtedly offered a step forward for LGB people in British workplaces". For example, they suggest the introduction of civil partnerships was "'normalizing' and increased LGBT people's self-confidence in talking about their relationships and partnerships at work" (p. 555). However, as Ferfolja (2009, p. 381) argues:

> …teachers' concerns regarding potential discrimination are not necessarily allayed by anti-discrimination legislation alone, which may be ineffective if not reinforced by school administrations. Indeed, laws may police explicit discrimination but do not necessarily halt discriminatory covert acts.

Indeed, teachers in the Colgan and Wright (2011) study questioned how deeply change has been embedded in U.K. schools. For example, they argue that there is a hierarchy of equalities and "being gay is well down there. There is lip service paid to it" (p. 557). Crucially, it was perceived that the reduced powers of Local Authorities (viewed as the 'champions'

of LGBTQ equality in their study) and the increased independence and variety of schools (through the introduction of Academies and Free Schools) fragments the impact of equalities legislation. For example, Colgan and Wright comment "it was 'the head who made the school' in terms of setting policy, practice and culture and thus there was much greater variation in working environments between schools" (p. 560).

The next section of this chapter considers other influences, beyond the politico-legal, on lesbian visibility in the school workplace.

2.3 Other influences on the visibility of lesbian women in school

The State, through the political process of drafting and enacting legislation, has had profound impact on the visibility of lesbian women in the school workplace in the U.K. However other factors have also influenced their visibility. As Endo et al. (2010, p. 1024) observe "the degree of teachers' "outness" in their school environment differs from each other and there seem to be numerous socio-political factors in their coming-out process".

Both geographic location and the local practices of schools influence lesbian visibility. For example, Ferfolja (2009, p. 384) asserts that "the culture and location…or religious affiliations of the school" has an impact upon lesbian visibility; while Blinick (1994) describes the influence of geographic location.

Other research literature emphasises the impact of school leaders on the visibility of lesbians in the school workplace; for example, Ferfolja (2009, p.382) (citing Allen 1999) comments:

> …school administrators' active and explicit application of anti-discrimination legislation to school-based policies and programmes helped to create a positive school culture in relation to sexual diversity. This in turn enhanced feelings of safety and security for many lesbian teachers in the study, influencing their willingness to be 'out'.

Conversely where school leaders and managers do not take a proactive and supportive approach to sexual diversity, visibility may be diminished. For example, despite the introduction of equalities legislation in the U.K., Colgan and Wright (2011, p. 559) argue that some leaders do not prioritise the development and implementation of equalities policies:

> Thus, while policies on sexual orientation had been developed, on paper, there was a view…that there was often insufficient commitment from managers and leaders to put these into practice, given a host of other political, financial and social pressures.

In addition, Colgan and Wright contend that this lack of commitment from managers and leaders may result, at least in part, from a lack of diversity training.

Even where there is a commitment to equalities policy and practice from the senior leaders in a school, this may not be shared or implemented by other managers. As Colgan and Wright observe:

> Even where there was a commitment at the top this did not always percolate down to junior and middle managers, who were perceived to have limited awareness and in some cases were thought to avoid addressing sexual orientation issues because they were not confident or willing to do so (p. 566).

Furthermore Gray (2013) presents a picture of school managers and leaders who are reluctant to support teachers who wish to come out to pupils. Their resistance "took many forms including the refusal to hold a Pride assembly…refusing to use the word 'homophobia' in a report on bullying, and surreptitiously removing books with LGB themes from a school library" (p. 711).

Malicious stereotypes about LGBTQ people may also reinforce the need to keep sexuality hidden in the school workplace (for example Epstein and Johnson 1998). To illustrate this Hardie (2012, pp. 275 - 276) (a teacher who did not declare her own lesbian identity while working in school) describes how she managed the potential threat of being accused of child abuse:

> I felt on edge and vulnerable because of my sexuality; thus, I made sure I never supervised showers and, in this way, I maintained a professional boundary that prevented the possibility of any allegation of sexual impropriety or paedophilia.

Edwards et al. (2014) confirm that lesbian teachers may still mute their visibility for fear of such accusation.

Finally, in relation to other influences, visibility may be enhanced by the beliefs and actions of other people. For example, Hardie (2012, p. 277) argues that "students who want to know about their teacher's sexuality will listen for cues, and although sexuality is not declared, those students

will tune in to hear these clues". Furthermore Edwards et al. (2014, p. 709) assert that once anything is known, or believed, about a teacher's (homo)sexuality within the school organisation, it becomes de facto public:

> John states that information about his sexuality has been passed on through 'word of mouth', suggesting that once spoken into existence, the divide between a lesbian, gay or bisexual teacher's public and professional life is forever fractured…Foucault argues that schools are 'observation machines'…and so it can be argued that once spoken, the sexuality of an LGB teacher becomes public property.

As well as external and social factors, internal and psychological characteristics may influence lesbian identity and, as a consequence, visibility in the school workplace. For example, Rudoe (2010, p. 27) observes "it is important to recognise that lesbian teachers negotiate their identity in relation to the complex interplay between their gender, ethnicity and class position".

Sharing heterofamilial norms of parenting and family life may also support lesbians who wish to be visible in the school workplace. For example, one participant in Rudoe's study (2010, p. 29):

> …identifies having a child as contributing to her social capital in the school; this provides her with an unproblematic way of discussing her personal or private life with other staff members and is part of her negotiation of her sexuality in the school.

In a similar vein, Gray (2013) notes that having a partner facilitates lesbian women coming out to colleagues in the school workplace.

Personal conviction may also encourage an individual to embrace visibility; for example, Ferfolja (2009, p. 386) observes:

> The prospect of discrimination and the invisibility caused by heterosexism…certainly silences lesbian and gay teachers but it may compel them to come out: a political gesture aimed at quelling negative myths and misconceptions...

In a similar vein Blinick (1994, p.143) comments on her belief:

> I felt it was crucial for young people – especially those who were questioning their sexual orientation or who already knew that they were lesbian, gay, or bisexual – to see another healthy, happy and productive lesbian.

Examples of visibility driven by a desire to offer positive role models to pupils persist in the literature (for example Courtney 2014 and Atkinson and Moffat 2009). This is despite critiques of the notion of 'role model';

for example, of the ability to be representative of category (Hardie 2012) or of the potential for impact (Rudoe 2010).

Another influence on lesbian visibility is the desire to respond to homophobia directed towards the individual lesbian herself. For example, Gray (2013, p. 710) observes that "a key reason for coming out to students was that participants had experienced homophobia as a result of the way in which students perceived their sexual orientation".

Thus, a range of factors beyond the political and legislative may influence lesbians to conceal or declare their sexual identity in the school workplace. The next section considers the strategies lesbians may deploy in managing their lesbian visibility in the school workplace.

2.4 Managing lesbian visibility in the school workplace

The research literature suggests that fear of discovery and potential harassment and discrimination, has driven many LGBTQ teachers to hide or disguise their sexuality. For example, Ferfolja (2009, p. 384) comments:

> As a result of discrimination many lesbian and gay teachers perceive a need to 'manage' their sexuality at work. This often involves employing strategies that enable the lesbian teacher to hide her sexuality to varying extents depending on the context. It may involve careful monitoring of appearance, behaviour and conversation.

In relation to identity management strategies Griffin (1991) developed a descriptive framework. This four-staged identity-management typology was developed from the analysis of interview transcripts with 13 lesbian or gay teachers in the U.S.A. Behaviours were grouped into categories:

> *'Passing'* in which "an individual actively says or does something to suggest they are heterosexual so that their sexual identity is invisible. Or, more passively, they may simply not challenge the assumption that they are heterosexual" (Sparkes 1994, p. 99).

> *'Covering'* where someone does not set out be understood as heterosexual but conceals their non-heterosexual identity; for example, by using gender-neutral language when speaking of a partner. Griffin (1998, p. 138) describes covering as "a middle ground between passing as heterosexual and actually coming out".

> *'Implicitly coming out'* by speaking about one's private life without explicitly confirming a lesbian or gay identity.

> *'Explicitly coming out'* when someone self-identifies using words such as lesbian or gay.

Sparkes (1994) observes that these strategies involve both risks and benefits; for example, although 'passing' may secure invisibility, it requires a rigid separation of the individual's private and professional life. Maintaining such a 'public/private' divide may have negative consequences for LGBTQ workers in schools; for example, Sparkes writes of a newly qualified P.E. teacher, "...the ongoing dislocation and forced separation of her professional and personal life are exacting a heavy emotional toll on her" (p. 107). Or as Squirrell (1989, p.97) comments "there is a strain in not being able to acknowledge anything of one's personal life in school…Duplicity and lying also take their toll, as does not 'bearing witness'".

Continuing this theme Ferfolja (2009) highlights the negative impact on teachers' health citing research by Olson (1987). Writing more recently Gray (2013, p. 707) confirms that stress, anxiety and depression continue to be prevalent for LGBTQ teachers, with one of the participants in her study needing "the support of a therapist to enable her to manage her professional life".

Invisibility can isolate and separate lesbian workers from their colleagues. Clarke (1996, p. 206) describes the professional isolation of lesbian teachers as they manage a professional / private divide, considering it a "process that denies them full participation in the social world of the school". Similarly, Gray (2013, p. 708) asserts that "LGB teachers lack the social (heterosexual) capital to participate fully with the staffroom banter that gives one a sense of belonging…[which] precipitated feelings of isolation…".

Other research has problematised Griffin's model. For example, Hardie (2012, p. 280) observes that Griffin's strategies may not be mutually exclusive, commenting that she "used all of them in different contexts in my professional role".

Critique has also focused on the nature of 'public and private' spaces in the school and their influence on the identity management strategies of lesbians (Wallis and VanEvery 2000). On the other hand, Rudoe (2010) has considered the intersection of spaces and power relationships within the school and the impact on lesbian visibility; she concludes:

> The school may be conceptualised as both a public and private space, with unstable boundaries between the two… and as teachers move between locations in the school they may employ different 'identity management strategies'…(p.23).

While Edwards et al. (2014, p. 10) note that the strategies presented in Griffin's model are still evident in the identity management of lesbians in the school workplace, the framework "does not tell the whole story".

Furthermore Ferfolja (2009) argues that dress and appearance may play a strategic role in the identity management and visibility of lesbians in the school workplace. Dress is central to self-presentation and identity management both at work and in life more generally. As Wilson (1990, p.67) comments "clothes play a key part in our acts of self-presentation, whether we like it – or recognise it – or not".

Crucially dress and appearance may be involved in the performance of gender and sexuality; for example, Davis (2015, p. 959) observes:

> Clothing is an essential means through which social actors construct, perform, and negotiate their sexualities in their everyday lives…social actors carefully balance institutional demands, their sexual identities, and their erotic desires when determining what to wear.

Thus, dress and appearance may be significant in the workplace as lesbian identities intersect with professional identities. Citing Goffman (1959), Lugg and Tooms (2010, p. 84) observe that "every organization has a professional uniform that is the mandated presentation of self".

It may be argued, therefore, that dress and appearance are literally the garments of identity, sometimes cloaking while at other times revealing.

As I have started to suggest (for example Davis 2015) organisations may specify a dress code for their workers and this is often the case in schools. In balancing a lesbian identity with professional identity, some lesbians in schools deploy a hyper-feminine dress code "...to distance themselves from the lesbian stereotype" (Edwards et al. 2014, p. 12). Others adopt distinct dress codes in and out of work; for example, Wallis and VanEvery's (2000, p. 413) participant comments:

> When I go to work I put on my 'uniform', neat cardigans and smart blouses and trousers with a crease ironed down the front, clothes that I would never wear outside work. Although I realize there are many things I choose to edit in the school environment, most of the information that I censor about myself is related in some way to my sexuality.

Leadership roles in schools often carry additional requirements in relation to dress and appearance, such as wearing formal jackets or suits. Lugg and Tooms (2010, p. 78) call this "the cultural phenomenon of the suit". Thus, the intersection of school leader and lesbian may be another site to perform and calibrate identity which may be mediated through dress and appearance.

2.5   Lesbian women leading schools

The fourth research question asks how lesbians who lead schools navigate visibility. The research literature offers a significant example of one lesbian Headteacher's visibility during the Section 28 years. Jane Brown was a primary school Headteacher in the 1990s in the London Borough of Hackney. Her refusal to accept tickets to take pupils to the ballet of 'Romeo and Juliet' in 1993 generated outrage amongst both the political classes and the press (Cooper 1997).

Brown's decision to decline the tickets was multi-faceted but as Cooper (1997, p. 501) observes "price, logistics, and educational planning were all factors, but the one that grabbed the public's attention was the comment dismissing Romeo and Juliet as a tale of heterosexual love".

Epstein and Johnson (1998, p. 90) comment that "the precise facts remain obscure" but suggest that media reporting escalated from criticising Jane Brown's professional judgement in refusing the tickets to 'scandalising' her sexuality.

Brown's dress and appearance could be typified as 'butch' or masculine. It was used by sections of the press to scandalise and condemn her sexuality (for example Steinberg et al. 1997). Quoting a headline from the *Daily Mail* on 21 /1 / 94 in which Jane Brown was described as "wearing a blue donkey jacket, red jeans and boots – her customary school attire", Steinberg et al. (1997, p. 185) argue that "this coding of Jane Brown as being a rather 'butch' lesbian ushered in a series of attacks on her primarily for her sexuality…". Wilson (1995, p. 3) notes that *The Sun* also used derogatory language, describing Brown's physical appearance "as a 'hatchet-faced dyke' who must be sacked immediately".

In addition, Brown appears to have been caught in the middle of a power struggle between the Governing Body of her school (Kingsmead Primary

School) and the Education Department of the Local Authority. Cooper (1997) argues that the Local Authority was adjusting to its loss of direct control over schools introduced by the Conservative government's policy of 'Local Management of Schools' (LMS). Similarly, the Governing Body of Kingsmead School was testing its new responsibilities and powers acquired under LMS. Cooper (1997, p. 501) concludes that "the struggle that occurred over the boundaries of school initiative and the allocation of educational control parallels similar conflicts that have arisen elsewhere in Britain as a result of the educational reforms of the late 1980s".

It could also be argued (for example Cooper 1997) that the 'assertive' response from Local Authority officers and councillors resulted from the Labour members' desire to identify themselves with the social liberal policies of New Labour and distance themselves from earlier, strongly left-wing policies.

In addition, Cooper explores the response of parents and the wider community to the Jane Brown case. She comments that lesbian and gay activists rallied to Jane Brown's support and in so doing "placed Kingsmead as the focal point of a symbolic lesbian community" (p. 510). She also asserts that parents were supportive of Brown and turned their anger towards Gus John, Director of Education, because of his unsupportive intervention. On the other hand, Epstein (1996) offers a critique that suggests some parental support for Brown stemmed from racism against John.

Furthermore, Epstein and Johnson (1998) suggest that Jane Brown's case illustrates how "sexualities are policed" (p. 130). They argue that the media, politics and the state all play significant roles in policing sexualities and that "the surveillance of teachers in relation to sexuality [is] particularly strong…[which in turn]...bears particularly heavily on teachers identifying as lesbian and gay" (p. 131).

While Epstein and Johnson agree with Cooper that the inter-relationship between local and national politics was significant, their analysis examines the outing of Jane Brown by the press. They illustrate that her visibility as a lesbian Headteacher cost her dearly. For example, Epstein and Johnson comment "her privacy was invaded, she received hate mail, her partner outed, her partner's children and ex-partner harassed, and her work and career deeply affected" (p.90).

Jane Brown's case also had wider significance for lesbians and their visibility in the school workplace. For example, Epstein and Johnson argue that Brown became the negative symbol of lesbian teachers and that the response to her was an "attempt to define lesbian teachers…as inappropriate people to head a school and perhaps to teach there at all" (p.90).

2.6 Discussion

I began this chapter with a discussion of the conceptualisation of identity and of 'lesbian' identity; as a result, the conceptualisation that I employ in this thesis broadly follows Wilton (2004, p.8):

> My understanding of the relationship between the individual and the social is that the self is produced at and by a dynamic interface between the person (bodied, biological, sensate, electro-chemical) and the social realm (apprehensible only via the five corporeal senses).

Thus, a lesbian identity is discursive, non-essential and inter-sectional. In addition, I have argued that lesbian visibility is a consequence of performing a lesbian identity: it is relational and involves recognition and response. Visibility is also contextual and calibrated as lesbians 'turn up' or 'tone down' their performance of 'lesbian' in order to generate 'liveable lives'.

However, the participants in this study may not share my view or may have developed different perspectives over time. Hence an important task within my research is to capture and offer an analysis of the participants' definitions of identity and visibility.

I have argued that a single piece of legislation was pivotal and had a profound effect on the visibility of LGBTQ identities in school: Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. Section 28 policed the sexuality of teachers by acting "as a *panoptic schema* of surveillance" (Edwards et al. 2014, p. 2) which "created a climate of fear and homophobia" (Rudoe 2010, p. 25). Consequently, many lesbian and gay teachers deployed the "silence of self-censorship" (Nixon and Givens 2007, p. 457) to hide their sexuality. Gaining insight into the participants' perspective on being teachers and lesbians during this era is important. Were the participants fearful of their lesbianism being known in school during that time? If so,

did they seek to conceal or camouflage their sexuality? If so, how did they mask this aspect of their identity and minimise their lesbian visibility?

After the repeal of Section 28 and the introduction of equalities legislation, the literature suggests there was greater recognition and protection for LGBQT citizens. In addition, the 'family' was stripped of its heterosexual status, with an alternatively sexualized and more gender-neutral version taking its place. However, some commentators have argued that such changes come at a cost: that aspects of difference rooted in sexual identity have been minimized or 'glossed over'. Thus, I seek to understand the impact of legislative reform on the participants' experience and visibility as lesbians in the school workplace. Did they feel recognised and protected by changing legislation? Did they feel more able to identify as lesbian in the school workplace as legislation changed? Did they perceive state validation of 'heterofamilal lesbianism' as problematic and as an alternative form of invisibilisation?

I have also demonstrated in this literature review that other factors, both social and psychological, may influence the visibility of lesbians; for example, the culture and climate of the school developed by school leaders appears significant (Ferfolja 2009; Colgan and Wright 2011). Did the participants in my study become more or less visible depending on the social, professional context?

Finally, I shall consider narratives told by the two Headteachers in this study to provide a perspective on how lesbian women who are school leaders manage visibility at the intersection between their lesbian identity and professional identity.

In the following chapter I examine the methodology and methods I used in this study: that is, the methodological basis on which the research is predicated and the methods I used to recruit participants and to generate and analyse data.

3   Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

This chapter explores the methodology and methods used in my study. My research examines the visibility of lesbians who have worked in U.K. schools over the last forty years. Specifically, it asks four research questions:

- o   Has a changing political and legal context influenced the visibility of lesbian women who work in U.K. schools?
- o   Are there additional or other influences on the visibility of lesbian women in the school workplace?
- o   What strategies do lesbian women in the school workplace use to manage their visibility? Have these strategies changed over time?
- o   How do lesbian women who lead schools navigate visibility?

To answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative piece of work that involved a series of semi-structured interviews. The approach to interviewing was broadly 'narrative' since narrative interviews "allow respondents to speak off the cuff about a part of their everyday life that is of interest to the researchers, be it their entire life story or just their working life" (Nohl 2010, p.196). The sample consisted of nine self-identifying lesbians recruited by a 'snowballing' method. The sample size was determined pragmatically and included all contacts who were willing to be interviewed.

This chapter discusses the methodological basis of my research and describes the practical procedures and techniques, or methods used in the study.

Section 3.1 begins with a brief discussion of the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of the work. Section 3.2 describes the process of identifying and articulating the research questions, while in Section 3.3 I discuss how this study relates to other research and existing academic literature. Sections 3.4 and 3.5 describe how I secured participants and my approach to interviewing them. Section 3.6 considers data analysis and, in Section 3.7 I describe some of the authorial decisions taken in writing the thesis.

3.1   Research methods: methodological framework

In this section I describe the methodological foundations that inform my research; since, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 13) argue, "research – whatever its methods of data collection and analysis – needs a broader intellectual framework".

In the previous chapter I described my ontological understanding of 'lesbian': that 'lesbian' is a discursive construction which intersects other aspects of a subject's 'identity' and whose performance may be calibrated according to context. As well as considering the ontological, Grix (2004, p. 68) argues that the epistemological and methodological foundations of research should be transparent:

> [by] setting out clearly the relationship between what a researcher thinks can be researched (her ontological position) linking to what we can know about it (her epistemological position) and how to go about acquiring it (her methodological approach), you can begin to comprehend the impact your ontological position can have on what and how you decide to study.

In considering the epistemological basis for my work, I understand epistemology to be:

> …a theory of knowledge which addresses central questions such as who can be a 'knower', what can be known, what constitutes and validates knowledge, and what the relationship is or should be between knowing and being (that is between epistemology and ontology). (Stanley and Wise 1990, p. 26)

In seeking to understand the experience of lesbian women working in U.K. schools over the last forty years, I started with an assumption that individuals experience themselves as coherent persons, about whom they can reflect, describe and discuss. Following Gubrium and Holstein (2001, p. 5) I believed that:

> …each and every individual has a sense of self that is owned and controlled by him- or herself, even if the self is socially formulated and interpersonally responsive. This self makes it possible for everyone to reflect meaningfully on individual experience and to enter into socially relevant dialogue about it.

However (as I describe in Section 3.6 of this chapter) during the course of data analysis, I was reminded that participants may not always be completely conscious of their own psychological processes. As a consequence, I adjusted my approach to data analysis to allow for

reflection on both conscious and possible unconscious psychological processes by using psycho-social data analysis.

Having argued that lesbian identities are complex in their production, I sought a method or methods that might capture those complexities in ways that were true to each participant. Following Schwandt (1994, p. 221 - 222) I wanted to understand "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it...". Therefore, I determined to "watch, listen, ask, record, and examine" (p. 222) the words and actions of the participants.

Consequently I determined that I would conduct a qualitative study that employed semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection, noting Warren's (2001, p. 85) observation that "qualitative interviewing is a kind of guided conversation…in which the researcher carefully listens "so as to *hear the meaning"* of what is being conveyed (Rubin and Rubin 1995, p. 7)".

The following sections describe the methods used in the study. Although I write as if the research activities were linear and discrete, of course this was not entirely the case: some of the work was iterative and cyclical in nature. In the next section I describe the process of identifying and articulating the four research questions.

3.2   Identifying and articulating the research questions

The iterative process of articulating and refining a substantive research question and related sub-questions was central to the research process and led to the final shape of the thesis. As Agee (2009, p. 446) observes:

> …good qualitative questions are dynamic and multi-directional, drawing the reader into the research with a focus on a topic of significance and at the same time functioning as lenses that are directed outward by the researcher to capture the nuances of the lives, experiences, and perspectives of others.

The initial impetus for my study stemmed from a reflexive curiosity. I had lived and worked through a time of social, political and legal change that had significant impact on my willingness and freedom to name myself as a lesbian woman in the school workplace, and in the wider world. I wondered how my contemporaries had experienced these changes. I also wondered how deep-rooted and transformational these political,

legal and societal changes had been and to what extent they were still influential, or significant in schools today. As Janesick (2000, p.382) observes, qualitative research originates with "a question, or at least an intellectual curiosity if not a passion for a particular topic".

Starting from this reflexive curiosity I began to articulate specific research questions. In the first instance I simply asked how legal and political changes influenced the 'experience' of lesbian women in the school workplace. This broad question set the scene for the study and started to outline the specifics of my interest. It reflects Creswell's observation (2007, p.107) that "first iterations of questions are tentative and exploratory but give researchers a tool for articulating the primary focus of the study".

My engagement with the research literature broadened and deepened my interest in the topic, enabling me to refine and test my overarching research question. For example, at the start of the study, I simply asked how legal and political changes influenced the '*experience*' of lesbian women in the school workplace. As my reading progressed, I further developed my conceptualisation of 'lesbian', understanding it to be a discursive and intersectional construction which is performed. That performance influences 'visibility' which is relational, contextual and calibrated in order to generate 'liveable lives'.

Linked to ideas of calibration and 'liveability', I noticed how many commentators discussed ideas of concealment of a lesbian identity in the school workplace. Such concealment was driven by the fear of consequences should a lesbian identity be discovered or revealed. For example, Nixon and Givens (2007, p. 457) summarise this as the "silence of self-censorship". Furthermore Edwards et al. (2014, p. 2) described Section 28 of the 1988 U.K. Local Government Act as "as a *panoptic schema* of surveillance" which generated a "coerced form of…*invisibilisation"*.

It was from this point that I framed my substantive research question around the concepts of visibility and invisibility. Thus, visibility became a lens through which I could conceptualise and frame 'experience'. As Creswell (2007, p.43) observes: "our questions change during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem". Thus, my primary question became:

> Has a changing political and legal context influenced the visibility
> of lesbian women who work in U.K. schools?

Having identified an overarching 'grand' question', I then developed a series of subsidiary questions. These enabled me to 'drill into' and explore the primary question. Agee (2009, pp. 435 – 436) describes these as 'sub-questions':

> An initial generative question can set the stage for developing
> related sub-questions…[which] emerge from an overarching
> question and ask about the specifics of a topic / issue or
> phenomenon.

In reading the research literature I was alerted to other influences on the visibility of lesbian women in the school workplace; for example, the 'micro-culture' of the individual school (Ferfolja and Hopkins 2013). Consequently, the second research question asks:

> Are there additional or other influences on the visibility of lesbian
> women in the school workplace?

When people fear or experience harassment and discrimination because of their sexuality, they may seek to conceal or camouflage it. They may develop identity management strategies and tools; for example, in the school workplace, lesbian women may limit the personal information shared with colleagues, pupils and pupil parents. Reading the research literature resonated with my own attempts to mask my sexuality in school. For example, I discovered a framework developed by Griffin (1991) that identifies four types of strategy deployed by lesbian and gay teachers to manage their visibility in the school workplace: passing, covering, implicitly coming out and explicitly coming out. I wondered about the relationship between such strategies and the calibration of lesbian visibility; about how lesbian teachers have calibrated their visibility in the school workplace as the legal and social contexts have changed. Hence the third question asks:

> What strategies do lesbian women in the school workplace use to
> manage their visibility? Have these strategies changed over time?

Finally, I was interested in understanding whether teachers who become senior leaders, such as Deputy Headteachers and Headteachers, experience lesbian (in)visibility differently from other lesbian workers in schools. As a Headteacher at the end of the 1990s and into the 2000s, I

felt particularly vulnerable should my lesbianism become public knowledge. Yet, this may not be true for others and, consequently, question four asks:

How do lesbian women who lead schools navigate visibility?

However, as my research progressed, I further developed the way in which I interrogated the data to answer this fourth question. I began to pay attention to the intersection between 'lesbian identity' and 'professional identity' as performed by school leaders. Thus, I widened my understanding of the question: I shall not merely consider identity management and lesbian visibility but examine how a composite performance of lesbian-leader influences the generation of a liveable, professional life for both the lesbian leader herself and for any lesbians she manages.

3.3   Reviewing existing research and related literature

One of the early tasks in designing the research was to review the existing research and related literature. This enabled me to understand what was already known and "to determine whether a new qualitative interview study would add anything to it" (Warren 2001, p. 86). More specifically, reviewing relevant literature flagged significant ideas and perspectives that shaped my approach to the research project. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 110) argue, "A general value of wide and eclectic reading is the development of "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer 1954), or general analytic perspectives…".

The starting point for the literature review was to identify key pieces of research by using on-line search engines such as Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts; British Education Index; Education Resources Information Centre; Google Scholar and legislation.gov.uk.

Through reading texts identified in this way key themes or 'sensitizing concepts' began to emerge; for example:

- Identity is discursive and constructed and performed at intersections.
- Many lesbian women felt compelled to conceal their sexuality in the school workplace because of the oppression reflected in, and

generated by, the introduction of Section 28 of the 1998 Local Government Act in the U.K.

- The repeal of Section 28 and the gradual introduction of equalities legislation at the start of the 21st century generated increased confidence in declaring a lesbian identity in the school workplace. However, this confidence was far from universal and was often contextual.

- Lesbians may calibrate their visibility, highlighting or diminishing their lesbianism according to the safety of the context in which they find themselves.

These 'sensitizing concepts' influenced my thinking: they shaped how I articulated the research questions, conducted the interviews, and how I worked with the research data.

Reviewing the literature was not just an early and one-off activity. I returned to the literature throughout the research project to think about and further understand my own data. I sought to "use ideas in the literature in order to develop perspectives on [my] own data, drawing out comparisons, analogies, and metaphors (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.110).

Of course, crucial to being able to conduct the research and seek answers to my research questions was identifying and securing participants. The next section describes how I went about this aspect of the work.

3.4 Identifying and gaining access to participants

Writing transparently about how I recruited participants is "important because researchers want to show that their work is ethical. Respect for the autonomy or freedom of choice of participants needs to be demonstrated…The ethics of recruitment revolve around values, such as respect for autonomy, dignity, and worth" (Gilgun 2014, p. 668).

Gaining ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee was a pre-requisite to beginning fieldwork. The Ethics Committee required a summary of the research project and a description of the proposed recruitment strategy. In addition, I had to offer reassurance about how

any potential harm to individuals might be mitigated, as well as how data would be kept secure.

Of mitigating risk of harm to individuals I wrote:

> In discussing how gay identity relates to professional experience, there is some risk of psychological distress being experienced by participants. Should this be the case, I would use my skills as a qualified therapeutic counsellor to reflect the distress back to the participant and check that they wish to continue with the interview. If the participant was still distressed by the end of the interview, I would check that they were able to leave the interview 'safely'. If a participant expressed continuing and profound distress, I would discuss possible sources of support, such as counselling, that they might wish to access beyond the research context (by this I mean that very distressed participants would be given details of local support).
>
> There is some small risk of physical harm to me in a one to one interview situation. I will ensure that someone independent knows the time and location of any interview. I will select interview venues to ensure they offer appropriate levels of privacy but, preferably, in a public building. I would end an interview if I felt unsafe.

In writing about potential distress to participants I was signalling several issues. Firstly, that the open-ended interview technique I intended to use was not that dissimilar to a therapeutic counselling session. As Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p. 81) observe:

> …the interview provided the context of a relationship with someone who was capable of listening well (especially paying attention to emotional significances), was not competing for attention, who could reflect back in questions and comments a recognition of her experiences which was emotionally appropriate, and by whom she did not feel judged. These are the characteristics of a good counselling relationship. But they are also very effective in eliciting the kind of information that we require for our kind of research…

Although I might deploy counselling skills to make "an open and explicit commitment to the psychological, emotional, physical and social well-being of informants" (Johnson and Rowlands 2012, p.109), I was clear that there was an ethical difference between the research interview and the counselling conversation; a difference between the researcher and the counsellor. For example the qualitative tradition in which I conducted this research seeks to understand "people's experiences through their own meaning-frame" (Hollway and Jefferson 2000, p.143); while the purpose of counselling is "'to help the speaker make sense' of what is

being said" (Hollway and Jefferson 2000, p.149), and to identify and implement life changes.

The Ethics Committee also required a description of the approach to gaining consent and securing data. On receiving contact details of a potential participant, I sent an introductory email (Appendix 1) with an information sheet (Appendix 2). The potential participants were offered the opportunity to ask questions about the research before agreeing to take part. It was also an opportunity to explain the processes; such as how the interview would be conducted and how personal information would be secured. Importantly it was clear that participants could withdraw at any point without the need for giving a reason. At the start of each interview I again explained the nature of the research, offered the opportunity to ask questions and asked the participants to sign a consent form (Appendix 3). In hindsight I would have sent the consent form prior to the interview to give participants longer to think about what they were signing.

One potential participant ultimately refused to participate because she was unhappy at the prospect of her data being recorded and stored. She wrote:

> I would feel very uneasy about having my interview recorded and stored. I have no idea how secure the data storage system is and/or who has access to this data (my guess is that it is probably not as secure as you think).

While there may have been additional reasons why this person did not wish to participate, her response illustrates that participants were able to give, or withhold, informed consent. In response to her email I replied by thanking her for giving consideration to taking part in the research and for letting me know her decision.

The next task was to find and secure the participation of lesbians who either currently, or had previously, worked in schools. Flick (1998, p. 59) suggests that search strategies could include use of:

> …the media (advertisements in papers, announcements in radio programmes) or notices in institutions (education centres, meeting points) which these persons might frequent. Another route to interviewees for the researcher is to snowball from one case to the next.

Thus, my initial approach to recruiting potential participants involved:

- Approaching Stonewall Cymru and Stonewall U.K.
- Contacting teaching unions
- Networking through social contacts.

Where the initial introduction to an organisation was a 'cold contact' I used my Cardiff University email address. The introduction was an email which summarised my career, described my personal interest in the research and outlined the nature of the research. Also attached was the 'information for participants' document.

In all cases of 'cold contact' emails were sent to named people within the organisation. For example, in the unions, I made contact with individuals listed on their websites as having responsibility for LGBTQ policy and / or professional development. I took a similar approach when contacting Stonewall Cymru and Stonewall U.K.

Both Stonewall Cymru and Stonewall U.K. were swift to reply and encouraging in their response. While Stonewall U.K. ran a leadership development programme it was not specifically aimed at teachers. As a result, the lead officer in Stonewall U.K. and I agreed that there would be limited value in attending any of the sessions.

Stonewall Cymru invited me to attend a 'women in leadership' seminar in Cardiff which was an advocacy / issues meeting. LGBTQ women from a range of professional backgrounds were in attendance. I had a conversation with a young lesbian teacher working in a sixth form college. She offered to broker an introduction to a friend who was lesbian and a teacher. She also expressed an interest in being interviewed and volunteered her work email address. However, there was no reply to my follow up email.

I contacted the major teaching unions: NAHT, ASCL, NUT and NASUWT. In the case of NAHT, ASCL and NASUWT there was no response. The NUT officer with whom I made contact was organising the Union's annual LGBTQ conference. After liaising with senior officers, it was agreed that I could pay to attend the morning of the conference. The afternoon sessions were solely for Union business and the officers felt it inappropriate for a non-member to attend. While an interesting morning, the structure of activities did not facilitate networking and did not result in meaningful contact with any potential participants.

Social networking proved a particularly useful tool in the recruitment of participants. This approach yielded two interviewees whom I had met previously in a social context, and seven participants that were completely unknown to me. As Warren observes (2001, p. 88):

> … where the researcher is a member of the community she or he is studying, respondents may even be part of the interviewer's own social circle…In some cases, sampling begins with acquaintances and moves on to strangers. This is typical of snowball sampling.

Not all the introductions yielded interviewees; for example, in the first instance one potential participant seemed keen to be interviewed. However, when we came to agree a specific date for the interview, she 'disappeared' and did not respond to emails. Another potential participant had also agreed to take part until she realised that she would be interviewed, as opposed to completing an anonymous questionnaire.

Interviewing the two participants whom I had met previously provided both challenges and opportunities. With a degree of rapport already established, they were both open and detailed in the aspects of their lives that they were willing to discuss. However, as I conducted the interviews and later analysed the interview transcripts, I was aware that I may be filtering these participants' data against my pre-existing knowledge of them. I attempted therefore, to limit the analysis to that which was evident only in the transcripts.

Conversely where the participants were unknown to me, I had to establish rapport swiftly in the hope that they would feel comfortable to discuss and reflect upon their lives throughout the interview. I was also aware that with a couple of these participants I felt nervous going into their homes and meeting them for the first time. I worked to set aside these feelings, again in the hope of generating productive interviews.

Chapter Four introduces the participants more fully; however, the following table summarises the cohort of people interviewed in this study:

Name	Career Summary
Alice	Primary schools. Started teaching in 1990s. Continues to teach in middle leadership role.
Angela	Secondary schools. Started teaching in 1970s. Moved to other work at the end of the 1970s. Now retired.
George	Primary schools. Started teaching in 1990s. Became a Headteacher in the early 2000s. Left schools in 2016.
Jenny	Secondary schools. Started teaching in 1990s. Had a ten-year break at the start of the 2000s. Returned to schools as an administrator.
Kate	Secondary schools. Started teaching in 1990s; continues to teach. Has held middle and senior leadership roles.
Lucy	Secondary schools. Started teaching in 1990s; continues to teach. Has held middle and senior leadership roles.
Maureen	Secondary schools. Started teaching in 1970s; held curriculum responsibility. Retired in the 2000s.
Rowan	Secondary schools. Started teaching in 1990s; held middle leadership roles. Has worked in advisory roles. Continues to teach.
Wendy	Special schools. Started teaching in 1970s. Held two Headships but medically retired in the 1990s. Developed an education-related business. Now retired.

Once I had recruited participants, I turned to the task of arranging and conducting one-to-one interviews. How I conceptualised and carried out the interviews is described below.

3.5   Interviewing the participants

As described in Section 3.1 I determined to conduct a qualitative study, employing semi-structured, narrative interviews at an early stage in the research project. However, I also began to reflect on the ontological and epistemological nature of myself as the research interviewer in relation to the participants. As Coffey (2018, p. 60) observes:

> Who we are, what we bring to our fieldwork and indeed what we become over the course of our research, defines and shapes the data we produce in the field and how we come to make sense of those data through our analyses and writing.

Thus, for example, I started by considering how as a former Headteacher and lesbian woman my 'insider' status might be useful in establishing my credibility with participants. It might also help me to "…ask the right questions" (Miller and Glassner 2004, p. 128). As Johnson (2001, p. 106) explains:

> Former or returning members can fruitfully use in-depth interviews to check, stimulate or inspire their own self-reflections and to see if their understandings are the same as those shared by others who are also members or participants.

On the other hand, prior or insider knowledge may be a hindrance, as Johnson and Rowlands (2012, p. 103) comment:

> Veterans with actual lived experience may already possess member knowledge, but they may also take that knowledge for granted. Additionally, their current or former status as members may constitute a barrier when they interview others.

Furthermore, I was also aware that I may no longer be perceived as, or indeed *be,* an insider having left schools some years previously. As Johnson and Rowlands (2012) suggest, being a former Headteacher may inhibit some participants, seeing me as an outsider in relation to their insider status as teachers. Thus, I became increasingly mindful of the complexity of categories such as 'insider' and 'outsider'.

Consequently, I began to consider how I might hold in productive equilibrium different aspects of my experience; that is how I could deploy ideas of 'insider' and 'outsider', of the 'strange' and 'familiar' to engage with the participants and generate perspectives on the research questions. Thus I sought to balance "the social freedom that marginal status confers, and which in turn engenders a certain intellectual freedom" (Atkinson et al. 2004, p. 37) with "the researcher's job…[of communicating] genuinely, in both subtle and direct ways that 'I want to

know what you know *in the way that you know it…*Will you become my teacher and help me understand?'…" (Heyl 2001, p.369).

Taking such a perspective implied a further set of beliefs about, and behaviours during, the interview process. Heyl (2001, p. 370), although discussing ethnographic interviewing and acknowledging differing and problematized approaches, summarised in the following way:

> 1 Listen well and respectfully, developing an ethical engagement with the participants at all stages of the project;

> 2 acquire a self-awareness of our role in the co-construction of meaning during the interview process;

> 3 be cognizant of ways in which both the on- going relationship and the broader social context affect the participants, the interview process, and the project outcomes; and

> 4 recognize that dialogue is discovery and only partial knowledge will ever be attained.

In adopting such an approach, I sought to enable the participants to recount their narratives in their own ways: indeed, I recognised that my counselling skills might help in this process. Furthermore, one of the fundamental principles of the counselling tradition in which I trained is that the counsellor should set aside or 'bracket' her own beliefs, experiences and assumptions in order to understand and articulate those of the client. Atkinson et al. (2004, p. 38) draw the following parallels in the research context:

> For the phenomenologist, on the other hand, the philosophical point at issue is to make strange the familiar features of one's own cultural milieu. This is the essential point of the phenomenological move of "bracketing" one's own background knowledge in order to address afresh the phenomena of everyday experience.

Thus, for example, during the interviews I asked participants how they felt about an event or what significance or meaning they attributed to parts of their narrative. I also tried to build rapport through demonstrating active listening via using verbal and non-verbal cues; and through summarising sections of conversation and inviting the participant to say more. In addition, I sought to demonstrate empathy and understanding as I listened for the participant's meaning (for example Warren 2001). I used all of these strategies to understand and reflect what I had been told in an accurate, authentic and sensitive way.

However, neither in counselling nor research is the listener an 'uncritical' vessel to be filled with the other's story. In seeking to report the participants' accounts from their perspective, I also wanted to preserve a degree of analytic or "intellectual distance" (Atkinson et al. 2004, p. 50). This was necessary to make sense of and synthesise multiple narratives and to demonstrate that my research could add something new and of conceptual significance.

Having explored some of the methodological foundations of the interviews, I shall now describe the practical details of how I conducted them.

I arranged to interview the nine participants who had expressed a willingness to take part in the research project. Each participant was interviewed once: this was largely due to logistics, as I had to travel extensively over the U.K. to conduct the interviews. In retrospect it may have been productive to interview each participant at least twice, to follow up and clarify aspects of the data.

I travelled to meet all participants at a time and location of their choosing. Alice and I met in a tea shop near her home. Despite my initial aspiration to meet in a public building, everybody else invited me to their home. Six of these eight interviews took place around a kitchen / dining table; the other two took place in the main living room. Rowan, George, Jenny, Kate and Lucy all had their partners in another room in the house while the interview took place.

Before starting an interview, I thanked the participant for being willing to take part and reminded her of the purpose of the research. It was also an opportunity to invite any questions about the research. I reminded participants about confidentiality, and its limits, and explained how personal data would be anonymised and kept secure.

I asked each participant if she was happy to continue with the interview and requested that she sign a consent form. I confirmed that the participant was happy to have the interview recorded. I wanted to record the interviews "to obtain verbatim records of those interviews" (Johnson 2001, p. 111). I was aware that the presence of the recorder might influence the nature of the discussion (for example Johnson 2001), although none of the participants appeared uncomfortable being recorded.

I explained, at the start, that each interview would last for about seventy-five minutes; in some cases, the interviews ran for slightly longer. In these cases, the participant was in the middle of narrating an episode and I felt that it would have been rude or dismissive to 'cut them off' before a natural break in the conversation. In addition, I always finished the interviews by asking if the participant wanted to mention anything else before we ended; this resulted in some participants continuing to speak.

When interviewing the first six participants, I began by asking them to tell me about their early life. As Johnson (2001, p.109) comments:

> An in-depth interviewer begins slowly, with small talk (chitchat), explains the purposes of the research, and commonly begins with simple planned questions (often referred to as icebreakers) that are intended to "get the ball rolling" but not to move so quickly into the issues of the key interview questions as to jeopardize intimate self-disclosure (or trust).

This approach yielded rich background data. However, I began to wonder whether it might be considered intrusive to ask this question when researching professional experience; albeit professional experience filtered through a very personal perspective. As a result, I started the subsequent interviews differently; for example, with Angela I observed:

> So, you've already sort of tempted me into the conversation with something really interesting. You said you loved school so much that you didn't want to leave, could you say a bit more about that?

I did not use a detailed interview schedule throughout the interviews; rather I encouraged the participants to tell me about their careers over time and explored their perspectives on the intersection of lesbian and teacher. I probed for further detail where the participants' comments seemed significant to them; I also asked subsidiary questions where participants discussed sensitizing concepts, such as the influence of Section 28 and more recent legislation on their visibility as lesbians in schools. In this way I tried to balance the interests of the individual participant with the focus of the research in a fluid and responsive manner. As Warren (2001, p. 86) observes:

> The design of qualitative interview research…is open-ended in the sense that it is concerned with being attuned to who is being travelled with, so to speak, rather than with setting a precise route for all to follow…

As the interviews were conducted over a six-month period, I had the opportunity to reflect and develop my thinking between each one. Thus, in some instances, my subsidiary questions became more focused. For example, I interviewed the two Headteachers several months apart and, in the interview with the second Headteacher, I introduced a conversation about experience of working with other lesbians as a result of a narrative contained in the interview with the first Headteacher. Thus, I was beginning to theorise my findings even as I was still gathering the data.

The interviews were often followed by short 'wind down' conversations where participants typically asked me something; for example, how the research was progressing or how I had experienced being a lesbian woman working in schools. I always thanked the participants as I left and followed up with an email of thanks on the following day.

In the following section I shall explain how having interviewed the participants, I captured and analysed their data.

3.6 Data analysis

In this section I describe the processes and strategies I used for data analysis. Of course, considering data analysis in a separate section is simply a device to clarify the concepts and practical processes shaping the research. It does not imply that the research activities are discrete or linear. As Coffey and Atkinson assert (1996, p. 6), "The process of analysis should not be seen as a distinct stage of research; rather, it is a reflexive activity that should inform data collection, writing, further data collection and so forth".

There are numerous approaches to the analysis of qualitative data. While differing in emphasis and technique they all share "…a central concern with transforming and interpreting qualitative data – in a rigorous and scholarly way – in order to capture the complexities of the social worlds we seek to understand" (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p. 3). Since any analysis is subject to human agency, they are all "…incomplete, partial and selective" (Riessman 1993, p. 11). As Letherby (2004, p.183) concludes "…whatever method we use, knowledge is always rooted in the particular perspective of knowledge producers and therefore it is important that we make transparent the 'analytical procedures' involved

(Stanley, 1997: 216)". It is the purpose of this section, therefore, to elucidate my approach to data analysis.

One of my first tasks in analysing the interview data was to become familiar with what had been said. Griffee (2005, p. 36) explains this process of familiarisation in the following way:

> …the evaluator becomes familiar with the data— depending on how it was collected—by going over notes many times, listening to tapes repeatedly, or constantly reading and re-reading the interview transcripts.

Thus, to become familiar with the interview data, I transcribed the tape recordings myself. This involved careful and concentrated listening to ensure that I recorded the content accurately. I would listen to several words, stop the tape recorder and then type what had been said into a Word document. As I wrote down what had been said, I developed a system for capturing emphasis: I recorded statements, made with particular strength, in capital letters. I noted pauses in the conversation by placing a series of dots between the lines of text. I made a record of where the participants laughed, cried or demonstrated other strong emotion.

Once I had made an initial transcript of an interview, I read it several times. I then listened again to the recording of the interview, this time without the pauses. In doing this, I wanted to check that I had both transcribed the interview accurately and understood the overall flow and emphasis of the conversation.

As I listened in this way to an interview, I began to make hand-written notes on 'post-it notes'. These notes were one- or two-word prompts that summarised my understanding of the themes and patterns emerging from each interview. The memos that I wrote on post-it notes were 'codes' that broke down the data and helped to organise it. To identify a code, I listened for emphasis from the participant or for ideas that were resonant with the 'sensitizing concepts'.

For each participant I devised a grid that recorded their individual codes with supporting quotes / information. The following is a short section from George's 'grid':

Being a school pupil	Boarding school (p'1)	I loved my uniform…I loved it…it was very levelling (p.2)	A lot of girls' schools…everyone has crushes (p.2)	Boarding school toughens you up…you just become independent (p.5)
Father	My dad was a vicar (p.1)	He was a good person (p. 3)	I was a daddy's girl…(p.4)	
Coming / being out	Feeling different at 11 or 12 (p.2)	Came out at 14 (p. 2)	It took mother a lot of years to get used to it (p.2)	I can't not be out (p. 24)

As I developed grids for each participant many consistent or related codes emerged across the group which I could organise into themes. For example, most participants' interviews contained codes that could be synthesized into an over-arching theme of 'dress and appearance'. In synthesising codes in this way, I began to develop a thematic framework:

Being a school pupil	Early life	Parents and Family	Coming out / being out	Partners	University and training
Legislation and society	The gay scene	Early career	Mid-career	Later career	Colleagues in school
Children in school	Parents of children in school	The school curriculum	Homophobic abuse	Location of school	Media
Dress and appearance					

As I began to compare and contrast what each participant had said within the themes, I annotated the thematic framework and wrote further memos on post-it notes. Taylor et al. (2015, p.165) argue that by comparing data in this way it is possible to move away from the individual towards the generic and, perhaps, conceptual:

> …as you note a theme in your data, compare statements and acts with one another to see whether there is a concept or parallel that unites them… By studying themes, constructing typologies,

and relating different pieces of data to each other, the researcher gradually comes up with accounts of how things happen in a setting and sometimes with generalizations that may be relevant beyond the particular setting.

Of course, individual and unique codes also emerged; for example, being a 'butch' lesbian, a black lesbian or a lesbian parent. Using these individual codes added a richness and nuance to the analysis.

Having initially deployed thematic analysis I began to consider additional data analysis methods as I grappled with the interview transcripts. In particular, the two Headteacher participants recounted narratives that explored the intersection between their lesbian identity and their professional identity. The narratives were lengthy and rich in detail, having been offered spontaneously and with little intervention from me. This kind of narrative data seemed to merit a different kind of analysis. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 68) argue:

> How social actors retell their life experiences as stories can provide insight into the characters, events, and happenings central to those experiences. How the chronicle is told and how it is structured can also provide information about the perspectives of the individual in relation to the wider social grouping or cultural setting to which that individual belongs.

While coding segments the data in order to reconstruct and expand meaning, narrative analysis preserves the structure of the narrative (Riessman 1993). As an analytic method it may be useful in accessing subjective meanings given to key events in the narrator's life; for example, Cortazzi (1993, pp. 1 – 2) observes that "by studying oral accounts of personal experience we can examine the tellers' representations and explanations of experience".

Different commentators use different frameworks to conduct narrative analysis, but whichever typology is deployed the analysis goes beyond individual experience and includes a social analysis in a particular cultural context. As Riessman (1993, p. 5) comments:

> To the sociologically oriented investigator, studying narratives is additionally useful for what they reveal about social life – culture "speaks itself" through an individual's story. It is possible to examine gender inequalities, racial inequalities, and other practices of power that may be taken for granted by individual speakers. Narrators speak in terms that seem natural, but we can analyze how culturally and historically contingent these terms are…

Consequently, I decided to use narrative analysis on lengthy segments of Wendy and George's transcripts. In doing this I wanted to move away from the fragmentation and re-synthesis of thematic analysis to a more holistic analysis of the stories they offered. My starting point for narrative analysis was Cortazzi's work (1993).

Cortazzi demonstrated the use of narrative analysis "to develop descriptions of teachers' culture which preserve their voices" (p. 1) and this resonated with my research. Cortazzi's evaluation model is structured into six parts, beginning with the abstract. The abstract

> …initiates the narrative by summarizing the point or by giving a statement of a general proposition which the narrative will exemplify. It signals the start of the narrative by past tense reference…(p.44).

This is followed by the orientation, where the narrator provides the background-information she believes necessary to make sense of the narrative. The third stage is the complication which "shows a turning-point, a crisis or problem, or a series of these…It is basically the content of the narrative" (p .46). The narrator then gives explicit evaluation of the purpose of the story which is followed by the result or conclusion of the narrative. Finally, there is an optional coda which returns the listener to the present. As well as examining the narrator's explicit evaluation in the fourth section of the six-part structure, Cortazzi argues that there are also moments of 'micro-evaluation' throughout the narrative that give the narrator's meaning to the story.

As I applied the evaluation model of narrative analysis to sections of George and Wendy's narratives the method illuminated both the narrative structure of their accounts and some of their intention informing the narrative. However, it seemed to me that the narratives contained something more than I could access by using Cortazzi's evaluation model alone. Following Hollway and Jefferson's (2000, p. 31) I became interested in "the idea that there is a *Gestalt* (a whole that is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda) informing each person's life which it is the job of biographers to elicit intact, and not destroy through following their own concerns…".

Furthermore, I began to consider how unconscious processes and concerns may influence the telling, and indeed the hearing, of interview narratives. This shift challenged my earlier epistemological belief that

what was 'within' was known and could be articulated by each participant (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). As I began to consider other analytic approaches, I examined work within the psycho-social tradition discussed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). Hollway and Jefferson argue that their "starting-point [for psycho-social research] neither takes respondents' accounts at face value nor expects them to be able to understand completely their own actions, motivations or feelings…" (p.40). Thus, data generation and interpretation operate in the realm of "conscious and *unconscious* psychological processes" (Lucey et al. 2003, p. 279).

In addition, Hollway and Jefferson argue for the notion of the 'defended subject' who is influenced by a combination of their unique psychology / biography and discursive social relations, in their sub-conscious defences against "anxiety-provoking life-events…" (p. 21).

In moving towards this kind of analysis I was clear in my own mind (and must make clear to the reader) that I was 'borrowing' from Hollway and Jefferson. For example, while adopting a broadly narrative interview technique I had not used Hollway and Jefferson's free association narrative interview method. Rather I used "a minimally structured narrative-eliciting interview method" (Hollway and Jefferson 2000, p. 150). However, I did assume "the researcher's responsibility…to be a good listener and [encouraged] the interviewee [to be]…a story-teller rather than a respondent" (Hollway and Jefferson 2000, p. 29).

Furthermore psycho-social research in the Hollway and Jeffersonian tradition constructs "interviews guided in some sense by psychoanalytic methods" (Walkerdine 2008, p. 344). I am not trained in psychoanalytic methods, either as a clinician or as a researcher, so I am aware of the limits of applying this style of data analysis to my work.

While notions of ethics and power, inter-subjectivity and representation are pertinent to any qualitative interview research, turning towards psycho-social style of analysis required that I revisit these concepts. In particular I questioned my authority to 'interpret' another's narrative and how to demonstrate the 'validity' of my judgements. For example, Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p. 62) argue that building on the theoretical, in a reflexive manner, starts to address the issue of validity:

> Using reflexivity is not a substitute for utilising theory, but…it can strengthen a theoretical conviction or alert us to a misreading.

> Like everything else, subjectivity too must be checked…the more I check back with my experiences…the more I remain convinced that our account…makes sense.

They go on to observe:

> …reliability can be checked (though never guaranteed) if, when our interpretations and analyses are studied by others, they are 'recognised'; that is, the sense that we made out of them can be shared through the subjectivity of others (including you, the reader). This does not rule out the possibility of alternative explanations, but these too can be tested against the available data. If you, the reader, wish to offer a different interpretation of our data, you are welcome to do so (p. 74).

Other commentators avoid the use of 'validity' and 'reliability' in qualitative research, arguing that such concepts are rooted in scientific method. Rudestam and Newton (2007, p. 112) argue "all research carries the responsibility of convincing oneself and one's audience that the findings are based on critical investigation". Citing Guba and Lincoln (1985), Rudestam and Newton suggest that the qualitative researcher must establish the "credibility" (p. 112) of their work.

Thus, once I had examined George and Wendy's narratives through narrative analysis, I used Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) work to guide me in a re-analysis of their stories. In particular I looked at the intersection of their lesbian identities and professional identities, examining the influence of social relations on the development of a 'liveable professional life'. This is discussed in Chapter Eight.

3.7 Writing the thesis

To some extent the overall 'shape' of any written thesis is determined by academic convention. As Merriam (2002, p.15) observes:

> …*all* write-ups of qualitative research contain at the very minimum a discussion of the research problem, the way the investigation was conducted, and the findings, including a discussion of their importance or relevance to theory and practice.

Consequently, the structure of my work follows this 'traditional' format. However, just as "data collection and analysis go hand in hand" (Taylor et al. 2015, p. 160) so do data analysis and writing. As Sandelowski (1998, p. 376) argues "writing is a mode of discovery" that helps to transform 'raw data' into something more conceptually complex.

Thus, in this section I describe my writing process, and reflect on some of the authorial decisions which helped to shape the thesis.

When I started to review the interview transcripts and write about the data I began with an analysis of the influence of the social and political context on the participants' visibility in the school workplace. While this produced a rich analytic chapter, I felt that I had 'launched in' without fully introducing and contextualising the participants. I perceived this to be an omission and determined to offer the reader an opportunity to 'meet' the participants; as Taylor et al. (2015, p. 153) argue:

> …[in] studies based on in-depth interviewing, researchers attempt to give readers a feeling of walking in the informants' shoes – understanding their inner experiences and seeing things from their points of view.

Therefore I 'back-tracked' to pen Chapter Four in which the participants describe how they came to identify as lesbian and what being lesbian means for them. They talk about their family contexts and other individual matters of significance; such as being black and lesbian, or, being a 'butch' lesbian in dress and appearance.

Chapters Five to Seven deploy thematic analysis to examine the first three research questions. As noted earlier, Chapter Eight takes a different turn in style to reflect the shift in analytic technique: it includes much lengthier sections of George and Wendy's interview transcripts to address my fourth research question. I use narrative analysis to examine the structure and intention of the narratives while I refer to Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) psycho-social tradition to discuss what may be learned by paying attention to the narrator's *Gestalt* and unconscious, defensive mechanisms.

My methodological commitment to achieving a balance between presenting the nuanced voices of the participants and coherent, conceptual analysis influenced my writing style; in particular I made extensive use of participant quotes. As Taylor at al. (2015, p. 194) note:

> Qualitative research should yield rich descriptions. Illustrative quotations and descriptions convey a deep understanding of what settings and people are like and provide support for your interpretations. Your account should be filled with clear examples.

Thus, there is a thread linking the theoretical, the stylistic and the reader: Gilgun (2014, p. 658) citing Glaser (1978) describes this connection as 'grab':

> With viable core concepts and rich data, researchers are positioned to present their findings in ways that are memorable and interesting; that is, with "grab" (Glaser, 1978). "Grab" requires compelling descriptive material: excerpts from interviews, field notes, and various types of documents, as well as researchers' paraphrases of these materials…The notion of grab is central to write-up.

In making rich and extensive use of participant quotes I have, in a small number of instances, repeated a particular participant quote. In doing so I was mindful of the caveat from Taylor at al. (2015, p. 195) that "repeating quotes or examples can leave the impression that your data are thin".

However, where quotes are repeated it is either to emphasise a recurring theme or to develop and layer an argument. For example, Kate repeatedly talked about being black and its relationship to her sexuality; George, on the other hand, repeatedly discussed her masculinised dress and appearance and their impact in the school workplace. These themes became recurring 'motifs' weaving through and lending structure to their interviews. As a consequence, in writing the thesis, I have used a little repetition of quotes to capture or illustrate such motifs.

In other instances, quotes are repeated to layer and develop analysis. For example, a number of quotes are used to introduce participants in Chapter Four and some of these have been repeated as I have developed my thematic analysis.

As well as determining which participant quotes to include, others were discarded or edited out. Indeed, I recognised Ball's (1990, Preface vii) observation that" sometimes data was sacrificed for analysis and sometimes analysis for data. Some of the cutting and editing was painful; favourite passages or juicy quotes had to be excised".

In this study preserving anonymity was my primary reason for excluding data. For example, one participant discussed her parents' public profile. The stories she told were historically interesting and significant, particularly in relation to broader questions of social equality. However, to discuss this information in relation to my thesis would have compromised

the participant's anonymity (and also that of her family). Hence, they remain unexamined here.

The other main reason I excluded analysis of information was when it lacked direct relevance to the focus of the research. For example, Alice spoke at length about being a lesbian parent. She described homophobic prejudice she experienced from a midwife; she spoke about her child's experience, as the son of lesbian parents, in school and amongst his peer group. Again, while interesting to me and of personal importance to Alice, inclusion of these sections of her interview would not have added to my data analysis in relation to the research questions.

Having described the processes involved in conducting my research I shall now present the analytic chapters. I start by contextualising the participants in Chapter Four.

4   Chapter Four: Contextualising the participants

This analytical chapter provides a context for each of the participants: how they came to identify as lesbians and what this meant for them within their families and as teachers. The chapter also locates the participants' careers within the political, legislative and historical framework, whilst illustrating their individual career trajectories as lesbian teachers. I use rich pen portraits of each participant as a way of presenting this analysis. Following Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p. 65) in writing these pen portraits I "aimed to write something which made the person come alive for a reader… and [to] provide enough information against which subsequent interpretations could be assessed.

As well as providing insight into the participants' professional lives the portraits offer ontological perspectives on how the participants understand and use 'lesbian' and 'lesbian visibility' in relation to their own identity.

To help preserve anonymity all participants have pseudonyms. The same is true of any partners, children, friends or colleagues that they discuss. Where secondary school teachers have a specialist subject it has been changed. However, when identifying participants as living or working in Brighton this is factual. The significance of Brighton as a gay-friendly city emerges through the interviews and it is important to capture this.

4.1 Contextualising the participants

4.1.1 Alice

Alice grew up in the South East of England and decided to become a teacher as a teenager:

> I knew I wanted to be a teacher straight away…well, actually, I wanted to be a nurse…'cos I wanted to do the caring and sharing and all of that stuff…and then I realised people would die on me….and I couldn't cope with that…I'm a very emotional person…and just the thought of anything like that was going to blow my mind…so I thought: 'Oh well'…and when I was 14, I did a…when I was at school it was called community service… and I went back to my junior school…and loved it and thought: 'Oh my goodness…this is about children…they listen to you…you teach them things…it's an enriching experience' and so that's where I went…

Alice trained as a primary school teacher in the early 1990s during which time she had her first lesbian relationship. However, Alice was reluctant to come out at this time, telling only her immediate family of her lesbianism. Alice describes a difficult experience of coming out to parents and siblings:

> The conversation with my sister was tortured…my sister was into: 'What does that mean…will I lose my friends?' And I said: 'No, it doesn't mean any of those things.' My mum…I got tortured letters from my mother saying: 'What are you thinking - it's a hard path you'll lead'.

Entering her first teaching post during the Section 28 years, Alice was fearful of how she might be received by pupils and their parents:

> In my head I thought children might go 'errrr'… (sound of distaste) …or a parent might say: 'I don't want my child taught by that person'…and it was what was going on in society…that whole…'you can't do this…you can't do that…'

Consequently, Alice recognised the need to manage her lesbian identity in school even as a Newly Qualified Teacher.

During her first year as a teacher Alice was open with colleagues about her sexuality. However, it took much longer for her to come out to pupils and their parents. For Alice the Section 28 years were "all about fear" and so she perceived the Labour victory in the 1997 U.K. general election as offering the possibility of positive change in relation to LGBTQ equalities.

During her career Alice moved to a middle leadership post in a primary school in Brighton where she was out to both pupils and their parents. She describes the response to the birth of her child from across the school community:

> It was amazing I hadn't expected people to be so accepting, so welcoming…and then Henry was born…presents came in to both me and Jude (Alice's partner)…I just think they wanted us to know we were…it was okay… and they were happy and supportive…

Alice discussed the changes within schools from the Section 28 years until the present day; for example, she muses:

> It is amazing…when you think how far…when you talk about Section 28, you're not allowed to use these books, you're not allowed to use those books…and suddenly, here we are and…twenty- five years later and it's…you can teach what you want, you can talk about what you want…

Alice is equally optimistic for her own child as he grows up with lesbian parents:

> A   …and we say to Henry, he does have a dad because everyone has a dad…what we know about him is that he's very kind and very generous because we can't have children without something from a man and he…but he doesn't want to be part of our family…So, if anyone says anything, just say: 'Of course I've got a dad...yeah, and, I've got two mums'… (laughs)
>
> K   And, has he had any of that?
>
> A   No, not that I'm aware of…and hopefully he's just getting through on the fact he's a very funny little kid…he's a very nice kid who is very jolly and good for a laugh…so, yeah, not that I'm aware of.

4.1.2 Angela

Angela decided to become a teacher because she enjoyed her own school days; she comments:

> I loved school so much that I didn't want to leave… I think I was very lucky 'cos I went to a school which really encouraged children…I wasn't particularly bright… but we were encouraged in every which way…and things you carry on lifelong…some of the influences I had were, I think, critical to how I've developed… I just wanted to be like my teachers. It was a delight to be with them.

Angela identified as lesbian from the early 1970s when she was training as a secondary school teacher. She felt fearful of coming out, both in training and while working in school, as she believed she would be subject to a "witch hunt". Thus, Angela sought to hide her sexuality in school, commenting: "I just didn't let on anything about my private life…anything…anything at all".

Angela's fear of exposure was re-enforced by colleagues speaking about moving schools before they were dismissed for being lesbian. Again, this was in the 1970s:

> I was very concerned…I mean when I was…when I first started teaching I had a huge crush on the Deputy Head of Department, who I'm still friendly with, interestingly…and she had had to leave her previous school…which I knew…I played in the same hockey club…and people in the hockey club all knew she'd had to leave her school because she'd been found out to be gay…so it was a choice of leave or be booted…

Angela also observed that the over-supply of teachers in the U.K. at that time added to her insecurity and determination to be an invisible lesbian woman in the school workplace:

> …you were definitely feeling dispensable because you knew you could be replaced fairly easily…especially PE……because a lot of schools didn't have a PE specialist even…and I was PE and Drama…I mean that was a vulnerable combination.

Angela's teaching career spanned the 1970s but ended when she left for other work; she explains:

> …the reason I moved out of the school was because I was burnt out…and I was quite glad to move to a place where I could be a little less in the closet as well…'cos it does affect you.

4.1.3 George

George identified as lesbian in her early teens; she comments:

> G   …and I think it's true of a lot of girls' schools, everyone has crushes and all that…and I was thinking: 'This is great!'
>
> K   Were you identifying as gay or lesbian by then?
>
> G   Oh yeah! I remember walking up…I've got such a vivid memory of this…I can see the path…with a grapefruit yoghurt…I don't think you can get grapefruit yoghurts now…(both half laugh)…thinking: 'I feel really different to other people'…I was probably not more than about 11 or 12. And then I came out to some family…to most people, I think, at 14… And I can remember my mum saying: 'Don't make up your mind yet, don't get yourself in a rut…I felt just like that at your age'…and I was like: 'REALLY?'…and...erm…it took my mum A LOT of years to get used to it…

As a teenager George describes herself as both a 'tomboy' and a 'good girl':

> G   I was always known as the tomboy…but then it was always okay to be a tomboy… we lived in the country…and we were mucking out horses and stuff…and I was a **good** girl and my sister was the rebel…
>
> K   So what did a good girl look like…and what did a rebel look like?
>
> G   So…I was very quiet and…amenable…and calm…and my sister was always quite flighty and naughty and er... (half laughs) …she was brought home by the police, drunk in charge of a horse…

George studied for a degree and trained as a primary school teacher at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. George felt she could not mask her lesbian identity, even as a trainee teacher:

> … I'm not very good at not being out, I think I look…I look like a gay person…

Beginning to teach in the early 1990s George had never known a professional life before the introduction of Section 28. George described Section 28 having a "MASSIVE impact" on her own visibility and on the wider visibility of LGBTQ identities and issues in schools. However, George continued to feel limited in her ability to camouflage her lesbian identity because of her masculinised appearance. Consequently, she determined to 'compensate', or perhaps prove her worth, through excelling as a teacher:

> Yes…I've definitely felt that's been the case…from my first ever teaching job…I look like a bloke…I *am* a lesbian…I'm really going to have to prove I can teach well…

George became a Deputy Headteacher around the time that Section 28 was repealed in 2003. She had successfully navigated her career to this point despite her lesbianism being known:

> When I…erm left to go to the Deputy Headship…he [a parent] wrote me a really lovely letter saying I really appreciate how open and out you've been, and I feel my daughter…I think it's been really good for my daughter…such a positive lesbian role model…

However, the move to Headship was more tortured. Initially George's own preconceptions restricted her progress:

> I'm just waiting to look like a Headteacher…and I DON'T… (assuming the voice of a truculent child when she says 'and I don't').

In addition, George's relationship with her then Headteacher was strained:

> G   I think that was true when I was a Deputy [that she had to perform better than other teachers because she was lesbian] …and then I thought, yeah…I just felt I didn't fit the Headship…and…probably a big thing of this was that the Head I worked for as one of the Deputies…and I remember the Headteacher saying: 'I don't think you're cut out to be a Headteacher'…she never qualified it…she never actually explained why…
>
> K   Mm…the inference being…because you're gay?

> G   I think I felt that…I think lots of things…she was very formal…I am very informal in work…and she hated…she hated some of my ways…

However, in the early 2010s, George did become a Headteacher, determining to be different from her former colleague:

> She was very formal…I am very informal in work…I've made a point of being informal…

Yet, at the time I interviewed George she was about to leave teaching: I discuss this in detail in Chapter Seven.

4.1.4 Jenny

Jenny trained as a secondary school teacher in the early 1990s because of her enthusiasm for Geography:

> I did my PGCE more, or less, straight out of university…erm, partly because I loved my subject and…well…I wanted to go on and do a Masters'…erm, eventually do a PhD…but funding wasn't an option, so teaching was the way to stay in touch with……my subject. So, I did my PGCE.

Jenny's first teaching post was in London. She feared being stereotyped, gossiped about or teased for being a lesbian teacher and sought to hide her lesbianism in school:

> I just lived in fear of stereotypes that I'd be the lemon teacher…lemon…lesbian…kids do call…call…call names… I didn't…it was that thing that I thought people would look down…on me…and somehow, I'd be less of a person…er…and the fear of people talking about me…behind my back…which I know did go on…er…when other people found out…erm…within the staffroom…

Jenny's fear of being known as lesbian must have heightened when, in her first year of teaching, a friend threatened to out her in school:

> A friend…someone I'd done my teacher training with…he was my landlord for a while…and…er…two of us...three of us shared a house…and two of us ended up, not quite doing a mid-night flit…but he was very difficult to live with and he was a gay man…and he outed me to my mum…and he threatened to phone the school as well…

Jenny's response was to out herself to her line manager:

> …and when my friend stroke landlord…erm…threatened to phone the school and tell them…I thought: 'Oh well I'll get in there first' and I spoke to my Head of Geography...and she just said:

> 'And…and what do you think will happen? Nothing'…And I don't think he did in the end…

Jenny also came out to a small group of other colleagues; but this, too, was fraught:

> J   I lived in the…er…smokers' room…and there were a lot of older teachers there…and I remember when I bought my first flat, I felt as if I should've got married or something because I had all these wonderful presents…and they were quite motherly…and I remember another friend…something came out…someone told Jackie: 'Well, no, Jenny's gay'…and Jackie had apparently been quite shocked and quite upset…by that…and she found that…she apparently didn't know anyone who was gay and found it a bit…I think it was described to me as…she found it a bit repulsive…and that she wouldn't…erm…but that she would try not to think differently of me…
>
> K   How did you feel about this reported feeling repulsed?
>
> J   I was really quite hurt and quite shocked…by it…and thought: 'Well that…that was a good decision on my part not to be openly out…'

Jenny left teaching for over ten years because:

> I didn't want to be chained with a rucksack full of marking…

However, she returned to work in school as an administrator, around 2014. Jenny remains fearful of being known as a lesbian, commenting that she is "more in the closet" now. Consequently, Jenny continues to use a range of strategies to conceal her sexuality, including pretending that her partner is male.

4.1.5 Kate

Kate identified her sexuality when she was very young. She discusses this in the following quote, while also illustrating the intersection between sexuality, ethnicity and colour:

> KT   I think I pretty much knew I was gay as soon as I knew about my sexuality…
>
> KN   …so a young teenager…teenager?
>
> KT   No…no…much younger than that…about 8…9…Yeah…but I never did anything about it in that sense…it was compounded by the fact I was black…and we moved to this town… in Essex…in 1970…when we were the only black family there…
>
> KN   Did you experience racism?

> KT   **Yes!** Yes…yes…huge amounts. That's one of the things why the gay thing just wasn't an issue…but being black was…so I decided to try to integrate first…to make friends…and, yeah, it was hard…it was hard growing up…in Essex… and, yeah…like my brother…he's younger than me…he had an *awful* time at school…we found him one day…his first day or his first week at primary school…in the bathroom, he'd locked himself in…he was scrubbing himself with bleach so he'd fit in…so he had a horrible time as well…so as a black kid growing up there it was not good. So, with my sexuality, although I knew about it, I didn't act on it…until 6th Form…

Kate describes how her decision to train as a teacher was a 'last resort', after working in financial services:

> KN   So, you did your degree, what happened next? Did you know you wanted to go into teaching?

> KT   No, I absolutely did not want to go into teaching! I did my degree…and I trained as a broker for a couple of years…and hated it…oh my God…I loathed it…the people you met…oh….

> KN   Corporate life was it?

> KT   Oh it was *hideous* and…if the people had been nice I could have stuck it out, but they had no conversation beyond money…so I gave that up…and in desperation went into teaching…applied for a PGCE.

Thus, Kate trained as a secondary school teacher in the early 1990s. Even in her first teaching post Kate came out to colleagues: this was despite Section 28 being statutory.

Throughout her career Kate has encountered racism. In her first year of teaching a parent "objected that her son was being taught by a black person, she wanted a white person teaching him…" In a recent move of area and school Kate continued to experience racism from pupils:

> Yeah. You know, monkey noises, parents saying they didn't want their kids taught by me…and someone who left human faeces in a bag at the back of my classroom…

Kate has taught in several schools throughout her career, but it was not until her current post that she came out to pupils. She now believes it is important to be out in school "because I think it's important for kids to have members of staff who they know are there…I think it's important for parents as well".

4.1.6   Lucy

Lucy did not identify as lesbian until she was teaching in the mid-1990s.

She had grown up in a time and place without LGBTQ role models:

> I knew I was gay, but I just assumed I'd get married and have children…it wasn't about any particular prejudice, I just didn't know anyone who was gay…I didn't really know that was possible.

However, Lucy describes meeting her female partner at work:

> We met in my first job…and I was moving, it was the night before I left (half laughs)…and I was about to move in with my boyfriend, hence the job in Cornwall, when she and I got together (laughs)…I still had to move and yeah, came back six months later, ended the relationship with Michael and came back…and we've been together ever since, so 21, 22 years…yeah…so all my teaching career…

As soon as she identified as lesbian Lucy came out to colleagues but not

to pupils because she feared their homophobic attitudes.

Lucy taught in several schools, on occasions in middle and senior

leadership positions. However, she describes how much she disliked

being an Assistant Headteacher:

> …and I think my years as an Assistant Head were the worst and the shittiest ever…it was *so* stressful…as an Assistant Head I couldn't believe the hours…and I've never been more miserable…

Being unhappy as an Assistant Headteacher prompted Lucy and her

partner to move to a remote part of the U.K. Lucy explains:

> It was no life and a friend of ours died…and we just thought…just decided to do it. We'd toyed with it for a long time, but we thought: 'Don't put off the things you want to do'.

Initially Lucy was concerned that she and her partner might encounter

homophobia, but she suggests this did not happen:

> There was a chap who stopped me when I was unlocking the door…we hadn't moved in yet…he was a builder or something…and he said: 'Have you bought it? I saw two people come and have a look at it'…he said: 'Two ladies'…and I said: 'Oh that would've been me and my partner'…he said: 'Oh…partner...business partner or partner partner?'…and I said: 'Partner partner…is that going to be a problem?'…and he said: 'No…no...we're very open minded here…you should meet our hockey team…'(laughs).

Lucy went on to describe in detail how she and her partner integrated

into village life. Furthermore, when Lucy began teaching in the local

secondary school, she felt able to come out to pupils (as well as colleagues) because both staff and students were "openly gay".

4.1.7 Maureen

Maureen trained and taught in secondary schools in the 1970s but did not identify as lesbian until her early 30s. However, as soon as Maureen identified as lesbian, she came out to colleagues but not to pupils:

> I was ridiculously evangelistic…it's embarrassing looking back on it…highly embarrassing…people said to me: 'Why are you telling me this?'…'Well, I want to' (laughs)…

Despite her initial enthusiasm for identifying as lesbian, Maureen became disillusioned over time:

> …the relationships I had with women were bloody bonkers…I gave up, I gave up in my early fifties…I just had such…somehow or other…I just met such weird women and it…in a sense it was a massive disappointment…so in the end I just thought it was me…I had just met some very strange women…and I see all the women around me, with very nice women, why do I have to meet strange women...but there you go, I do.

Maureen worked as an advisory teacher in the late 1980s but returned to teach in a girls' secondary school until she retired around 2008. Although she was always out to colleagues, Maureen sought to hide her lesbianism from pupils. However, she was aware that pupils 'read' her as lesbian, observing: "Nobody talked about it, but everyone knew I was…". Maureen's experience is consistent with Hardie's (2012, p. 277) observation that "students who want to know about their teacher's sexuality will listen for cues, and although sexuality is not declared, those students will tune in to hear these clues".

Maureen's disillusionment with personal relationships led to an intense focus on her work life; she explains:

> …but the truth of the matter is I allowed it…it became my life…those other ones were more normal, they had lives outside and they were probably wiser than me but there you go, that's the way it is.

Maureen joined anti-Section 28 protest marches in the 1980s and 1990s, although she was dismissive of her contribution:

> I wouldn't get up and speak, you could just be in the crowd and
> then there'd be a party in a pub somewhere afterwards…so that
> was that.

However, as she remembered the Section 28 years, Maureen marvelled
at the legislative and social change since that time:

> God, when you think from Section 28 to gay marriage in a
> lifetime…it's amazing.

4.1.8 Rowan

Rowan described herself as growing up in an 'alternative' family in a rural
location. She associated education with 'escaping':

> And growing up in a sort of small rural community in the 70s and
> 80s, what was very clear to me...that education was my 'out'
> (laughs)…only in the sense that I longed for something different
> than small town kind of mentality. Having said that...I come
> from...you know…a sort of family of 1960s hippies…so it was a
> very chaotic but rich upbringing…and…er…very alternative to the
> area, so I knew I had to…I was different from my peers.

Her parents' alternative lifestyle shaped Rowan's view of sexuality and
sexual identity:

> I didn't grow up with a sense of being gay...erm…at all really…my
> mother was bisexual and had female partners…er…although she
> was sort of on and off with my father all my life… and they're still
> together…She certainly had girlfriends...er…periods of time when
> she was certainly with women…so I just grew up with a vague
> sense of: 'Oh I'll try that one day'…you know when in your teens
> you go: 'I'm going to try *every* experience in the world and that will
> be one of them…'

Rowan described herself as 'very self-sufficient' and was determined to
achieve her goal of leaving the area:

> I had managed to find a Polytechnic that would take me on an
> HND with one A' level and I was, just like: 'I don't care what...I'm
> going…'

Subsequently Rowan surprised herself by gaining a degree and 'drifted'
into a secondary PGCE course in the early 1990s. Entering teacher
training was a revelation to Rowan:

> …it was being in a classroom and thinking it was such a
> *fascinating* place. It just made me laugh…it made me smile…it
> lifted me. And I had such an intense sort of emotional
> reaction…like positive emotional reaction to it…And I just thought
> it was brilliant…I don't know why I thought it was brilliant, I didn't

> really question it…I just felt it. And I loved that whole year; I loved everything about the course.

During this time, she had her first lesbian relationship which Rowan considered "an experiment", although the relationship lasted six years.

Rowan taught in her first school until 1998 when "Section 28 was rife" and, consequently, "no one dared to be visible".

As she described her career moving from newly qualified teacher to middle leader Rowan also recounted her determination to move from invisible to visible lesbian, at least to colleagues. In relation to pupils Rowan did not believe it was appropriate to be out at that time.

However, legislation and society had begun to change when Rowan encountered a youth project for LGBTQ young people being bullied for their sexuality. Her view of being out to pupils changed:

> When I listened to them talk…in the school that I was in and they talked about growing up and wanting to call themselves and not seeing any role models in school, not seeing it normalised, my view changed…completely…about being out to kids…I saw it as something really important…

I discuss Rowan's changing view on coming out to pupils in chapters five and six.

4.1.9 Wendy

Wendy trained to teach children with special needs in the 1970s. She explains:

> I worked then in a few jobs but ended up as a classroom assistant in a special school junior training centre…on a large council estate in a very, very big city in England. Er…from there I went back to college and trained to be a teacher…and…er…specialised in children with profound and multiple learning difficulties …the significant turning point was finding my niche with children with special needs. It was just a sense of…erm…comfort…feeling at home…feeling that I had something to offer…feeling the delight, the joy…of being with people like that…

Of her sexuality at that time, Wendy comments:

> Er…I don't think I did…I don't think I described it. I'd always had lots of boyfriends…er…etc…lots of….er….I don't know what you'd call them these days…in my generation you'd go to dances, get off with somebody…I'd spent, you know, my whole…my

teenage years and my twenties…early twenties like that. So, I don't think I defined myself like that at all.

Wendy described having a "couple of drunken liaisons with women" during her teacher training. However, she sought to hide her sexuality when she began teaching. This continued throughout Wendy's teaching career, despite having two long-term relationships with women.

Wendy's career progressed quickly, and she became a Headteacher in her early thirties. However, serious ill-health forced Wendy into early retirement; she summarises her feelings:

> I was totally devastated…totally devastated…

Over time Wendy recovered enough to 're-invent' her career and developed an education-related business. Although she had been in a long term-relationship with a woman throughout her 30s and 40s, it was not until her early 50s that Wendy named herself as lesbian. Wendy describes the process:

> W   When that relationship ended…erm, I think…at a personal level I knew…I knew then that…I was more than likely to have a relationship with a woman than a man.
>
> K   Still not using the label gay?
>
> W   No, not using the label gay, no. I knew my next relationship would be with a woman.
>
> K   Mm…so what had shifted?
>
> W   I felt comfortable about that. I think I just woke up (laughs)…you know I think that…having lost my health and re-habilitated myself, my…you know, life is precious…and you know the time had come to be more open and more honest…
>
> K   With yourself…or…the outside world?
>
> W   …with myself…more open and honest with myself and the outside world…and I started…reading…I went on a spiritual retreat…read lots of books about spirituality…and sexuality. I went on a retreat…and as soon as I got there…I shocked myself as identifying myself as gay…
>
> K   So you, actually for the first time, voiced that?
>
> W   Yeah, yeah…
>
> K   How was that?
>
> W   How was that? It was momentarily shocking and *really* scary, I thought: 'Oh my bloody good God' but once I'd actually verbalised it and articulated it and put it on my admission form, it was a bit of a relief.

Wendy subsequently retired and married her partner; she comments:

> …it was just…quite powerful to meet somebody I connected with on a very deep spiritual level and like a coming home, then… I've found her at last…

4.2   How participants understand 'lesbian'

Wilton (1995, p. 4) notes that there is an "ebb and flow of meaning" attached to 'lesbian'. The concept of 'lesbian' has shifted from the pathological and dysfunctional, to the socially constructed and discursive to the deconstructed and fluid. Moreover, as I argued in Chapter 2, 'lesbian' continues to be contested; and since there is no archetypal 'lesbian' multiple versions may exist. Therefore, this section explores whether and how the participants in my study have used 'lesbian' to understand and describe themselves.

The participants all reported that, at some point in their lives, they recognised and named themselves as lesbian *to* themselves. For example, Alice describes this as 'coming out to myself'. Self-naming as lesbian generated a range of responses from the participants; for example, Maureen felt uncomfortable because for her 'lesbian' signalled difference, being the outsider and being the other or alien. Consequently, naming herself as lesbian was a gradual process, as this extract from my interview with Maureen shows:

> M   …by now I just kind of knew that the heterosexual life just wasn't 'right' but I didn't know what I wanted to be. I had absorbed…comments from the past and comments from home…comments that…I suppose friends, school friends that lesbianism was well weird so that you kept away from it…
>
> K   What did weird mean?
>
> M   Well, my mother would say…do you remember Nancy Spain on the telly, from Top of the Pops…so she had very curly hair but it was cropped short and she wore a checked shirt…and mother said: 'Oh she looks like a man' and somebody from school, where we lived then…it wasn't posh like it is now…you'd say: 'Walk home but be careful'…and she said: 'Good grief'… she said: 'You know you've got to look out for men but a woman touched me'…you know, that kind of thing…so I really just absorbed it. And I've never really liked being different…and then I was at that school for eight years, but it took me about four years to finally come out…I mean, it was a bit like kicking and screaming…

> K   Kicking and screaming in that you were resisting it still?

> M   Yeah…because it wasn't the 'done' thing, it was a bit
>   odd…it was a bit different and I didn't like being different…

Other participants were initially surprised by, and also a little resistant to, naming themselves as lesbian; for example, Rowan comments:

> …during that time I met my first female lover and that was just a complete shock out of the blue (half laughs)…but by the end of the evening I thought: 'Maybe I'll give this a go…I always said I would one day'. As we were walking back, she was going: 'I don't want it to be an experiment for you'. And I went: 'It's *not*'... But in my head, it was going: 'It's an experiment, it's an experiment'.

In another example Wendy was particularly resistant to naming herself as lesbian:

> …because there were no visible role models or…or groups of people, even small groups of people out there…erm no friends I could have identified with…I think I basically…erm…just accepted that I might have had a drunken liaison…with a woman…but I didn't look for it. So, I don't think I defined myself like that at all. I didn't…I didn't pigeon-hole myself…I didn't pigeon-hole myself at all. Labels, that's it…I've never really been into labels.

Wendy continues to demonstrate her resistance to describing herself as lesbian, even as she describes her first long-term lesbian partner with whom she shared a home:

> K   Would you have called her your partner?

> W   ….no, the word hadn't been invented…

> K   So…what word in your head…going home to…

> W   I didn't have a word…I'm sorry (laughs).

In contrast some participants, such as Lucy, did not initially identify as lesbian to themselves as they did not believe it was a lifestyle option.

In the early days of naming themselves as lesbian some participants viewed their sexual identity as uncertain or flexible; for example, Alice comments:

> K   You describe coming out to yourself…how was that, then, coming out to yourself?

> A   It was…well I went on holiday with my best friend from University and we ended up getting together on that holiday and it kind of came completely out of no-where…and…er…and then I thought: 'Oh my God what's that all about?' and then after the holiday and we went back and nothing, and I thought: 'Well just because that happened, it doesn't mean to say that's who I am' and…

> K   Did you not want that to be who you were?

> A   I didn't know…who I was…I didn't know who I was…

Initially Rowan also viewed her sexuality as flexible and impermanent:

> So I…I was with a woman, I was proud, I was using the label gay…I still didn't know if…well…I knew that relationship would finish at some point…it was never forever, I just didn't feel that sense of forever…so when we broke up at some point, I didn't know whether I'd go for men or women, I just didn't know. So, I felt gay, I identified as gay…that didn't mean that was forever…it was fluid…then…

Thus, from first identifying or exploring their lesbianism many of the participants did not perceive 'lesbian' as an 'essential' component of their identity: their lesbianism, at least initially, was fluid and lacked permanence. However, both George and Kate presented slightly different perspectives: they identified as lesbian at a much younger age than the other participants and did not seem to question that lesbianism was fundamental to their identity. Thus, they appeared to take a more essentialist view of their lesbianism.

Once participants named themselves as lesbian *to* themselves, many declared their sexuality to other people. Stories of family members and their response to the participants defining themselves as lesbian were prevalent. Several participants recalled being fearful of declaring their sexuality to parents and, often, receiving a negative or troubled response. For example, Alice comments:

> …I was always her favourite growing up and I think she was thinking: 'That's it now… no grandchildren' and that sort of thing…I think it was just sort of horror…

Kate also spoke of her parents' difficult and differing responses to her coming out as lesbian:

> My parents they had a different reaction to it…erm…my father was just horrified…just on a political level…he was a very political man…very left wing…Marxist…Trotskyite really…and he just thought…he couldn't see the point in being gay…he didn't see…he didn't know what that was about really…you know, in terms of politics he didn't see what stand I was making… I think he was disappointed in me…I think he thought there were better things I could be doing with my life than being gay…my mother, on the other hand, was just upset.

However, some participants also experienced immediate and positive support from family members when they declared their lesbianism; for example, George remembers:

G   And, I remember my cousin saying: 'I heard you came out recently' and 'Congratulations' and I was thinking: 'Wow'.

K   Mm…when was that?

G   That was…I must have been 15 or something…

K   Gosh…that must have a big thing, I should think, at 15 to say: 'Congratulations'?

G   Yeah…oh God it was MASSIVE that she'd said that…because it wasn't something I really spoke about with my mum…

Many participants also told of families coming to accept their lesbian status over time; for example, Lucy observes:

…my parents, although it upset them, initially, have been absolutely amazing, and so have their friends, you know, very supportive…

George also illustrated how parents may change their attitudes to their adult lesbian daughter; and how she, too, could now understand and accept the shifts in their parent-adult child relationship:

…my parents are so different now…it's unbelievable…I think my mum…and I really understand it, I really get it…I think she found it excruciating to talk about because of the nature of vicarages and…the people who were there, you know. She…they were invited to something with the Pope…I don't know what it was…some Popey thing (both laugh)…and my mum said very proudly to me: 'Oh…I said 'no' of course' and I said: 'Did you, mum, why was that then?' 'Well! Why would I want to hang out with someone who's homophobic!'…(both laugh)…and it's gone…she's gone…so supportive…wonderfully supportive…you know they came to our civil partnership…I wish I'd got them to be more part of it, really…and…yeah…I couldn't want more supportive parents actually…they love Sal…actually it's a bit annoying…to the point she can't do anything wrong…(both laugh)…

During the 1970s, 80s and 90s, some of the participants explored their lesbianism on the 'gay scene'. Angela, Rowan and George all remembered the gay scene of those years as hidden or underground and, frequently, separatist. For example, Angela describes hiding her face as she went into a gay bar that was literally underground:

No, you didn't want to be seen…it was very secretive…I used to go on my motorbike and I'd go in with my crash helmet on.

Of the separatist culture, George comments on the prejudice she observed:

G   …and the gay scene, then, was so different, wasn't it? Oh my God…I look back…I was saying to someone recently…it was like a different world…there was lots of…it was very underground…and I just thought that's what you had to put up with really…

K   That's what (both together)…being gay was all about.

G   And you'd go and have to knock, and they checked you looked gay enough…

K   Yes…

G   And, I was fine with that…it was never…and I think that……

K   So what did 'gay enough' look like at that time?

G   …at that time…and being gay at that time…there was a really anti-feminine look…to the point of this woman getting a really difficult time…it's really weird isn't it…gosh…(musing to herself)…gay people made it very difficult for themselves…and I also remember this woman who had started seeing this guy…and they taunted her…and I remember saying to someone at the time: 'Well…this is a bit ironic…talk about homophobia…but you can be just as 'ist' about other people'…

K   Yes

G   And people not getting that…and separatist culture was massive, you know…and it was really difficult not to be separatist.

Rowan also experienced lesbian separatism during the 1990s with which she, too, was uncomfortable. She relates this separatism to notions of binary visibility:

        …and I keep coming back to this…I didn't see people like me…So I did see separatist lesbians…out and about…I see these crazy-arsed pink haired women talking about boy children being thrown out of the community at the aged of 6…you know…I didn't identify with them either. It seemed like people were very polarised…into being all or nothing at that time… no grey area, everything was…what do they call it…everything was binary. How you looked was binary…either you looked queer or you didn't…you couldn't be…you know…either you were hidden, or you were visible.

Thus, it could be argued that since the 'gay scene' of the 1970s and 1980s was underground and hidden, homosexuality was subject to social 'policing' and censure even before the sexual imperialism embodied in Section 28. Furthermore, the participants' comments suggest that this may have generated 'counter-policing' within the 'gay scene', through a strategic and essentialist insistence on (homo)sexual stereotypes.

In Chapter Two I argued that identity is discursive and is both generated and performed at intersections; some participants in this study discussed their identity in relation to their 'intersections of being'. For example, Kate referenced the influence of being both black and lesbian; while both George and Wendy spoke about class and / or cultural capital and its inter-relationship with their lesbian identity. For George, being the daughter of a vicar sometimes compensated for her masculinised lesbianism in the school workplace:

> …and do you know I think the vicar's daughter 'card' has helped me through it sometimes…

While Wendy felt out of place in the gay scene of the early 2000s:

> … I didn't feel comfortable…it was fine to have a good drink and a good dance and whatever… but I didn't feel comfortable in those environments…I was trying to be authentic and true to myself…and what I saw…I didn't feel comfortable about and I couldn't find myself within that……and having spent all those years of my life hiding…I then found I didn't have anywhere…I couldn't place myself anywhere…

During the interviews I asked participants how they currently defined their lesbianism. Consistent with other research (for example Wilton 1995) this seemingly straightforward question elicited a range of responses which were often presented with emphasis and conviction. For example, Rowan demonstrates her resistance to the label 'lesbian' in favour of other specific words.

> …by then I was queer…I was gay…I was a dyke…I love every word but lesbian…because lesbian, lezza was the word of choice at secondary school when I was growing up, you know, 'you fucking lezzas'…and I still kind of have an 'errr'…I think most gay people have words that were used when they were growing up…probably maybe queer's the most famous one…for many people.

Thus, in Rowan's discursive construction of 'lesbian' that particular word denotes rejection and prejudice. Rowan, therefore, prefers to describe her identity with other social labels; she describes her preference for 'gay' and 'queer':

> But, I like the word dyke and gay…I just object to the word 'gay' being taken over by men…You know, in the media…I'm a gay woman, for fuck's sake…why aren't you a gay man…why are you just gay? I don't know who's doing it…but male is gay, and female is lesbian and I'm not okay with that…I think queer is genderless…I think gay is genderless…I think my growing more

confident in being queer…alongside society's changes…I don't know which influenced which…

In this quote Rowan challenges the gendered power inherent in 'gay'. Wilton (2004, p. 194) argues there is an "interdependency of gender and the erotic which underpins the hegemony of the patriarchal heteroerotic order". Indeed, Rowan's comments may reflect her rejection of 'homoerotic patriarchy'.

Maureen and Alice deploy 'lesbian' both politically and to describe their personally sexuality; for example, Maureen comments:

M   ….it's quite important for me to say lesbian, rather than gay…

K   What's that about?

M   It's something about…something political…it's something feminist, I think…

K   Can you say a bit more…it's interesting because people are using…people that I've interviewed, are using different names for themselves…

M   Yes…I don't like the word queer 'cos I'm not modern enough…and I know the word queer is being reclaimed …I think, I don't know, I think it's been reclaimed more by men but that feels a bit too much for me…I suppose when I first came out, so in the 80s, gay was for men and lesbian was for women…it was very much lesbian feminists…in those days and I think it was very important and for me that…I still stayed with it...that it means, to me, if you say you're a lesbian it implies there is a political awareness around women…If you say you're gay…to me, it implies that, you know, you might actually be a misogynist yourself…for all I know, there's no real awareness about feminism…and, of course, these days the media rules and the media is very anti-feminist…or the media will tell you if you are a feminist, you hate men…

While Maureen highlights a possible relationship between a lesbian identity and feminist outlook, Alice talks about reclaiming 'lesbian' in response to earlier homophobia and oppression:

K   Can I ask you about the use of language there…you used the word 'lesbian' before and then you used the word 'gay'?

A   Words…I'm lesbian.

K   You're lesbian?

A   **Yes!**

K   Tell me about that then…'cos some people say: 'Oh I'm gay'.

A   Because…well I was thinking about this this morning…and I was thinking...'Am I a gay woman…well, no'…if there's a name…for me personally…

K   Yes, for you…

A   I think that there's a name just for women, then that's lesbian… I think it's one of those things I was quite vehement about being, you know…if it's going to be used against me, then it's going to be my word…

K   Like reclaiming it?

A   Yes, yes exactly…reclaiming it…and I just think it's got more power to it…there's more fight to it, you know…to have that name and to stand underneath that banner that says: 'I'm going to use the word that you want to use against me…'

Alice and Maureen's comments about 'lesbian' and how they apply the concept to themselves are reminiscent of Rutherford's (1990, p. 12) observation that "the emergence of feminism, gay liberation and black politics struggled to turn those places from sites of oppression and discrimination into spaces of resistance".

On the other hand, as a result of Wendy's resistance to labelling people she rejects applying 'lesbian' to herself:

K   What does 'lesbian' mean for you?

W   It means nothing, it's a word…I don't like labels…I really do not like labels…it suggests a level of judgement…a level of smacking everyone with a label…on a conveyor belt…it denies the individual…

K   So are you a lesbian?

W   No…I haven't got a label…I'm just Wendy Jones expressing my love, my nurturing, my commitment to another person who happens to be a woman…it could be my husband, but it isn't…it's another human being and she's a woman and she's my wife…

Here Wendy resists being labelled because it denies the individual and 'pigeon-holes' her. She wants to retain the power to adopt a more ambiguous label, or fluid sexuality, that she defines for herself. Perhaps Wendy's desire to retain control over labels and definition reflects Wilton's (2004, p. 188) observation:

Note that Young-Bruehl…writes (ibid., pp. 142-3): Homosexuals are not a group unless they are made to be one or unless they respond to discrimination by organizing: they do not have a culture until they have been made into a sub-culture... Homophobia is an assertion of control over the category "homosexual". Homophobes try to seize the power of definition...

Finally, several participants referred to the changing concept of 'lesbian', highlighting its discursive and fluid nature. For example, Rowan observes:

> R   Ten years ago my gaydar might have spotted some kids……but they weren't 'out', they were trying to hide…erm…whereas now I think it's much more normal…in fact, I think they're even going beyond labels of gay and straight, aren't they?
>
> K   Yes
>
> R   There's pan-sexual…and, God, I don't know what they all are…it's beyond me (joking)
>
> K   Yes…going back to your word 'binary'…ideas are perhaps more about fluidity now…
>
> R   Mm… peers of mine talk about their teenage children…to give some examples: 'My daughter is seeing another girl, but she's not claiming to be gay'…there's a sort of normalcy that it's about who you love, not the gender you love…
>
> K   Mm
>
> R   …they can be freer than when we were growing up…

4.3 How participants understand 'visibility'

In Chapter Two I argued that lesbian visibility is a consequence of performing a lesbian identity: it is relational and involves recognition and response. Visibility is also contextual and calibrated as lesbian women 'turn up' or 'tone down' their performance of 'lesbian' in order to produce 'liveable lives'. As I had sought to understand how the participants construct and deploy 'lesbian', I also wanted to understand how they perceive 'lesbian visibility'. Although participants emphasised different aspects of visibility there was consistency across the group.

For example, Wendy emphasises recognition through popular representation:

> W   I keep on using the word visible but…I don't know if there's another word other than visible but…
>
> K   What does visible mean for you? What are you meaning when you use that word?
>
> W   Erm…that…erm…that there was representation of alternative types of sexuality…in the media…and in the

> street…so you'd see girls walking down the street holding hands…yeah that's what I mean…

Although other participants also spoke of the importance of representation, George laments perceived tokenism; for example, she comments:

> G   My little brother is half Afro-Caribbean and…erm…we're very close…I think I'm the gay one, he's the black one…we're the sheep of the family…I think that, too, there's not many gay people, not many black people out there in terms of advertisements, books, children's story books…they have to about being lesbians…like 'my two gay mums' or…
>
> K   Rather than being secondary to the story…
>
> G   Yeah…just good stories…

Alice's version of 'visibility' aligns with her political use of 'lesbian' as she seeks to secure recognition and validation. She comments:

> …you know children nowadays can see gay characters on television, they can see trans characters, you've also got books, politicians…you could never imagine…that's unbelievable that you've got people just out and about saying this is who I am, this is what I am and I'm not going to hide away and I think that's…that sense of celebration has given people the confidence to say: 'Yeah, yeah I am…this is who I am, this is my life and this is how I choose to live it'…

Several participants emphasised the relational and contextual nature of visibility. For example, George argued that cultural norms may act as a filter and so disrupt processes of social recognition of lesbians. The result in the case she discusses was to render her invisible in 'plain sight' as a lesbian teenager:

> I was at boarding school…I was always known as the tomboy…but then it was always ok to be a tomboy, wasn't it…in a way that it wasn't alright if a boy was very effeminate…erm…so that was fine…and we lived in the country…and we were mucking out horses and stuff…no-one noticed.

Lucy also gave an example of being 'invisible in plain sight' because of other people's assumptions:

> It was very sweet (starts to laugh) one day…erm…I'd walked into the classroom and a student said: 'She sounds just like Miss Du Plessis'…and another said: 'They're sisters, you know'…(laughing)…you know…'coloured' South African and I'm white…and they thought we were sisters, God bless them, (both laugh)…and that we came to work together every day. I just think you see what you want to see…so...er...the students knew we were 'friends'. They didn't know we were a couple.

George and Lucy's observations illustrate something of the nature of 'lesbian visibility'. I argued in Chapter Two that visibility is relational and involves recognition and response; sometimes the response validates, while on other occasions it rejects or condemns. As well as being relational, visibility is contextual and calibrated, as lesbian women 'turn up' or 'tone down' their performance of 'lesbian' in order to generate 'liveable lives'. In the examples described neither George nor Lucy were recognised as lesbian: they were invisible, not so much as a result of their own actions but because of the assumptions of other people.

Finally, several participants discussed deploying visibility as an activist tool in the context of the school and in relation to their pupils; for example, Rowan observes:

> When I started to feel that to be visible is so important…'cos if we're not visible in society then…who else is ever going to come out…and of course in retrospect that was directly related to my experience. And…er…yeah in my head was very clear that I wasn't going to be in the closet again…

Thus, Rowan began to integrate her lesbian identity with her professional identity in order to act as a role model to pupils.

4.4 Discussion

To understand the name or label 'lesbian' is to grapple with the tension between the need for language with which to comprehend and communicate, and the changing and individual conceptualisation of 'lesbian'. The variety of meanings attached to 'lesbian' reflects not only different theoretical understandings, but also the individuality of each woman's experiences and psychological conditions. 'Your lesbian may not be my lesbian' and there may be as many versions of lesbian as there are lesbian women. Indeed, the participants illustrate the variety and difference in becoming and being lesbian. They 'came out to themselves' at different ages and in different ways: everything from a gradual and reluctant process for Maureen, to Kate's pre-pubescent certainty. Their sexuality intersected with other aspects of identity; for example, for Kate being black was more dominant and problematic than her lesbianism.

As the participants described how they have understood and labelled their lesbianism, they began to discuss ideas traditionally explored through 'identity politics'. For example, Alice and Maureen apply 'lesbian' to themselves as a means of asserting the legitimacy of their sexuality and to challenge prejudice. On the other hand, while Rowan now chooses to describe herself as 'queer', she feels a professional responsibility to come out to pupils and describes herself to them as 'gay'. To challenge dominant heteronormativity in the professional context, she has to adopt a more essentialist identity than she may be comfortable with in her private life.

Just as each participant's 'lesbian' was slightly different from the others, so too was their entry into teaching; for example, Jenny's motivation to teach was interest in her subject, while Wendy delighted in pupils with special needs, but Kate grasped teaching as a last straw.

However, despite nuanced and individualised journeys to lesbianism and teaching, a common aspect emerged: fear of dismissal, prejudice or discrimination as lesbian teachers in U.K. schools in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The next chapter, Chapter Five, considers the participants' experience of and response to working in schools before and during the Section 28 years. It also evaluates the influence of changing legislation at the start of the 21st century on the participants' visibility as lesbians.

5   Chapter Five: The influence of the politico-legal context on participant visibility

This chapter offers an analysis of the participants' perspectives on how a changing politico-legislative context has influenced lesbian visibility in the school workplace.

In Chapter Two I argued that Section 28 represented a State-sanctioned assault on lesbian and gay identities and lifestyles: it set out to police and punish 'transgressive' sexualities in schools. Following Edwards et al. (2014, p. 2) I conceptualised Section 28 as "a *panoptic schema* of surveillance" which generated a "coerced form of…*invisibilisation".* That is, the fear generated by Section 28 compelled many lesbian and gay teachers to hide or camouflage their sexuality. As Ferfolja (2009, p.390) argues:

> …social marginalization of lesbian and gay identities means that in schools, teachers often feel compelled to manage their sexuality, often passing or covering as heterosexual, or filtering personal information in various ways.

I continued to describe how the repeal of Section 28 and introduction of equalities legislation has offered greater recognition and protection for LGBTQ citizens, including many working in state schools in the U.K.

I also illustrated in Chapter Two how different conceptualisations of sexual identity were articulated through legislation: from a 'convenient' but discriminatory attachment to the discursive in Section 28 to an essentialist but more permissive construction in more recent equalities legislation.

Furthermore, I explored the intersectional nature of identity. A study by Cox et al. (2009) was illustrative: it examined the intersection of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and place. Cox et al. (2009, p. 190) concluded that to manage 'liveable lives' their participants appeared "to 'perform' or highlight different aspects of their identity in different places". Finally, I suggested that visibility is a consequence of the performance of a discursive lesbian identity and entails recognition and response.

In Section 5.1 of this chapter I analyse the participants' descriptions of the politico-legal influence on the performance and visibility of their lesbian identities in the school workplace. Many participants were keen to widen the discussion; therefore, in Section 5.2 I consider the participants'

perspectives on the influence of changing legislation and national policy on teaching, learning and the curriculum and the impact on the visibility of different sexualities in schools. In Section 5.3 I explore the participants' views on the extent to which approaches to homophobic bullying in schools have altered as the politico-legal context has changed. Finally, the participants discussed the response of children and young people to same-sex identities amongst their teachers and peers: this is discussed in Section 5.4.

5.1   Working in schools before, during and after the Section 28 years

Fear of discrimination and harassment towards LGBTQ teachers in the school workplace has a long history. For example, Squirrell (1989, p. 91) notes that during the 1980s lesbian women often chose to hide their sexuality as they feared "for job security and promotion, [and feared] victimization and of being discredited at work". As employment and financial security are significant in generating 'liveable lives', it might be reasonable to assume that lesbian teachers might calibrate their performance of lesbian to reduce their visibility when they fear prejudice and dismissal from the workplace.

Both Angela and Wendy trained and started teaching in the 1970s and described how they were fearful of being known as lesbians. For example, Wendy comments of her teacher training:

> …my tutor…she was very supportive…but she actually said to me: 'Now, you need to be very, very careful because, you know, if this gets out, it could ruin your career and, you know, same sex relationships are not condoned…er…and you could get struck off as a teacher…'

It is likely that in the 1970s the notion of a formal process of being 'struck off' as a lesbian teacher was more myth than reality. However, there is evidence to suggest that lesbian and gay teachers may have risked dismissal should their sexuality become public knowledge. For example, Squirrell (1989, p. 88) describes an Employment Tribunal Appeal which "upheld the reasonableness of dismissing someone for being a homosexual if they had contact with children". Similarly, Wilton (1995, p. 194) notes that "...the ILEA…in 1974 attracted a lot of publicity for sacking teacher John Warburton for coming out to his pupils in response

to questioning". Thus, case law, if not statue, was already policing and punishing visible lesbian and gay teachers before the introduction of Section 28.

Indeed, Angela explicitly discusses the threat of dismissal during the 1970s:

> …when I first started teaching, the Deputy Head of Department…she had to leave her school because she was found out to be gay…so it was a choice of leave or be booted…so pressure was applied, and she had to leave…

Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s Wendy and Angela did fear dismissal should they be identified as lesbians in the school workplace. Consequently, they sought to hide their sexuality by having male partners; Angela comments:

> I had boyfriends…I hid…

This approach to visibility management is typified as 'passing' (Griffin 1991) which "is a strategy that leads others to believe that the individual is heterosexual" (Sparkes 1994, p. 99).

Section 28 further entrenched the fear of dismissal; for example, Clarke (1996, p.191) observes:

> Though Section 28 may only be of symbolic power and significance, it has clearly had a major impact on the lives of lesbian and gay teachers causing many of them to fear for the continuation of their employment should their sexuality be revealed.

Indeed, Rowan comments on her fear of dismissal during the Section 28 years, explaining her anxiety at the thought of attending a Gay Pride march:

> …I can't march down the street without some sort of disguise because I'll lose my job…

Rowan's dilemma about attending the march echoes Sparkes' (1994) work with Jessica, a PE teacher during the Section 28 years. While Jessica did attend Gay Pride but kept a low profile, Rowan literally disguised herself:

> So I went with a pillow case over my head and…and…had pinned red ribbons to it so…it was around the time of Aids and all of that…only I'd stupidly chosen a grey pillow case …and I looked like elephant man covered in…red blotches…it was ridiculous…I called it the 'half out' position…

Rowan's vignette illustrates how she attempted to calibrate her lesbian visibility in relation to the politico-legal context. In responding to Section 28 Rowan allowed her identity as teacher to dominate her lesbian identity as she strove to restrict her lesbian visibility. Although Section 28 only applied in schools its jurisdiction seeped into the wider locality and network of social relations. Thus, while Rowan wanted to identify with other LGBTQ people out of school, she still camouflaged herself (in the most literal sense) in response to the policing function of Section 28. Thus Section 28 did act as a 'panoptic schema of surveillance' and generated a "coerced form of…*invisibilisation"* (Edwards et al. 2014, p. 2) even beyond the boundaries of the school.

In describing this episode Rowan also touched upon her experience of gay activism in the mid-1990s. She describes the intolerance of her 'half-out' position from colleagues on the Pride Committee:

> …as far as the Pride Committee was concerned you were either out or you were in…nobody would take on board what I was trying to say…I was out to some people but not out in school…and they really, really didn't understand in all the conversations and I felt very alone in that…I just remember that I didn't feel like I was being heard…it was like there was no middle ground and for me there *was* a middle ground…

Rowan's description suggests that gay activism of the 1990s was neither as neatly compartmentalised nor as inclusive as some commentators suggest. For example, Lent (2003, p. 33) asserts that "the [gay activist] movement of the 1990s…accepted the wide variety of different ways in which homosexuality could be expressed…". However, far from finding understanding and support from her activist peers, Rowan felt isolated. Section 28 caused Rowan to repress her visibility and isolated her in the school, while activists rejected her reduced visibility at work and isolated her beyond the school gates. As I argued in Chapter Two, while Section 28 functioned to police lesbian and gay teachers in school, some lesbian and gay people appear to have experienced 'counter-policing' from the 'gay community'. This was often based on stereotypical and essentialist constructions of (homo)sexuality, as well as rooted in the vilification of less politically active lesbians and gay men.

I also argued in Chapter Two that the fear of retribution generated by Section 28 permeated "an individual's consciousness" (Edwards et al. 2014, p. 2) and as a result, danger could seem to lurk everywhere. For

example, Alice described the fear of pupils and / or pupil parents objecting to her as a lesbian teacher. George, also a primary school teacher, describes the fear of her lesbianism being visible to pupils:

> G   …but in terms of children and parents I was always REALLY nervous about being out…not SO much parents…but always really nervous about talking to children about it. I wouldn't be AT ALL now…
>
> K   What were you nervous about?
>
> G   Because Section 28 was still in force…you know…you felt you had to be…it was a risk to be openly gay…and I took that risk quite a lot…because…erm…why? (pauses and reflects) Because I've always been really proud to be gay really…and…yeah…so I was always willing to put myself, my head above the parapet really…

In secondary schools, participants also felt anxious about the possibility of a negative response from pupil parents. Rowan observes:

> I thought: 'If I tell a colleague, and two adults were having a conversation in a corridor and a kid overheard, the kid told their parents, the parents would be down with fire…you know brandishing…I don't know what you call them…sticks…I can't remember what they call them…

On the other hand, Lucy and Kate feared pupil homophobia being turned against them; for example, Lucy notes:

> …the homophobia amongst students, rabid homophobia…it was pretty savage…

It might be expected, therefore, that most participants would deploy covering or passing strategies to 'tone down' or completely camouflage their lesbian identity in school. However, both Alice and George used 'differentiated' identity management strategies. Rather atypically (for example Edwards et al. 2014) both Alice and George were 'out' with colleagues from the start of their careers but deployed different strategies with pupil parents and pupils.

It could be argued that Alice and George's strategies illustrate how the performance of 'lesbian' (and therefore visibility) is relational, contextual and calibrated. As a legal context, Section 28 was influential throughout schools and did not specify a relationship to colleagues distinct from pupils and their parents. However, in being out to colleagues perhaps Alice and George perceived 'micro-communities' within the single organisation: as discussed in Chapter Two Rudoe (2010) argued for differing identity management strategies in different spaces within the

school. Thus, in considering the discursive nature of 'lesbian', it could be argued that Alice and George calibrated their visibility differentially, not because of the spaces within the school, but because of the social relationships within the school. Alternatively, or in addition, their strategy may have reflected a need to ameliorate possible psychological distress generated by the oppression embodied in Section 28: having at least some recognition and validation within the workplace was necessary to produce a liveable (lesbian) professional life.

Some participants distinguished school leaders / managers from other colleagues in their response (or potential response) to lesbian visibility. This differentiation may have stemmed from the participant's perception of a manager's power to implement Section 28 and potentially, dismiss staff. Accordingly, most participants continued to mask their lesbianism to senior managers; for example, Rowan describes asking for leave of absence to care for her partner:

> It was awful…it was really awful…a sort of dark time of being gay in education...for me. 'Cos, I couldn't tell anybody…Mary was becoming more and more unwell. I was very closeted at work. I remember asking for…she had a huge operation…and I asked for two days off…I was never ill…I never took time off. And they asked: 'Why?' and I said: 'Because my partner'…and I made it…I didn't actually say 'she'…and I never lied actually…but I made it…I omitted the gender. I said: My partner is having this operation' and this woman…the deputy head…brought out the guidebook and said: 'You can only have time off if you're married but we will give you one day off paid and one day off unpaid'…which I couldn't afford to do but I did. Next time she had an operation I went off sick.

Although it is feasible that a heterosexual but unmarried couple could have been treated similarly during that time, Rowan believed the strict implementation of this policy resulted from the homophobic discrimination embodied in Section 28.

Lucy also feared that she might not receive support from school leaders as a lesbian:

> …I wasn't sure, genuinely, although there were some nice Heads, that they'd support it…I think I was *so* nervous and *so* worried how they'd handle a parent who said: 'I'm not having my kid in her class'…so I didn't push it…I didn't say anything…

Indeed, writing more recently, Gray (2013, p. 711) comments that the participants in her study all "…experienced some form of resistance to their coming out from their schools".

Chapter Two discussed the changing political climate as Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party and eventually led his party to general election victory in 1997. Some participants started to experience a change during this time which offered the possibility of safer visibility for lesbians in school. Alice notes the Section 28 years were "all about fear" and so the Labour victory in the 1997 general election provided:

> …an opportunity to have some positive change…to address things that had been seemingly ingrained and overturn things that were standing in the way of progress.

Also, during this period, Rowan sensed a positive if evolutionary change in school policy when she experienced homophobic abuse from a pupil:

> I went to see the Headteacher and one of the Deputies and said: 'To be honest I don't really know what to do about this…I just don't know what to do'…and they were fantastic…they just said: 'Right, let's look at our…', 'cos there was no policy on sexuality at that time, so they said: '…we'll look at our policy on racism and we'll follow those same guidelines'. And that's exactly what they did, and they made it very, very easy for me…

Chapter Six further considers Rowan's changing approach to visibility management. However, it is important to note here that towards the end of the 1990s she was no longer deploying covering strategies across the school. She had developed a differentiated strategy of being out to colleagues and of covering to pupils and their parents.

The repeal of Section 28 in 2003 and the gradual introduction of equalities legislation at the beginning of the 21st century reassured many of the participants. For example, Alice explains that with the repeal of Section 28 her fear of visibility began to recede:

> …it's taking away that culture of fear…that culture of fear…

As the fear receded so identifying as a lesbian in the school workplace became less taboo. For example, Kate began to feel protected by legislation and less fearful of being recognised as lesbian by pupils and their parents:

> The legal stuff must be important…because if we go into school and get trouble…well we have the law on our side, don't we? Whereas, twenty years ago that *absolutely* wasn't the case…so obviously, that's *vital.* And, again, if a parent has a problem with it, you have the law on your side. What can they do? I don't think you can…erm…underestimate how important that's been.

Alice expresses a similar sentiment:

> … it's about me feeling secure enough to think: 'Do you know what, I'm not going anywhere, I'm staying here and I'm proving myself in my classroom…and if you come and tell me your child isn't learning, isn't working in the classroom then you've got cause to question what I'm doing. If you haven't…you've got nothing…you can't say anything against me'…I make children laugh, I make learning fun.

Kate and Alice's greater confidence and sense of security, borne out of changing legislation, is consistent with the findings of other research (for example Edwards et al. 2014).

For other participants civil partnership offered recognition and validation that enhanced their confidence in being visible in school. For example, Rowan explains:

> R   …the biggest thing for me was about civil partnerships. 'Cos when I became civil partnered, I walked round with even more confidence…and that surprised me because I didn't particularly care what the State thought. But that piece of paper saying it's okay to be legally hitched to another woman…I couldn't believe how important that was. Not romantically…I mean…I mean in terms of how…erm…what's the word?
>
> K   Legitimate?
>
> R   Yeah, there's something that really legitimises that…that *really* surprised me. I felt more confident about saying it in places I might not have before…

Alice also comments on the sense of recognition and protection offered by civil partnership:

> It was euphoric…I remember waking up the next day…there were people staying with us…so there was me, Jude and Henry (their young child) all in the same bed, so that was our civil partnership night…and I just felt I was in this absolutely massive hug…just that sense of security…not just a sense of security…this is about me, I'm here…

Civil partnership was also significant for Lucy as it boosted her confidence in coming out to pupils:

> But, again, I didn't tell students…even though they were so lovely: Daddy worked for the Independent, Mummy was a barrister…it probably wouldn't have been an issue but I didn't share it…it didn't…it didn't come up…my one thing then if students asked you, legitimately…my mum would think this was prying…but they asked if I was married, I would always say: 'No'…and I would just shut down a conversation about relationships…I wouldn't tell them I was in a relationship…and that went on, you know, for quite a few years until we had our civil partnership, actually…

More prosaically but still of significance in relation to the influence of changing legislation for lesbians in the school workplace, Wendy comments:

> …at least now Pip (her partner) will get my pension…I know she'll be alright…erm…financially…

Continuing to discuss the influence of changing legislation and political culture on equalities policy and practice in school, and the protection offered to individual lesbian and gay teachers, Rowan observes:

> I think the more things that are written down in policy documents the better. I don't know when it started to happen…but when I started to see that the school had a…a whatever…anti-bullying policy, homophobia, this policy, that policy…brilliant…that it's written down somewhere…it's really important that it's in black and white…I mean nobody ever reads policies (half laughs) but that doesn't matter, it gives me some confidence to go there…to know things are written down.

Rowan was also encouraged when she observed a colleague challenging homophobic behaviour by a pupil:

> R   I remember hearing a straight colleague saying to some boy who said something to him…he was a big, booming old fashioned teacher…he said: 'Would it matter if I was gay? Would it?'…and that was really standing up to him at that moment and that was wonderful…I remember going to see him afterwards and saying: 'That was really nice to have someone do that'…
>
> K   What was his response to you saying that?
>
> R   It was just like…well…erm…you know: 'We've got to stand up for what's right' or something like that…really simple and quite humble…

This illustrates Lumby and Coleman's (2007, p.110) assertion that "for diversity issues to be adequately addressed, the attitudes and practice of the dominant group and the structures which it has established require adjustment".

However, after the repeal of Section 28, not all participants experienced legal recognition and protection in the same way or to the same degree: this stemmed from the culture of their particular schools. For example, when she retired during the 2000s, Maureen took up a post as a supply teacher. During the research interview Maureen provided detailed descriptions of how she had challenged prejudice, including homophobia, in her substantive posts. However, as a supply teacher she experienced

homophobic abuse from pupils which was not censured by senior members of staff:

> There was no back up from staff, there was no back up from Heads of Year…I only stayed there seven weeks at most…

Thus, despite a common legal framework, inclusive cultures and the development and implementation of policies on sexuality and equalities appear inconsistent across schools. This is consistent with Colgan and Wright's assertion that (2011, p. 559) "while policies on sexual orientation had been developed, on paper, there was a view…that there was often insufficient commitment from managers and leaders to put theses into practice…".

Consequently, while many of the participants now feel safer and more confident in declaring their lesbian status in the school workplace, it is not the case for all of them. The school context can have a profound impact on the day to day experience and visibility of lesbian women. This theme is further developed in Chapter Six.

5.2   Teaching, learning and the curriculum

Chapter Two noted that Section 28 generated confusion, as well as fear, for teachers about what they could teach pupils and how they might address homophobic bullying (for example Greenland and Nunney 2008; Epstein 2000). This was also the experience of some participants in this study. For example, of the curriculum in the early 1990s Lucy comments:

> I'm just so glad I worked in London…the attitudes to that…to that kind of legislation…that kind of bigoted outlook was just challenged all the time, you know…if someone had come in, I'm sure they could have prosecuted us…how do you promote a thing like that…but I certainly did lots of sex education…and I found it completely fine…good people taught me how to do that…it wasn't about your sex life or theirs…and so we would talk about gay relationships…we'd talk about all sorts of things.

This illustrates the confusion about how the promotion of homosexuality was defined in Section 28. It also reflects uncertainty about the enforceability of the Act since it is unlikely that Lucy's school could have been prosecuted for including discussion of lesbian and gay relationships in its sex education policy. Section 28 made it illegal for Local Authorities, not schools, to 'promote' homosexuality (for example Epstein 2000). However, Lucy clearly thought that the prosecution of a school or its staff

was a possibility. On the other hand, an Ofsted inspection of the time may well have questioned such teaching and caused difficulties for the school, its leaders and teachers. For example, Epstein (1994, p. 2) observes:

> The official *Handbook* for the newly privatized inspectors of schools says, in its section on the statutory basis for education, that 'promoting homosexuality through resources or teaching is prohibited' (OFSTED 1992:13). This restatement of Section 28 is even stronger than…Section 28 itself.

Furthermore, Epstein considers this description in the Inspection Handbook as an attempt to re-calibrate the poor drafting of Section 28. While history suggests it may still have been legally unenforceable, the directive could have generated a difficult inspection for a school such as Lucy's. However, Lucy's experience also suggests that even at the height of the Section 28 years, some schools resisted its heteronormative hegemony through discussion of same-sex relationships in the curriculum. Despite the perceived danger, some schools and teachers endeavoured to "construct possibilities and spaces for young people's identity production" (Epstein and Johnson 2008, p. 46).

In contrast Jenny describes how same-sex sexualities were, as intended in Section 28, repressed in the 1990s curriculum. She had the opportunity of free tickets to take pupils to a National Theatre to production of 'Two weeks with the Queen'. This performance depicted a gay relationship in which one partner was dying of HIV/AIDS; Jenny explains:

> …and I spoke to the second-in-charge of English and it was, like: 'Nah, don't go there. The Head won't have it…'cos we can't deal with parents…parents just wouldn't have it…'

Thus, parents of pupils influenced the school curriculum by reinforcing the homophobic zeitgeist embodied in Section 28. However, it may also be that the school leadership used fear of parental response as an excuse for not including LGBTQ sexualities and relationships in the curriculum.

Alice made comparisons with the pre- and post-Section 28 curriculum in primary schools. She considers there is now more freedom to teach about same-sex sexualities within the formal curriculum:

> It's amazing…when you talk about Section 28…you're not allowed to use these books, you're not allowed to use those

> books…and suddenly, here we are…twenty-five years later and you can teach what you want, and you can talk about what you want…

However, Alice goes on to argue that there is inconsistent practice in including LGBTQ sexualities in the primary curriculum:

> …people are choosing which bits to teach…we used to teach a lot…there used to be units on stereotyping, homophobia…social and emotional aspects of learning…there were six strands…getting on and falling out…bullying…keeping safe…this is what we're supposed to teach, but within that there's nothing specific on what to do with homophobia, what to do with sexism…and lots of schools have put it into SEAL[5] but children could go through all of that without touching those key issues, unless you as a teacher think: 'We are going to focus on this'.

Furthermore, as Edwards et al. (2014) note Section 28 has cast a long and lingering shadow in policing personal identities and school curriculum. For some school staff this means continued fear and confusion about curriculum content and what can be discussed with pupils. George illustrates this:

> I was with a teaching assistant and I was talking to a child…I've forgotten what I was saying but it was something about 'my partner, she…'…I can't remember what it was…and she looked panic stricken…and I remember saying to her: 'It's not illegal…Section 28 went and it's fine to talk openly about sexuality…it's okay'.

George goes on to say:

> There's still such fear around Section 28…I know I've said it a few times in this conversation but the damage…the long-lasting damage it created was phenomenal…*phenomenal…*

George's conversation with the child and Teaching Assistant also illustrates how in the post-Section 28 era, George went beyond 'coming out' to pupils. She deployed her own masculinised lesbianism to challenge gender stereotypes and to present the possibility of same-sex sexualities to pupils; for example:

> …and I remember some Year 1 children walking up the road going: 'Ms Rogers is marrying a girl…' and one of them going: 'You can't marry girls, if you're a girl…' and the other one goes: 'She's not a girl, she's a boy…' it was all about gender…and the other one goes: 'My mum says it is okay for girls to marry girls'…And it was just wonderful they were having this conversation…But I think in terms of gender, children have such

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> confusion because they're already being aligned to what girls look like, what boys look like…

Thus, George integrated her lesbian and professional identities in the educational service of her pupils. She enhanced her lesbian visibility as a space or tool to encourage pupil reflection.

Rowan also describes a similar process with secondary aged pupils once Section 28 had been repealed and equalities legislation introduced:

> I had a really tricky Year 9 class…er…the most difficult boy in the class said: 'Are you married?' And I said…and I…was still like, 'I don't know how the kids will react'…and I said: 'No, actually, I'm civil partnered'. And I thought: 'Oh my God, I've said it now'. He said: 'What's that mean?' So, he's asking the question and the whole class is pretending to work…so like ears pricked up…So I said: 'It means that my partner is…er…a woman'. He went: 'Oh, okay'. Anyway, they all carry on working, and it's quite loud, and then he says: 'Can I ask a question?' And I was like 'Oh fuck'…you can tell they're all listening…and I go: 'You can but I might not answer it'. And he said: 'How did you decide who took whose surname?'…And I just remember…that being a really important lesson for me…that if this tricksy, mouthy kid can come up with such a wonderful question about something he doesn't know…when he could have asked anything…er…then I had to trust them more.

Other research argues that this informal and identity-based teaching is a powerful means of presenting LGBTQ sexualities to pupils; for example, Cullen (2009, p.32) comments:

> **…**micro-moments of interaction can start the process of thinking the unthinkable…within everyday classroom interaction, yet…such moments may be fleeting and are not as legible as whole-school anti-bullying workshop or an assembly on gay historical figures.

Additionally, Courtney (2014, p. 393) observes that "visibility constitutes a counter-discourse, which as Sedgwick (1990) suggests, whilst not commensurate to the dominant one, is not devoid of impact or value".

In making their lesbian identities known to pupils, George and Rowan were not so much acting in the interests of personal validation or gratification, rather they were making their lesbian identities available / visible to pupils, as those pupils fashioned their own (sexual) identities and responded to diverse sexualities in society. Thus, George and Rowan engaged with in acts of identity politics within the professional context. As a result of the changing politico-legal context *and* the nature of social relations within specific school sites, Rowan and George's

lesbian identities became teaching tools within their professional identities.

5.3   Homophobic bullying

As well as confusion about curriculum content, earlier research describes consternation amongst teachers about Section 28 and its implications for tackling homophobic bullying amongst pupils (for example Epstein 2000); that is, in challenging homophobia, teachers may be perceived as 'promoting homosexuality'. For example, Kate explains both the 'hit-and-miss' nature of challenging homophobia and its prevalence amongst pupils in the early 1990s:

> …homophobia was much more prevalent then…yeah, I mean that whole thing about calling people 'gay'…'gay this, gay that'…yeah…I challenged it, but I didn't challenge it as much as I should have done, looking back…I think it was just so common place, you know…everyone was doing it…I challenged it when I could be bothered…

In addition, as Kate was not out to her pupils at the time, perhaps she felt it was too dangerous to challenge homophobia amongst them. She may have felt that to do so would have risked increasing her visibility as a lesbian in a threatening environment: she was calibrating her visibility downwards to help secure a liveable professional life.

In contrast Alice describes discussing homophobic bullying with her primary aged class in 2015:

> Children in school had used the word 'gay' recently and they said: 'You can't use that word' and I said: 'No, you can use that word about someone who's in a gay relationship because you're using it in that sense because that's how he defines himself, that's who he is…but if you say to somebody (pulls a nasty face and makes a 'yuk' sound)…you can't use that because that's insulting…you can't use it in that offensive way but of course you can use that word…it is not a word that is bad per se…'

The children here demonstrate they are aware the word 'gay' may be used pejoratively. Unlike Kate's older pupils in the 1990s they acknowledge it is unacceptable to use 'gay' in an insulting manner. As their teacher, Alice appears confident in tackling potential homophobia amongst pupils.

George also demonstrates her confidence in tackling homophobia with primary aged children. However, she goes further than Alice in making explicit links to her own sexuality:

> …some children still use the word 'gay'…'GAY'…'SO GAY' (said as if an insult)…and…erm…I use my own personal experience a lot at school to try and teach children, so I say: 'Do you know how that affects me?'…and, you know, because I'm pretty lovely to children they tend to love me back…'I find that really hard that you say that, because you're using a group I'm part of in a bad way'…'Oh I don't mean it miss'…'No, I don't think you do, but that is about me…that is about me…'.

Thus, George again goes beyond coming out to pupils as she embeds herself within anti-homophobic teaching and discourse. She again integrates her sexual identity with her professional identity in the interests of her pupils. George's comments (noted earlier) illustrate that her confidence in 'turning up' her lesbian visibility stemmed from the repeal of Section 28 and from the introduction of equalities legislation in the first part of the 21st century.

On the other hand, Alice suggests that not all members of school staff are yet willing to tackle homophobia amongst pupils. She argues this should be addressed through policy development and staff training:

> …and you know people are using 'gay' in the playground and various other things…and some staff have said: 'Oh but they don't mean it in that way'…so I think we need to address that one……a lot of that doesn't just come from classrooms, it's got to come from Teaching Assistant training as well…you know, midday meals supervisors…and train them to say: 'It's not okay to say that..'

Lucy also perceives reluctance and inconsistency in dealing with homophobic abuse in secondary schools:

> The school never talks about situations like that…with tutors, you know, gay issues…that's from the grassroots that's from the children…that's absolutely from the students. No, I don't think the staff would find it easy to discuss that….

Rowan shares similar views to Alice and Lucy, emphasising the need to support staff to challenge homophobia through training:

> So…I think one of the biggest things as well…is, when teachers don't deal with things, you know, that language in the classroom about using 'gay' inappropriately and all that kind of stuff…it's nine times out of ten because they don't know how to respond to it… I guess…I guess there is a training issue there…it's making sure when you do that training around racist language, sexist language, you include homophobic language and all of that. If

people have the tools to deal with it, and the confidence to deal with it…they know what to say and it's been modelled for them…it's more likely to become part of the ethos, I think…

Alice concludes with a reminder that the development of anti-homophobic and inclusive schools is everybody's concern as she observes:

A   The incident I had at school recently was the child who was using homophobic…it was a homophobic incident in my class and it wasn't just calling someone gay it went beyond that…and the Head and the Deputy came to me and said: 'How do you think we should deal with this one?'…'Are you coming to me as the gay one…'cos I'm gay? Why are you coming to me? Is it because I'm a senior leader again…Why? Why me?' And I said: 'I've got no better way of dealing with this than you have'…I then said: 'I'd do this, I'd do that'…it was like they wanted…

K   Reassurance?

A   Yeah…yeah…it was like that…

K   Is there a policy?

A   I presume the anti-bullying policy must cover it…I don't know, actually…I'll check that one out…it's a good point…interesting, you'd think it would, wouldn't you…I'm going to make a note of that…I'm going to ask that question because it's not likely to be the first…nor the last…and I wanted to say: 'Don't assume I'm the expert on being gay…it's about not assuming we're going to be the expert on this because it's how we live our lives…Find out for yourselves before you think: 'Oh I'll pass that one to Alice'. You know, I'm not in a straight relationship but you expect me to teach sex education…I can do that because I'm a teacher…you, as a teacher, must be able to talk about these things…

Thus, in relation to responding to homophobic bullying in schools some participants are willing to tackle homophobia directly and clearly; sometimes they also deployed their own sexuality and lesbian visibility as a teaching tool. However, it would seem the confidence and commitment to challenge homophobia is inconsistent within and across schools. Thus, several participants argue the need for policy development and staff training to address this.

5.4   Children, young people and LGBTQ identities

The previous section illustrated that some participants feared or experienced homophobic abuse from their pupils during the 1990s and early 2000s. While Alice, George and Lucy demonstrated that

homophobia still exists in schools today, some participants discussed a shift in the thinking and behaviour of many young people and children in relation to LGBTQ sexualities. For example, Rowan contrasts her earlier experience of homophobic abuse with a recent experience of coming out to pupils:

> It was like 'my cousin's gay and my aunt and my whatever'…and it just became a conversation for about five minutes and it was gone…Yeah, so just a nothing, just a nonentity. And again, I take that as an incredibly positive lesson actually…that the generation growing up now is in a completely different culture from the one we grew up in…

Similarly, in a fleeting conversation with a pupil, Lucy (and her partner) received recognition and validation:

> And then I remember I had a really difficult student who'd been in Lyn's class and now was in mine…she'd never had any problems with him…but the school had painted him to be…you know…And first lesson, he stayed back 'cos I had to sign his report and he said: 'Are you Miss DP's girlfriend?' And I said: 'Yes, I am'…and I said: 'She taught you last year, didn't she?'…'Yeah, yeah…she was really good'…

The children in Alice and George's primary schools were also supportive of their teachers' lesbianism. For example, George describes the positive response to her civil partnership:

> …with the children, it was hilarious. I remember I was teaching Year 6 maths at the time. I remember my group being really cross with me and going: *'You didn't tell us…we should have been helping you sort it out'.* And I went: 'Hang on a minute…we've got maths to learn. We're not going to be sitting here working out what outfits to wear on my civil partnership day during maths lessons'.

Alice describes primary aged pupils celebrating the birth of her child:

> Then Henry came into school…as a baby…and the kids loved it, you know walking down the corridor…and it's 'Miss's baby…Miss's baby'…yeah, very nice.

Thus, within a changed politico-legal context and working within supportive schools where they enjoyed positive relationships with pupils, these participants felt recognised and validated as lesbian teachers.

Furthermore, in relation to their peers Kate describes the pupils in her current school:

> …here at this school there are just loads…there are just loads of girls…Year 8 upwards who are gay or bisexual…they hold hands

> with their girlfriends in the corridors, kissing them goodbye as they go into their lessons, it's a really accepted thing…

Lucy makes a similar observation about the pupils in her school:

> But…what was so remarkable to me was the students at the school…are openly gay…

Rowan also muses on the increased visibility of LGBTQ pupils in school. While she does not deny the possibility of homophobic bullying, Rowan perceives an increased acceptance of non-heterosexual young people:

> R   I've seen many gay kids in school, very 'out' children…boys…occasionally girls…holding hands…and that can be in rough schools as well.
>
> K   Do they get much hassle from their peers?
>
> R   I think…I think there has been…I think there's much more…much more public acceptance…so I've definitely seen kids comfortable…or being out…or playing with their sexuality…

Kate also describes a sense of normalcy and acceptance from younger people but this time within her own family:

> You know I think about my brother, his daughter has just gone into secondary school and the other one's about 6 or 7…erm…and he's always brought them up to call us Aunty Kate and Aunty Ali, so you know it's completely normal to them. Ali's two nieces and nephews…again we're both aunties to them, there's never been any hassle, you know, or…anything strange about the fact…never any feeling of discomfort, you know……with their friends…and they have quite a few gay friends as well…Ali's niece had her 21st birthday party up here a few months ago and had a big party up here and she had a number of gay friends, male and female. It does seem…you know…not to have as much…stigma as it used to…

However as discussed earlier in this chapter, these examples of acceptance do not imply that homophobic bullying or abuse no longer takes place amongst children and young people in schools. For example, despite her previous observation Kate continues:

> …there's a boy…he's left now…that I met up with after he'd left Year 11…who told me what an awful time he had…going to the toilets…he wouldn't go to the toilets at lunchtime because they'd just gang up on him in there…he'd wait for lessons and then ask if he could go…he said he had quite a difficult time…

Similarly, Alice describes managing an instance of homophobic bullying in the primary school:

> …So I said to this little boy: 'You know what, people can say what they like about you but it's what you think about yourself…you

> can think to yourself: 'You know what, you're missing out on so much being like that…you can say things behind my back but if you say it to my face, I've got enough people around me that it doesn't matter'. If you give it importance it will hurt you, but if you don't give it that importance…and then in circle time two weeks later he repeated it back…in the full circle…he said: 'Someone said this to me once'…and he looked straight at me…and I thought: 'Come on, come on little boy'…

Thus, Alice attempts to develop resilience in a child experiencing homophobic bullying (having also sanctioned the perpetrator). For each of these pupils Alice demonstrates her professional responsibility and commitment to offer interventions that support positive identity-making (Epstein and Johnson 2008).

Resilience is a theme that both Jenny and Maureen consider when they describe older pupils coming out in school. For example, Maureen says:

> This student was very big, bold and brave…I don't think she was bothered what other people thought…she had personality plus…

Similarly, Jenny describes one of her pupils:

> I don't worry overly too much about Jess…she's a forthright girl…no one's going to mess with her…

This was reminiscent of Epstein and Johnson's work (1998, p. 167) where a pupil's "macho appearance and, at times, behaviour…[was] a protection against being victimized for his gay sexuality". It is impossible to be sure but perhaps the students described by Maureen and Jenny took a 'muscular' approach to visibility as protection against bullying.

In describing how school leaders (mis)managed this particular pupil's attempts to come out Jenny explained how she felt anxious as an observer of the process. Despite the repeal of Section 28 and introduction of equalities legislation, Jenny continued to 'cover' her lesbian identity in school. Perhaps her particular school was less supportive of LGBTQ students and staff than the schools described by other participants. It is also possible that Jenny felt intimidated by her pupils' visibility, especially since it was counter to her own attempts at invisibility. For example, Wells (2017, p. 267) quoting Harbeck (1997) argues that visibility amongst LGBTQ students can threaten the invisibility of their LGBTQ teachers:

> Sexual and gender minority youth who "are coming out of the closet at a significant rate [are thus] forcing adults to come to terms with their visibility and existence. Ironically, but not

surprisingly, many GLBT educators are fearful of these public GLBT youth".

Furthermore, as if to reinforce the validity of her own nervousness, Jenny recounted 'tales of nervousness' in other lesbian teachers confronted by LGBTQ pupils and their parents. For example, Jenny describes two lesbian colleagues meeting with parents of pupils who were exploring their lesbian sexuality:

> J   …and it's two gay women sat in front of these parents who are absolutely appalled…that their children are gay…
>
> K   Mm, yes…how did they handle it?
>
> J   I think they…I think they got another Head of Year in…
>
> K   Were they obviously gay then?
>
> J   No, I don't think anyone realised…it was more the panic in them that anyone would think they would…erm…that, somehow, they might have influenced it…or teaching things that weren't morally correct…

Thus, visible lesbian pupils can feel dangerous to the lesbian teachers (and other school staff) who seek to keep their sexuality hidden.

Finally, Alice observes that schools should go beyond supporting pupils who are exploring their sexuality and also develop wide-ranging and consistent support for those questioning their gender:

> …and at the moment the conversation's all about transgender…and how are we going to be addressing that because there are going to be children within the school, and there are children in the infant school who are already showing…identifying these needs in terms of their…erm…in terms of their gender identity and how do we support those children because we'll have children as young as 7…9…11, and you know,…it's not just about that child, it's about everyone around them.

Thus, it may be argued that children and young people can be influential in recognising and validating LGBTQ identities in schools. However, this statement does not reflect a naïve belief that homophobia and homophobic bullying are things of the past: recognition of different sexualities may still generate rejection and physical and psychological violence.

5.5   Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that many lesbian teachers were fearful of being identified as lesbian before and during the Section 28 years. They feared prejudice and dismissal. Therefore, most participants denied or camouflaged their lesbianism: again, a feature consistent with other research.

Thus, my participants confirmed that Section 28 acted as a panoptic schema of surveillance (Edwards et al. 2014) and generated a "coerced form of…*invisibilisation"* (Edwards et al. 2014, p. 2) even beyond the boundaries of the school. Therefore, the institutionalised homophobia inherent in Section 28 interrupted the potential to generate a liveable professional life as visible lesbian teachers.

However not all participants camouflaged their lesbianism during the Section 28 era; for example, George's construction of herself as a butch lesbian led her to believe that invisibility was beyond her. Thus, she was explicit about her lesbian identity with colleagues even from the start of her career (although not with pupils or their parents). Therefore, to achieve a liveable professional life during the Section 28 years George risked heightened visibility. In response, colleagues ameliorated the risk by recognising her lesbian identity and affirming her visibility.

After the repeal of Section 28 and introduction of equalities legislation, participants tended to feel greater legal recognition and protection of their sexuality and allowed their lesbian identities to be more visible: restriction on the generation of a liveable professional life was no longer enshrined in legislation.

However not all participants felt more able to declare their lesbian identity despite the introduction of equalities legislation. For both Jenny and Maureen, the combination of school culture, social relations and their own psychological conditions led them to suppress the performance of their lesbian identities. Thus, despite a changed and more permissive legal context they still struggled to generate liveable professional lives as visible lesbians in the school workplace.

I suggest therefore, that there may be a lack of linearity between legislation, lesbian visibility and the generation of a liveable professional life. Section 28 was oppressive and intrinsically determined to disrupt the

generation of a liveable professional life for lesbian and gay teachers. Consequently, visibility tended to be degraded. On the other hand, more recent equalities legislation offered recognition and protection so increasing the possibility of being visible and achieving liveable professional lives. However, the local context of the school, social relations and psychological conditions of individual women combine with the effects of legislation. These influences may ameliorate oppressive legislation or disrupt protective legislation.

In addition, by understanding 'identity' to occur at intersections, I have demonstrated something of the relationship between the participants' identities as teachers and their identities as lesbians. After the repeal of Section 28 and with the introduction of equalities legislation, some participants integrated their lesbian identities into their professional identities and practice. They allowed their lesbian identity to be known and available to pupils. In some instances, this was to address homophobic bullying; in other cases, it was to support pupils as they fashioned their own (sexual) identities and responded to the diverse sexualities in society. In turn many participants received recognition and validation from their pupils.

I have already begun to examine the influence of place, school culture, social relations and psychological conditions on the visibility of lesbians in school. I shall develop this theme further in the next chapter (Chapter Six).

6   Chapter Six: Other influences on participant visibility

This chapter considers influences (other than the political and legal) that have had an impact on the participants' visibility as lesbians throughout their careers as teachers. Some of these factors relate to the participants' own attitudes, beliefs and affect; for example, as their careers progressed, some participants became determined to act as lesbian role models for their pupils. Other influences relate to the context in which participants worked; for example, a specific geographic locality or the culture and practices of a particular school. Finally, the chapter illustrates how social relations influenced participant visibility.

Analysis of the interview transcripts suggests that career phase has intersected with other influences to shape the participants' visibility as lesbians in schools. In the first instance participants discussed how they managed their lesbian identity at University and / or while training as a teacher. In the next phase of their careers, participants started working as teachers and adopted initial strategies to visibility management and self-presentation in the professional context. In the third career phase all participants had moved school, often several times and often adapting their identity management strategies. During this phase some participants had assumed leadership roles, with Wendy and George becoming Headteachers.

As the participants described their careers in these distinct phases, I shall use career stage to structure the chapter. Therefore, Section One considers influences on visibility during training, while Section Two considers the middle and later phases of the participants' careers. However, throughout the analysis I shall demonstrate the confluence of career phase and other influences and their impact on visibility. Specifically, Section 6.2.1 examines the influence of increased personal and professional confidence on being more willing to be visible in school. Section 6.2.2 discusses geographic location and the impact of school culture. Section 6.2.3 illustrates the significance of social relations; while Sections 6.2.4 and 6.2.5 demonstrate the importance of beliefs and attitudes, both of individual lesbians and of the people around them. Finally, 6.2.6 exemplifies how broader social change may influence lesbian visibility in the school workplace.

6.1 Teacher training and first teaching jobs

To whatever extent their lesbian identity was established internally during adolescence or early adulthood, during teacher training most participants sought to hide their lesbianism from their peers, teachers and lecturers. They feared negative responses and a detrimental impact on their career: this was the case whether they trained before or during the context of Section 28.

Chapter Five illustrated how participants' fears influenced their strategies for managing self-disclosure and, consequently, their visibility as lesbians working in schools. For example, describing teacher training in the 1970s Angela observes of being a lesbian:

> It really felt like a witch hunt…and, yeah, you just didn't admit to it…

Training in the 1990s, when Section 28 was statutory, the theme of fear and hiding continued. For example, Alice comments of her relationship:

> I don't think we told anyone for ages, actually…even that close group of friends we were living in a house with…I think now that was about fear.

Rowan and her partner also kept their relationship hidden while in training. Specifically, Rowan feared they might have to leave the course if their relationship was discovered:

> I don't think there was a formal chucking off the course…but it felt…like…we would both have to leave if we were found out, but I didn't really know why…I know we were hiding because we thought it would be a problem if we didn't…like it would mess things up somehow…

However other factors added to the determination to keep lesbian sexuality invisible while training as teachers. For example, Rowan comments on a lack of lesbian role models in schools:

> Maybe it was simply to do with role models…I'd never seen a gay teacher…I know that's why we were hiding…in our heads we had to be invisible. In reality… the only thing I can put that down to was that we didn't see anyone else…in terms of work and school…it was very clear in my head that no one should know.

A lack of role models was also important for Lucy, as the idea of living as a lesbian was beyond both her comprehension and experience in her early life and at the beginning of her career:

> I knew I was gay but just assumed I'd get married and have children…I just didn't know anyone who was gay…I didn't really know that was possible.

The need for 'lesbian' to be available and understood is reflected in Wilton's (1995, p. 40) observation that "once the social role – the label – is available, it enables individuals to make meaning out of their experiences for themselves and others, meanings which were not possible before". Indeed, during teacher training the intersection of 'teacher' and 'lesbian' was not available to Rowan; furthermore, for Lucy, 'lesbian' was not available at all and she could only make the assumption of living a heteronormative life.

As a trainee teacher Jenny also wished to hide her lesbianism; specifically, she feared negative stereotyping should she be visible. Jenny returned to this fear of being stereotyped and the subject of gossip throughout her research interview. Endo et al. (2010, p. 1027) describe this as the fear

> …of being judged and teased, as well as being the subject of gossip and the recipient of discrimination by people such as their students and colleagues, due to the fact they diverge from gender stereotypes.

As a consequence of their fear of discrimination and rejection during teacher training (often fuelled by the legislative and societal context) many of the participants deployed passing and covering strategies in an attempt to mask their lesbian identity.

In contrast George felt unable to camouflage her sexuality, even as a trainee teacher. She suggested that, even without overtly coming out, her sexuality was assumed because of her masculinised performance of lesbian. This concerned George as she looked ahead to a teaching career in the U.K. in the 1990s. She comments:

> I'm not very good at not being out, I think I look like a gay person…people always assumed, even if they don't say anything they're still assuming…[but] from the very start I was thinking: 'This is going to be difficult to fit into'.

As a result of her beliefs and feelings about the essential nature of her butch lesbian identity, George felt invisibility was beyond her. Since this might be problematic in the discriminatory 1990s George would have to find alternative methods of managing her lesbian visibility as she moved into her first teaching post.

As they moved from training into first teaching posts, many participants continued to fear being known as lesbians. The same was true for Lucy when she moved to her second teaching post and identified as lesbian in the 1990s; and also, for Maureen when she came out during her second post in the mid-1980s.

When they started teaching in the 1970s Wendy and Angela continued to use the identity management strategy adopted during teacher training: that is, they sought to 'pass' (Griffin 1991) as heterosexual. For example, Wendy observes:

> I carried over a relationship with a chap I'd started seeing when I was 17 or so…he spent a lot of time out of the country…so it wasn't a continuous, close, regular thing…

Starting teaching around twenty years later Rowan initially managed her sexual identity in school by 'covering' (Griffin 1991). Covering is "attempting to hide their lesbian identity" and strategies include "the use of non-gendered language…" (Sparkes 1994, p. 99). For example, Rowan describes her request for carer's leave:

> …I didn't actually say 'she'…and I never lied actually…but I made it…I omitted the gender.

As demonstrated in Chapter Five Alice, George and Kate initially deployed 'differentiated strategies' to manage and calibrate their lesbian identity and visibility in school. They came out to colleagues at the start of their careers, while covering to pupils and their parents. This was despite Section 28 being statutory and is atypical in relation to other research. For example, Edwards et al. (2014, p.8) citing Nixon and Givens (2007) observe that "a common theme…was the assumption that coming out and being out at school were unwise, particularly at the beginning of a teaching career".

I have already suggested that a supportive network of social relations with colleagues enabled George and Alice to partially declare their lesbianism and so ameliorate some of the psychological distress generated by the oppression embodied in Section 28. Despite the external context, having recognition and validation from colleagues was helpful in generating a liveable professional life for Alice and George. The same was true for Kate:

> …I'd been with my partner for several years and I just felt very comfortable with it…I was offered a job there…and, immediately I

> said I was gay and it wasn't an issue. I can't think of any other gay people who were teaching there at the time…no, well there was one, a man. So, it was never an issue, not amongst staff.

However, George and Alice also highlight the influence of beliefs, attitudes and feelings on their performance of lesbian and consequently their visibility; as Alice explains:

> When people asked me, I was very clear I had a relationship with a woman…to all the teaching staff. I was very open…I wasn't going 'here's my banner' or anything I just wasn't hiding on that level.

Such factors were also significant for George because of her perceived inability to mask her lesbian identity:

> …it was fine being out in the staffroom because I don't think I could possibly not be, really...

Consequently, George determined to excel as a teacher to compensate for her visibility and to help achieve a 'liveable' (lesbian) professional life:

> I suppose my career has been plagued by my fatal flaw …plagued in the sense that I had to prove myself much more because I was a lesbian. Yes, I've definitely felt that's been the case, from my first ever teaching job. I look like a bloke…I *am* a lesbian… I'm really going to have to prove I can teach well.

Adopting this 'super-teacher' strategy is evident elsewhere in the research literature. For example, Ferfolja (2009) speaks of lesbian teachers 'throwing all their energies' into teaching and school life to ensure that they are perceived as effective teachers to "deflect interest in their sexuality" (p. 385).

In the next section I examine influences on visibility as participants moved into the middle and later phases of their teaching careers. Again, I demonstrate an inter-relationship between career phase and other factors and their combined impact on lesbian visibility.

6.2   Middle and later teaching career

As participants became more experienced teachers, often moving schools and roles, many altered their approaches to managing their lesbian identity and visibility in school. The key influences of context, place, school culture, social relationships and the psychological / affective shifted, merging and melding in different ways. Hence individual constructs of 'lesbian' and 'lesbian-teacher' altered over time and 'lesbian

visibility' was 'toned up', 'toned down' or fashioned differently in relation to these influences.

I shall now consider these shifting influences in combination with middle and later career phase.

6.2.1   Increased personal / professional confidence

Increased personal confidence, sometimes in their lesbian identity and sometimes in their professional identity, led several participants to be more visible as lesbians in school. For example, Jenny described how, as she developed friendships with members of staff, she was more willing to be explicitly out with those people. By the time Rowan left her first school she had also come out to some colleagues but not to others.

Nixon and Givens (2007, p. 462) observe a similar strategy in a participant noting that "she had spoken to individuals slowly over the course of her first year in the school, judging their potential reactions…".

Alice summarises the impact of her growing personal and professional confidence on her visibility in school:

> …and I think as I've got older and the experience thing…you give more of yourself, don't you? The more confident you feel, the more experience you've got…you relate more of it to my family, my kids, my rabbits…you just relax into it…so I'm more open now.

Alice's comments also illustrate that as a parent she may share more cultural capital with her heterosexual peers, enabling her to be more visible in the workplace (this is in keeping with Rudoe's study 2010).

6.2.2   Place / school culture: moving locality or school

This chapter demonstrates the influence of combined, or intersecting, factors on lesbian visibility in the school workplace. For example, the influence of geographic location or school culture may interact with enhanced personal confidence *and* changes in society so that individual lesbians are more likely to perform their lesbianism in a way that enhances their visibility.

Indeed, several participants discussed the influence of locality and / or the nature of a specific school. As Ferfolja and Hopkins (2013, p. 315) argue:

> The experience of each participant was largely dependent…on the 'micro-culture' of the school in which they were employed…How the school positioned, managed, constructed, recognised or celebrated socio-cultural differences (or not) influenced the site-based climate that affected the teachers' experiences. These micro-cultures intersected in complex ways with those systemic issues surrounding schooling policies and local community cultures.

Three of the women in this study lived and worked in Brighton during the middle part of their careers, noting it as significant in relation to their freedom and confidence to be known as lesbian in school. Brighton has a large LGBTQ population and teaching there may have been comparable to Blinick's (1994) permissive experience of teaching in San Francisco[6]. Indeed, George comments:

> …but it's a very straight world really and I think I forget that in the Brighton bubble…

Lucy also noted the importance of locality, expressing relief that she taught in London during the Section 28 years: she was comforted by, and felt greater security because of, the more liberal attitudes she encountered there. Conversely Jenny experienced a move out of London as a negative influence that inhibited her willingness to be visible as a lesbian teacher:

> …in London things are just more cosmopolitan…the people you work with have…you know, broader horizons…about things…and then coming here…I didn't think it would be so narrow…In London I didn't have to come out, but I didn't have to hide…

Alice's increased professional confidence, combined with a move to teach in Brighton, made her feel more able to come out to a group of pupil parents despite Section 28 still being statutory. This contrasted with her initial fear of her lesbianism being known by pupil parents:

> I was in an infant class and parents were coming in and helping. One of them was chatting to me and said: 'Come with us to the pub for a drink and bring your partner along'. So, that let some of it out…it wasn't anything negative.

---

[6] San Francisco is an American city famed for its large LGBTQ community. Blinick argues that working there helped her feel more confident in being out in school.

Rowan, Lucy and Alice all described how their self-confidence was boosted on finding themselves working in schools with other gay or lesbian colleagues (in London and Brighton). Perhaps working with other lesbian and gay teachers offered 'safety in numbers', decreased the sense of isolation and increased confidence in being visible. As Lucy comments:

> And we used to joke about…we set up a staff association for parties and socials…and well lots of things, not just that…we were the gay mafia that got things done…it was good…we ran the bar on a couple of nights…and we got the staffroom decorated…we got the Head to give us a load of money…and we pulled, 'cos it was a very big and diverse staff there, we just pulled together…it was a great thing, it was lovely…

Rowan describes a similar experience, although she laments that, in her opinion, lesbians have only been visible in school much more recently:

> …there were a couple of gay men on the staff…and that was nice…we kind of clubbed together a bit…it was like 'oh other gayers...how exciting'...and for me that was a real kind of novelty...but, yeah…they were all men…er… to me gay women at work have only become visible in the last few years….

Rowan goes on to consider her response to a recent visit to a school for a job interview. She reflects on how schools seek to communicate their values and culture which, in turn, influenced her confidence in accepting the job:

> R   …the school I was recently in had posters in all the classrooms…erm… I don't know…various people…the rugby players, the actresses…Like…I've got a wife, get over it…I remember seeing those when I first walked round and thinking: 'Oh that's really good'… walking in that school and seeing those posters it was really important for me…And thinking: 'Wow they've clearly done some work on this'…even that visibility…all those little things add up…
>
> K   So how did it feel walking into that school and seeing those posters?
>
> R   Really, really chuffed they were there and just 'well if those posters are up, at some point these people have done some work on this and it's safe'…

Although many of the participants have overtly declared their lesbian identity as their careers have progressed, each move to a new organisation has required them to re-negotiate approaches to the performance of lesbian identity and to re-consider decisions about visibility. For example, when Alice joined her current school, she felt the

long-established staff members were unwelcoming and potentially homophobic. Alice describes thinking to herself:

> I'm not going to let you *not* talk about my family…I'm not *not* going to talk about Jude.

Consequently, she came out to colleagues. However, Alice has yet to come out explicitly to pupil parents and pupils in this school, reversing the strategy adopted in her previous school:

> It will happen at *some* point…and there have been times when I've talked about going somewhere and I haven't said 'with my wife'. I don't want to just throw that one in. I want it to come out of a conversation, rather than just throwing it in.

For Jenny and Maureen moving schools inhibited or reduced the degree to which they were willing to be visible as lesbians. Jenny describes herself as "even more in the closet now and Nikki (her partner) is Nick". A complex interaction of factors informs her current identity management strategy: the culture of the specific school, her beliefs and social relations with colleagues. In part she does not want to be perceived as a campaigning lesbian:

> …it's not my battle…I don't want to wear badges…you know, I don't need to wear coloured necklaces or anything anymore.

In addition, she wants to remove the 'power' of others to discuss her sexuality:

> …and so, I just play a game with them…one of them said: 'How's your partner coping with the train strikes…is she…is he delayed?'…and I deliberately looked at her and said: 'He's having no problems' because I thought: 'I'm not going to give you the satisfaction'…because I've watched them gossip about other members of staff…

Finally, Jenny wants to resist her colleagues' stereotyping:

> I'm not going to let them think what they want to think about me…I'm going to confuse them…but I do, this sounds awful, but I do quite enjoy this invented husband…sometimes just watching the confusion…

For Ferfolja (2009, p. 391) in the 'game' Jenny plays with colleagues, she possesses and deploys the "power to subvert, challenge and resist the dominant heterosexist culture that often seems all too pervasive".

6.2.3 Social relations: people in the school

As I have already suggested supportive relationships within the school can have a positive impact on the experience and confidence of lesbians to declare their lesbian identity. Positive social relations can acknowledge and affirm lesbian visibility; they can also challenge instances of homophobia.

When George left her first school to take up a Deputy Headship she was explicitly out to colleagues, pupil parents and pupils. Even so, she appreciated instances of acknowledgement and support. For example, she recalls a letter written to her by a parent governor as she left the school:

> He wrote me a really lovely letter saying: 'I really appreciate how open and out you've been. I think it's really good for my daughter to have such a positive lesbian role model'.

On another occasion the affirmation was more public. George's new school had the tradition of celebrating staff marriages and births in the school newsletter and she recalls how powerful she found the Headteacher's decision to celebrate her civil partnership publicly:

> …and the previous Head had always put weddings in the newsletter…and I *knew* she would never put my civil partnership in…and I remember saying to Caroline: 'Look…there's a bit of a history, but I warn you now, if and when I have a civil partnership I will expect…if you want to set yourself a precedent make the decision now…'(laughs) and I said it in a lovely way, you know…and *good on her,* she put it in there. And Caroline did for me in that sense, in that community, more than anything else, ever. What it did, it said: 'It's okay to talk about it'. If we can put it in the newsletter, it must be okay to talk about it to children.

Later in the research interview George re-iterated the significance of that Headteacher's actions as she described a discussion with an Ofsted Inspector:

> And we had Ofsted and, erm, three years ago…yeah three years ago…and the inspector was a wonderful woman…and it was probably the first official acknowledgement and support I'd had for my outness at school. It was really wonderful. What happened is, of course, they have to interview you about so many things…and I had an interview about homophobia…homophobic bullying…and: 'Here's the policy and here's this…and now can I just talk normally about it?'…and she went: 'Oh yeah' and I went: 'Can I tell you what the reality is?'…I said: 'The biggest step that's made a difference to homophobia is the credence from the previous Head for my outness…amongst parents…and amongst children…and the fact that I will talk about my partner and my

> family…quite openly…in fact, I make sure I put it into assemblies'…and she was really positive…and said: 'It's really wonderful that you're able to do that'…yeah…it made me feel really good about it…I'd never thought it was a particularly brilliant thing…she said: 'I think it's fantastic that you're willing to do that…that you're strong enough to do that'.

George's comments reflect the findings of Edwards et al. (20014, p. 15) that since the repeal of Section 28 and the introduction of equalities legislation, "heterosexual teachers, such as the supportive managers…are playing an important role in beginning to disrupt heteronormativity".

Alice also experienced quiet validation as a lesbian teacher from her Headteacher:

> A   …and I'm sure perhaps the Head had to deal with things, but it never got fed back to us as well…she was very good at 'this is who I am, this is who my staff are'…very. I think all of them have been very proud…oh I'm going to go again… (starts to cry) …of all their staff…and it was just…it was amazing…

> K   Yes

> A   …it really was (really crying now) … (takes a few moments to recover) …I'm sorry I've always been emotional…

> K   It's fine…we've been talking about all these things; it's bound to be emotional.

Both George and Alice spoke with feeling about the importance of their Headteachers' recognition, validation and willingness to protect them from any potential homophobia. Indeed, Alice's emotion overcame her as shown in the quote above.

Furthermore, validation and support are most effective when coming not just from the Headteacher but from other senior and middle leaders. For example, Alice describes how the Deputy Headteacher in her current school encouraged a visit from her partner and child while on a residential school journey:

> A   …and we're going on a residential trip…in Brighton Jude used to bring Henry out and watch me climb up ridiculously high things and Henry screaming, going: 'Mummy, mummy'…and the Deputy said: 'You could go home and see Henry or Henry could come out and see you'…and I said: 'You know that's going to involve Jude coming over'…and he said: 'Well, that's going to happen at some point'…

> K   So…supportive then?

> A   Very supportive…

George observes how other members of staff were also significant in lending their informal support:

> …I was very proud of our secretary…years ago…you remember that sticker 'some people are gay, get over it'…she stuck it on her computer in the school office…brilliant…because if parents would come…if visitors would come into the office…it's like 'there you go'.

However, colleagues can also inhibit or repress the freedom and confidence to declare a lesbian identity as Jenny explains:

> …erm… I remember being sat in the staffroom one day…so this is where I am now…and the Head of Art talking to someone who'd just got divorced and was going back to her maiden name…and he said: 'Well what are you Ms or Miss?'…and she said: 'I'm Ms'…and he said: 'Oh God, folk will think you're a lesbian'…and I remember…I just thought: 'This is an art teacher…who dresses a bit differently, deliberately to wind up the Headmaster…er…and…he's just said that'…and…I thought: 'If that had happened in the Civil Service and someone had said that I would have spoken out'…and yet I didn't feel I could speak out and…'cos I don't want to draw attention to me…

As well as colleagues offering, or not, recognition and validation, pupils and their parents can be influential. For example, George describes the response from pupil parents and children to the announcement of her civil partnership:

> Do you know…the most *lovely* response from loads of parents…bottles and bottles of wine and pictures, yeah, lovely…really positive stuff…with the children, it was hilarious. I remember I was teaching Year 6 maths at the time. I remember my group being really cross with me and going: *'You didn't tell us… we should have been helping you sort it out'.*

Thus, pupils and their parents expressed support and validation for George's lesbian identity and visibility in the school workplace. However not everyone within the wider school community acknowledged and validated George's civil partnership:

> …the vicar at the time, her lack of saying anything said everything to me…yeah, silence can be as strong as saying things, can't it?

This lack of overt recognition and validation from the vicar, who was also a Governor in the school, was hurtful to George as an individual. However, it also hints at the possible prejudice and discrimination faced by visible LGBTQ people currently working in some faith schools.

6.2.4   Personal conviction

Blinick (1994) argued that lesbian teachers should come out in school to offer positive role models to their pupils. More recently Courtney (2014) confirms that visible lesbian or gay school leaders often wish to act as positive role models and challenge homophobia. After the repeal of Section 28 and the introduction of equalities legislation, some participants in this study aspired to come out to pupils and their parents and to use their lesbian visibility as a 'force for good'. On the other hand, others did not feel comfortable with prospect of being lesbian role models. However, all participants faced some degree of inner struggle and nervousness in deciding if, how and when they should come out to pupils and pupil parents.

For example, Kate was fearful of being out in the early part of her career (during the Section 28 years) due to the perceived risk of homophobia from pupils. As her career progressed and Kate moved schools, she became more overt about her lesbianism. However, this greater openness and visibility did not come without a struggle. In the next quote Kate describes her inner tussle between wanting to preserve her privacy while presenting a positive role model to pupils and their parents:

> It's hard, isn't it, because your sexuality is private…and I don't want to be a poster girl for, you know, being gay but I do, I do think it's important to be out at school. I wish I'd done it in my old school. I think it's important for kids to have members of staff who they know are there. I think it's important for parents as well to have teachers who are there and who are not paedophiles…in their heads.

In the middle part of her career Rowan still resisted coming out to pupils because of her beliefs about the developmental needs of pupils and the nature of professional identity:

> I wasn't out to the kids to begin with…I *utterly believed* that no-one should be out to kids…like straight or gay…and I felt…they have enough to deal with, especially in secondary school… in puberty and all that kind of stuff…they don't need to hear from *anyone* about their sexuality.

However, as her career progressed Rowan encountered a school-based project working with LGBTQ young people experiencing homophobic bullying. As a result of this experience Rowan changed her mind about being out to pupils:

> I think I have a responsibility to be out in education where I can. I have a responsibility to be out…not that I've always done it and I

> only came out to the kids in school on the last day…I didn't feel comfortable…so it still does take a bit of courage, I suppose.

Thus, Rowan altered her view of the professional responsibility to support pupils in self-fashioning their identities. As illustrated with Alice and George earlier in this thesis, Rowan allowed her lesbian identity to be highlighted within her professional identity and practice in order to support pupils.

As she looks back on her career, Lucy describes her 'shame' at not coming out earlier:

> I feel ashamed, you know, of not telling more students…simply because it's normal and it would've been nice for them to hear it in a normal way.

However, Lucy goes on to describe how she also integrated her lesbian and professional identities in the support of a pupil and his parent:

> L …I did tell one parent…a parent of a profoundly autistic child, and she herself was gay, erm…and she was very angry at the school, she thought the school was against her, and she'd taken the school to tribunal and I'd been put in to do the reconciliation…so I shared quite a few things with her and I said: 'Truly, there is no-one here who's not like you, and with you and in your corner…'. So, yes, she was probably the only parent I ever told…
>
> K And was that positively received in that context?
>
> L It was… it really was…I was very touched by that…she was still angry at the school, but I think she saw it differently…she and her partner…and, erm…yes, it was, it really was.

Thus, personal conviction about their individual responsibility to act as positive lesbian role models to pupils and pupil parents has influenced some participants' willingness to be out and visible in school. However, this has taken courage and determination. As Gray (2013, p. 704) observes "heterosexuality is, then, a normalised and uncomplicated part of the world of school, whereas LGB sexualities require some further explanation if teachers choose to be open".

6.2.5 Social relations: other people's beliefs and behaviours

As I illustrated in Chapter Two the performance and visibility of 'lesbian' is relational and contextual. In this section I shall demonstrate how the lesbian visibility of some participants was 'turned up' by the words,

actions and beliefs of others. In some instances, participants consented or collaborated with this, on other occasions they did not.

As I have already demonstrated, George's visibility increased because of deliberate and constructive sharing of information about her civil partnership across the school community. However, in her third job, Alice found that personal information 'leaked' across the school and enhanced her visibility as a lesbian: this was without her explicit consent.

Alice had formed a relationship with a colleague (Jude) and they were explicitly out with colleagues. When Jude became pregnant with their child, Alice was surprised to discover that pupil parents knew they were a couple. She comments:

> I was thinking: 'No-body knows about us…we've been really secretive'; well, not secretive but we weren't going 'we're together, look at us'.

Alice continues to reflect how parents in the school might have discovered that she and Jude were together:

> I don't know… (half laughs, sounds perplexed) …I think people knew, probably, that we were lesbians…they knew that already because somebody had said something. Lots of the children of our Teaching Assistants went to the school.

Thus, Alice and her partner were explicit about their relationship to colleagues but, because some members of staff were also parents, information 'leaked' and increased her visibility across different groups within the school.

Furthermore, Alice goes on to describe how she realised the extent to which their relationship was known within the school. She and Jude were job-sharing after the birth of their child when Alice heard one of her pupils showing a prospective job candidate around the school:

> …and this is my classroom…Miss Williams and Miss Andrews, and they're a lesbian couple and they've got a baby…and nobody minds at all…the next class down here…

I have previously described how some participants deployed differentiated identity management strategies across the social groups within a school (colleagues, pupils, pupil parents and the like). However, the 'leakage' of information illustrated here suggests that those social groups are not distinct and have porous boundaries. As a consequence,

Alice's lesbian identity became known more widely and increased her visibility amongst pupils and pupil parents.

It is not possible to determine whether information flowed from pupil parents to pupils, vice versa or in both directions. However, this example illustrates Edwards et al.'s (2014) assertion that once anything is known, or believed, about a teacher's (homo)sexuality within the school organisation it becomes de facto public.

Kate, on the other hand, was 'outed' to pupils by a colleague. Pupils then asked her directly if she had a female partner:

> I was really quite shocked when I first came here…because it made me…when kids went into: 'Oh miss are you married?'…I just went into: 'Shut up, it's none of your business' 'cos you don't want to say 'yes' or 'no' to that. And after a while I thought: 'Bloody hell, why am I being so reticent about this? Obviously, it's not a problem for the kids'. So, when a pupil asked: 'Is that your partner?' I just said: 'Yes' and they said: 'Okay then'.

Kate went on to discuss how she felt about being outed without her consent:

> A bit relieved to be honest…because I thought: 'Why am I denying this, it's a bit foolish…why have we waited so long... because we were completely accepted by the staff. So, yeah, I was a little bit relieved because I didn't have to think about it. I didn't have to out myself and, as I say, the kids have been very accepting…they don't talk about it. I have more kids coming to talk to me about being black or non-white, than about being gay.

Although Kate describes herself as being a 'bit relieved' to be outed by someone else, others may have felt differently. Involuntary and enhanced visibility could be anathema to some lesbians in the school workplace. In contrast to the "coerced form of…*invisibilisation"* (Edwards et al. 2014, p. 2) generated by Section 28, it could be argued that removing the power of the individual to declare her lesbian identity and calibrate her visibility is a 'coerced form of visibilisation'. Furthermore, it could be argued that 'coerced visibilisation' is a form of neo-oppression of lesbians in the school workplace in the U.K.

Finally, several participants discussed how their sexuality became more visible because other people made assumptions or 'read' certain behaviours as indicators of a lesbian identity. This was consistent with Hardie's work (2012); for example, Jenny, Maureen and Rowan all

experienced students making assumptions that they were lesbian. Jenny observes:

> I remember once a note being passed between kids in the class and taking it from them…and not opening it until after they'd gone, and it was something like 'she's an old lesbian' or something…

This further illustrates that lesbian visibility is relational: a lesbian cannot be visible if she is not recognised. However, she may be recognised, and therefore visible, without deliberate action on her part. This may disrupt her ability to calibrate her visibility as she wishes and so, disturb the process of generating a liveable professional life.

6.2.6   Social context: greater visibility in popular culture

A final theme that emerged when discussing additional influences on the visibility of lesbians in schools was the role of popular culture. Chapter Two discussed how the press and other news media supported the New Right in vilifying and oppressing lesbian and gay teachers in the 1980s and 1990s (for example Epstein 1994; Epstein and Johnson 1989; Squirrell 1989; Greenland and Nunney 2008). However, several participants in this study spoke about the impact of television, music and popular culture on lesbian visibility.

In Chapter Four Wendy discussed visibility and its relationship to wider representation in society, while George lamented the tokenistic nature of popular representation. Several other participants also highlighted the normalising and permissive influence of increased representation of LGBTQ sexualities in popular culture; for example, Rowan explains:

> I think gay characters on soap operas was MASSIVE…in terms of personal politics…it was a bit…if your granny is watching a lesbian kiss on Brookside…actually, that was way before that, wasn't it…that was the beginning of it…wasn't it…not that I had a granny…but do you know I mean? It entered popular culture like that……it began to be normalised…

Kate agrees with Rowan's emphasis on normalisation:

> And of course, exposure in the media, that's going to have a knock-on effect to how people regard you and how people see themselves…'orange is the new black', we weren't aware of that when it came out five years ago and I binge watched it last summer. And, you know, kids used to talk about that…that's a very normalising thing, isn't it? A very normalising thing…

Later in the research interview Rowan returned to the theme of
normalisation, explaining her belief that representation is becoming less
tokenistic:

> R   And, you know, the gay presence in popular culture now is
> remarkable…we were watching 'Marcella'…and in
> 'Marcella' there's that wonderful-looking dyke…er…but
> just as another detective…it's not…it's nothing about her
> being queer…it's not anything about the programme…It's
> becoming more normal.
>
> K   She's just got a presence as a character…
>
> R   Yeah…she's just there…she's a bit of eye-candy for the
> rest of us…you know what I mean…it's not…maybe a
> story will occur but if it does I think it will occur because it's
> about her character…other than, we'll put a gay woman
> on there because there's a gay storyline…it's becoming so
> normalised that…kids…and pop music…and how many
> boy band members come out as queer…you
> know……that it's just becoming normal.

Greater visibility in popular culture enabled Wendy to realise she was not
alone as a lesbian and gave her greater permission to explore her
lesbian identity:

> I'd see on television…I'm just trying to think…oh, I can't think, but
> you know…people had come out, some of the actors…Hollywood
> and this, that and the other…and I can't remember at the moment
> the films I may have seen but there started to be more
> exposure… the L word…erm… Diva magazine…erm…you
> started to see men and women being more open and natural in
> public…and I started to realise I wasn't the only one and…you
> know gay people started to have a higher profile…

Finally, both Maureen and Alice discuss how they perceive increased
visibility in popular culture as permissive; for example, Alice comments:

> You know children nowadays can see gay characters on
> television, they can see trans characters, you've also got books,
> politicians…you could never imagine…that's unbelievable that
> you've got people just out about saying: 'This is who I am, this is
> what I am and I'm not going to hide away'… and I think
> that's…that sense of celebration has given people the confidence
> to say: 'Yeah, yeah I am…this is who I am, this is my life and this
> is how I choose to live it'.

And Maureen observes:

> There's a pop song 'I kissed a woman and I liked it'…it might
> have been Beyoncé…somebody famous…somebody did the
> thing about a ring on your finger but somebody…Katie
> Somebody…it's a pop song called 'I kissed a woman and I liked
> it'…and somewhere amongst the youth it's bi-curious and lots of
> pop stars and actresses say they've slept with this woman or that

woman 'cos it's the thing you do…it gives permission to the young folk…so it gives permission.

6.3   Discussion

In this chapter I have demonstrated the impact of a number of influences on lesbian visibility in the school workplace; for example, context, place, organisational culture, social relations and psychological features. However, these influences are not unitary and discreet but intermingle and have a composite impact.

I have argued, in both this and the previous chapter, that Section 28 was a significant and influential external context in the teaching career of the participants. They were fearful of prejudice, harassment and dismissal during that period. Hence most participants attempted to disguise their lesbian identity as a necessary condition of generating a liveable professional life.

Yet other factors were also influential and formative even at the same time as the participants were fearful of Section 28. For example, I have demonstrated that positive social relations encouraged some participants to come out to colleagues out during the Section 28 era. These participants distinguished different social groups within the school: they deemed it safe to highlight their lesbianism with colleagues while seeking to hide it from pupils and their parents. Thus, partial recognition and validation ameliorated the fear generated by the politico-legal context.

Other influences also determined the participants' performance of lesbian, and hence their visibility in the school workplace; for example, George's beliefs and feelings about her masculinised lesbianism were significant. She began teaching during the Section 28 years and, while fearful, she felt unable to disguise her sexuality. Thus, George took the strategic decision to excel as a teacher in an attempt to protect herself as a visible lesbian teacher.

As the politico-legal context changed with the repeal of Section 28 and introduction of equalities legislation, some participants began to merge their lesbian identity with their teacher identity and practice. They allowed their lesbianism to be a relational space for teaching sexualities, challenging homophobia and supporting pupils as they fashioned their own identities.

Yet this chapter has also challenged the notion that lesbian women can calibrate their visibility as they wish. For example, Alice was one of the participants who chose to come out to parents from the beginning of her career. However, it became apparent that Alice was not in total control of this process; the social groups within a school have porous boundaries and information about her sexuality spread beyond the colleague group. Consequently, Alice could not manage her lesbian visibility as effectively as she would have liked. Kate also experienced similar 'information leak' resulting in higher visibility than she intended.

I have argued that this flow of information around the social groups of a school disrupts the individual lesbian's control over her visibility. Losing the power to determine her level of visibility may be understood as 'coerced visibilisation'. Experiencing coerced visibilisation is likely to damage an individual's attempts to establish a liveable professional life and, therefore, could be deemed as neo-oppressive.

Another assumption challenged in this chapter is that, since schools now function in a more liberal and permissive legal and social context, lesbians will automatically feel able to highlight rather than diminish their lesbian visibility. Jenny illustrated this by claiming that she was more closeted than ever. Again, an individual combination of psychological factors, social relations, school culture and place were significant.

In the next chapter I consider the role of dress and appearance in the performance of 'lesbian', examining how it may enhance or diminish visibility in the school workplace.

7   Chapter Seven: Strategic use of dress and appearance

My third research question asks about the strategies lesbians in the school workplace use to manage their visibility and whether these have changed over time. I have already started to discuss (in Chapter Two Section Four) the strategic importance of dress and appearance in lesbian identity-management (for example Ferfolja 2009; Wilson 1990 and Davis 2015).

I suggested that dress and appearance may be the literal cloaks of identity which may emphasise or minimise aspects of personal identity and / or professional role. Thus, in the school workplace those lesbians who wish to camouflage their lesbianism are likely to dress in a particularly feminised or heteronormative manner. However, I have also started to illustrate (in Chapter Six) that visibility is not under the sole control of an individual lesbian. Social recognition and response from others influence visibility and, consequently, appearance may not always offer as effective camouflage as intended.

In addition, I began to consider "the cultural phenomenon of the suit" (Lugg and Tooms 2010, p. 78) in Chapter Two Section Four. I hypothesised that the intersection of school leader and lesbian may be performed, at least in part, through strategic use of dress and appearance.

Therefore, as a consequence of reviewing existing research literature, I was aware of the potential significance of dress and appearance in the calibration of lesbian visibility and in the performance of school leadership. Although I did not ask specific questions about dress and appearance in the interviews, I did take note when participants discussed how they dressed and the ways in which they described the symbolic importance of appearance. For example, some participants dressed to 'tone down', mask or hide their lesbianism. In other examples participants dressed in order to express some aspect of their lesbian identity; for example, George wore men's clothes and sported a masculine hairstyle in her performance of butch lesbian.

This chapter, then, considers the participants' strategic use of dress and appearance. Section One considers how Jenny and Angela sought to

use dress and appearance to conceal their lesbian identity in the school workplace. Maureen, on the other hand, deployed dress and appearance to declare her sexuality to colleagues in school and as a 'badge of honour'. However, she was simultaneously trying to conceal her lesbianism from pupils. Section Two examines Maureen's strategy.

George spoke at length about dress and appearance and their relationship to her lesbian identity and visibility. In the research interview she explored how she manages a masculinised lesbian identity in both school and in the wider world. George made eleven separate comments about her dress and appearance: some were brief while others were detailed and extensive. None resulted from a direct question about her dress code. Given the importance of dress and appearance to George's version of lesbian, Section Three considers their significance in her approach to identity management and visibility.

Finally, Section Four explores how for George and Wendy, dress and appearance provide an intersection to understand and perform 'lesbian headship'. This section, therefore, also begins to address the fourth research question which asks how lesbian school leaders navigate visibility.

7.1 Dressing to hide: Jenny and Angela

As demonstrated earlier in the thesis both Jenny and Angela, despite teaching many years apart, endeavoured to hide their lesbianism. Furthermore, they both made conscious use of dress and appearance in an attempt to calibrate their visibility.

Teaching in the 1970s Angela felt the dress code associated with being a PE teacher helped hide her lesbian identity:

> I mean that was one of the great things about teaching PE…I always had a track suit on…

Implicit in her comment is the notion that she could wear comfortable, relatively gender-neutral clothes because of the expectations of the teaching role. Angela enjoyed being able to wear a track suit as she felt it helped camouflage her sexuality, but Jenny held a different view. She felt that women PE teachers are often stereotyped as lesbian and so dressing for the role potentially enhances lesbian visibility:

> The one good thing going for me was that I wasn't a PE teacher…I was a Geography teacher, so…it wasn't quite as bad…

However, Angela was aware of how PE teachers might be stereotyped:

> I was never sure whether it was the PE side of things where people were so vulnerable…because of the whole issue of changing…you know…you happened to be in the changing rooms when the girls were changing.

As Chapter Two noted, malicious stereotypes about PE teachers monitoring pupils changing and showering may reinforce the need to keep sexuality hidden in school (for example Epstein and Johnson 1998; Hardie 2012).

In the 1990s Jenny tried to disguise her sexuality by adopting a "modest, conservative, and nondescript" look (Freeburg et al. 2011, p. 34):

> I always wore skirts…and I've been conscious of not having a short haircut…

Clarke and Turner (2007, pp. 269 - 270) echo the importance of style and length of hair as signifier of lesbian identity, suggesting that "for most participants [in their study] the 'first trigger'…for identifying a woman as a lesbian was her hairstyle, '*the lesbian haircut'*…

Jenny was cautious and judicious about wearing trousers, only doing do so when she felt it could be justified by the professional task:

> …it was only when I took field trips…that was my excuse to wear trousers…

Furthermore, Jenny explicitly rejects adorning herself with traditional symbols used to communicate a lesbian or gay identity:

> I don't want to wear badges…I don't need to wear rainbow coloured necklaces…this is just who we are and we're just like everybody else.

However more recently Jenny started to be less cautious about using dress and appearance to mask her lesbianism. Instead she started to 'play' with stereotypes in an effort to confuse people whom she believed had already stereotyped her as a lesbian woman:

> …because it's partly 'Well, wait a minute, you've stereotyped me'…even down to this is the shortest…this year I…how long have I been there…15 months…and this is the shortest my hair has ever been…last week I thought: 'I don't care anymore'…and just being really conscious...and when I say: 'I don't care anymore', it's 'I don't care what people think anymore'...I'm not

> going to let them think what they want to think about me…I'm
> going to confuse them…

Thus, Jenny plays with visual stereotypes while providing misinformation about her lesbian identity as she attempts to secure control of her visibility in school.

As well as discussing dress and appearance in relation to her own visibility, Jenny spoke about observing subtle hints and tips that other colleagues may be lesbian or gay: she discussed using 'gaydar' to identify and be identified.

Indeed, other research has discussed these 'hints and tips'; for example, Skidmore (1999, p. 513) argues that being hidden (because of prejudice and harassment) led to the development of covert communication of a lesbian or gay identity "that only certain others 'in the know' will be able to read". Barton (2015) describes this as an "insider language" (p. 1616), colloquially known as 'gaydar' which is "a playful mix of the word gay with radar, suggesting that one can sense, intuit, or perceive some set of characteristics in another that signal a shared minority status" (p. 1615). Using this insider language can be a useful tool when identifying as a group member or seeking to communicate with other group members. It can be especially helpful in homophobic times or places. As Barton comments:

> Historically, part of our survival and wellbeing as gay people in
> homophobic environments depended on our ability to recognize
> one another, to find partners and community, and to achieve
> some kind of solidarity (p. 1627).

Furthermore, Barton suggests that 'gaydar' is triggered by "physical presentation, including mannerisms, dress and voice; interactions, especially eye contact; a presence or absence of certain conversational social norms" (p. 1615). Hence gaydar relies on dress and appearance as primary sources of information and offers a further context for paying attention to my participants' observations about the nature and deployment of their own dress code.

In her current post Jenny feels the need to be particularly hidden as a lesbian, despite being less cautious about her dress code recently. Jenny attempts to be so deeply camouflaged that she believes it is too dangerous to use her 'gaydar' to connect with other lesbian and gay workers in school:

> I wouldn't even risk it…in the past you may be…bit by bit you
> drop clues…to other people and they pick up on it…but there's
> not anyone I think I could do that with now…

However, despite Jenny's determination to disguise her sexuality, her visibility appears higher than she would wish. For example, as previously observed, Jenny intercepted a note being passed between pupils which commented that 'she's an old lesbian'.

This raises the possibility that gaydar is no longer an "insider language" (Barton 2015, p. 1616). In some way, despite Jenny's attempt to use dress, appearance and conversation to mask her lesbian identity, she is being recognised as lesbian by pupils and colleagues; thus, she is visible despite her attempts to hide. This social recognition may result from a more permissive social-legal context and greater representation of lesbians and gay men in society. Perhaps, as a consequence, individuals such as Jenny are less able to calibrate the visibility of their lesbianism to extent they would wish.

Alternatively, Jenny's 'double-handed' strategy of saying one thing and appearing another may be unconvincing to those around her. Colleagues and pupils may judge Jenny on the basis of her stereotypical appearance rather than on the fake information provided.

A third possibility is that if greater numbers of people do not accept an essentialist construction of their sexuality, rather perceiving it as more fluid and discursive, 'definitive lesbian or gay tropes' may be less present. As a consequent these tropes or features may be less evident or accessible via 'gaydar'.

Whatever the truth, despite trying to tone down her lesbian visibility Jenny is unable to hide her lesbianism effectively; consequently, she is unable to generate as a liveable professional life as she would like. Jenny can run but she can no longer hide; and as Endo et al. (2010, p. 1027) ask," … [is it] even possible for a queer teacher to fully deny or conceal who he or she is?"

7.2   Dressing to declare: Maureen

Maureen made passing reference to using dress and appearance as one of her strategies for identity management and self-presentation.

However, where Jenny and Angela wanted to conceal their lesbianism through dress and appearance, dress and appearance were important to Maureen in communicating her lesbian status to others and to herself. For example, Skidmore (1999, p. 513) comments:

> …it seems there are at least three levels at which messages are being communicated by the wearing of clothing…First, a desire to communicate a message about one's sexuality which is intended to be readable by the world at large…Second, a desire to communicate a message that only certain others 'in the know' will be able to read…Thirdly a desire to communicate with the self…

When she first came out in the 1980s Maureen appears to have used dress and appearance to communicate her sexuality on several levels:

> …they all knew…you change the clothes you wear almost…you change your hairstyle almost…I remember white trainers…I remember all lesbians wore white trainers…day in, day out…jeans, I never wore a skirt again…

When Maureen said 'they all knew' she was talking about the wider group of staff. Her dress code was not a means of hiding but intended to communicate her sexuality to that audience. However, the specificity of the white trainers is perhaps a marker for other lesbians or those "'in the know'" (Skidmore 1999, p. 513) and for Maureen herself as a badge of belonging. Her feelings are reminiscent of Kleindienst's (1999, p. 199):

> After twenty-seven years of long hair and makeup, I came out, cut my hair, and began to wear blue jeans and T-shirts. I was clear about my reasons for this. I wanted to be recognized by other lesbians when I walked down the street.

This change in style may have also communicated that Maureen felt comfortable with her newly realised sexuality. She described herself as being "evangelistic" in telling colleagues that she was lesbian. Her strategy was consistent with Clarke and Turner's (2007, p. 273) observation that "participants chose to look gayer when they first came out to affirm and display to others that they were comfortable with their identity…".

However, Maureen was not out to pupils and sought to conceal her sexuality from them. Maureen was trying to deploy dress and appearance to both declare *and* mask her lesbianism at one and the same time. Perhaps unsurprisingly Maureen's strategy failed since pupils could 'read' her dress code and behaviour:

> You're not technically out to pupils but as I'd changed my look, it was so obvious and apparently…my classroom…kind of like a portacabin that if you looked out of one side you looked down to the PE block…so I was…in those heady days…always looking for the PE teacher coming back up to the staffroom…and one day some of the kids said to me: 'Your friend in PE' and I said: 'What do you mean my friend in PE?…All the teachers are my friends'…'No, your *friend* in PE'…so it was that kind of thing. Years later…I found out they all knew.

Thus, Maureen was recognised and visible to people from whom she wanted to hide her lesbianism.

7.3 George, dress and appearance

During the research interview George spoke of her 'butch' lesbian appearance (she used the word 'butch' of herself). George also made several references to the fact she believes she looks like a man and that she wears men's clothes and has a short, 'masculine' haircut. Furthermore, George is frequently taken to be male by other people:

> I spent all evening with people thinking I'm a bloke…the number of times I've been thrown out…or people have gone 'huh' when I've gone into [women's] toilets…

While I have argued against an 'essential' lesbian identity Walker (2001, p. 10) presents a different perspective:

> …I have challenged the notion that gender identity is malleable and subject to wilful change and argued that women experience butch and femme identities as embodied, fixed and expressive of a core or interior self – in a word, as essential.

Furthermore, George appears to consider that her masculinised lesbianism is in some way inherent or essential:

> I've always felt different in that way…and people think: 'Well you choose to wear clothes like that' and I think: 'Well, no, I just feel comfortable like that'…and I…er…on a very few occasions I tried to fit in by wearing something that would be seen as feminine…I feel false…I feel *excruciating* …I feel dragged up…badly…

Navigating her way through a teaching career with a visibly butch lesbian identity has had significant implications for George; and has influenced her identity management strategies. For example, even during teacher training George was concerned that she might not be able to fulfil expectations of how teachers should appear and behave. Talking of her teacher training course, George observed:

> …at the time they said something about most schools you could only wear skirts or dresses…and I remember it really vividly, sitting there and going: 'Huh (sharp in-take of breath)…I don't own a skirt…oh no, I don't own a skirt'…and they found me a school for teaching practice that was okay with trousers…so from the very start I was thinking: 'This is going to be difficult to fit into'.

Thus, George believed that her highly visible and masculinised lesbian identity denied her the opportunity to mask her lesbianism. As discussed in Chapter Five, George compensated by adopting a 'super-teacher' strategy. Her strategy is consistent with Ferfolja's (2009, p. 384) observation that:

> …teachers place inordinate amounts of time and energy into their teaching, often over-performing in order to develop reputations as outstanding teachers…Such a reputation is perceived to potentially counteract the loss of credibility the teachers felt they would experience at work if their sexuality became public knowledge.

As George explains:

> …I had to prove myself…much more because I was a lesbian…yes, I've definitely felt that's been the case…from my first ever teaching job…I look like a bloke…I *am* a lesbian…I'm really going to have to prove I can teach well…

On occasions her 'masculinized' dress and appearance confused some younger pupils. Again, as illustrated in Chapter Five, once George felt able to come out to pupils, she used her skill as a teacher to answer children's questions and turn her own lesbian identity into a teaching tool. Thus, George integrated her lesbian identity with her professional identity in an overt manner:

> I mean I create confusion every year…with children all the time…this little Year 1 came up and said: 'Ms Rogers, I'm really upset…'Why's that then?'…'Cos Kayleigh's been saying horrible things about you in the sandpit.' 'What's that then?'...'She says YOU ARE A GIRL'. 'Well she's right actually'…it's just this constant confusion all the time…

George went on to say to the pupil:

> 'Do you know, Kayleigh's right, I am a girl…but some people think I'm a boy because they think I look like a boy…they expect boys to look like me…but I'm a girl…but it doesn't matter, really, does it…is it going to make any difference to your learning? No'…And that's my normal, stock answer.

As George's career progressed, she felt uncomfortable at the thought of promotion to Headship as it involved, potentially, a revised and more feminised dress code. George's perception of how Headteachers dress

felt at odds with her own dress code; and consequently, she remained as a Deputy Headteacher and did not move to Headship for some years. George describes a conversation with a Local Authority Advisor:

> G   He said to me: 'You've been in the co-pilot's seat for such a long time now, what on earth is stopping you actually getting there…actually going for it?'…and I said to him: 'I'm just waiting to look like a Headteacher and I DON'T (assuming the voice of a truculent child when she says 'and I don't')…'And I can't imagine it happening…'
>
> K   How does a Headteacher look then?
>
> G   There is a look, isn't there…I go to Headteacher briefings and think: 'I *really* don't look like a Headteacher'…

George's comment reflects Hall's research (1989, p. 134):

> Though no respondent thought her homosexuality had any impact on work performance, most felt their future options were limited by their lesbianism. They could advance to a certain level but not beyond because they could not project the necessary corporate image.

However, George did eventually become a Headteacher in the 2010s, modifying her dress and appearance in relationship to the role. George explains:

> I dress in a way I feel comfortable…so I wear a Ben Sherman suit……I don't try…I wear what I'm comfortable in…so I would never wear a women's suit…'cos I don't feel comfortable in that…and children spend their lives saying to me: 'Why do you dress like a boy?'…and I say: 'I don't, I dress how I feel comfortable…'

The next section will demonstrate that George's dress and appearance as a Headteacher goes beyond an expression of lesbian identity and the need for comfort but also becomes symbolic of her beliefs about Headship and school leadership. The section also examines Wendy's use of dress and appearance as a Headteacher.

7.4   Dress, Appearance and Headship: Wendy and George

For George and Wendy there was a dress code that had to be adopted as Headteachers: the tailored suit. Lugg and Tooms (2010, p.78) describe this as "the cultural phenomenon of the suit". Wendy describes why it was important for her to wear a jacket or suit when she became a Headteacher:

> I felt strongly that in a position of leadership in a school, it was important to present myself in a manner befitting the role…I think, perhaps, at the time there was an element of if you are a leader…in a leadership role, you should have a presence that stands out from the rest of the staff…

The idea of the suit signifying a leadership role and distinguishing the Headteacher from other staff echoes Lugg and Tooms' (2010, p. 78) discussion of "organizational understanding of 'professional' through dress". Wendy used dress and appearance to mark herself as the Headteacher and to signal her professionalism: dress and appearance were symbolic of her professional identity.

As a Headteacher in the 1980s and as a lesbian seeking to conceal her sexual identity in the school Wendy wore a 'feminized' suit:

> W   When I was a Headteacher I wore smart…you know…a nice long jacket…a really smart…fem…(stops mid word)…
>
> K   Were you going to say feminine?
>
> W   I was…I mean as opposed to a butch suit…a nice, smart business-woman type suit…
>
> K   What's a butch suit then?
>
> W   A butch suit…is well…masculine, tailored lines…double-breasted (long pause to think)…What's a feminine suit?…I can't put it into words…grey dog-tooth, round neck, slashed pockets…I dressed what I felt a woman Headteacher should look like…my expectation of women Headteachers at that time…you dressed appropriately and for me that you meant you wore a skirt or a frock…

For Wendy this version of the suit supported her identity management strategy as a lesbian (for example Edwards et al. 2014). It also expressed something of her professional (Headteacher) identity: dress distinguished her from other staff and marked her professional role. Furthermore, Wendy's dress code may have been culturally driven by the expectations of women teachers and Headteachers in the 1980s. Wendy observes:

> I didn't wear trousers. In those days, women teachers had only just started to wear trousers…there were no jeans…and I felt strongly that in the role of the Headteacher you didn't wear trousers.

This reflects Miller's (1996, p. 16) comment that "some of us asked in the early seventies if we might wear trousers to work. To do so was brazen, unprofessional and political".

In the 2010s George became a Headteacher and tried to integrate her butch lesbian identity with the dress code of a Headteacher: she wore men's suits.

George appears to have a complex relationship with the 'Headteacher's suit', how it might look and what it represents. The 'feminized' version, evident at Headteachers' meetings, was so inconsistent with George's view of herself that she avoided Headship. When she did finally become a Headteacher (in the same school in which she had previously been a Deputy Headteacher) George accepted wearing a suit as an indicator of the role. However, she 'adapted' the suit by wearing men's suits. Thus, George was trying to integrate her lesbian identity with her professional identity in a way that felt tolerable or comfortable: for George this was an important consideration in generating a liveable professional life.

In adopting this strategy George felt able to accept the role and appearance of Headteacher; however, it also emphasised George's apparent difference from her Headteacher colleagues. That is, through wearing men's suits George further raised her profile as a butch lesbian.

However, George also rejected, on a daily basis, the suit jacket as symbolic of hierarchical power. She observes:

> I arrive in the morning in the suit and I take my jacket off… and I'm still, you know, smart…but it's interesting what a jacket does…

The consequence of removing her jacket was that George was often misidentified as the Headteacher; for example:

> …and it was in the business manager's office, and this woman comes in and she goes on talking about this kitchen audit…and I started asking questions and, erm, and she was very offish…like tossing away my questions as if they didn't mean anything…(laughs) and then…and then I said: 'When will the report be coming, because it will be really useful to know because there's a Governors' meeting?' And she was quite abrupt and she said: 'That'll be going to the Headteacher'…and I said: 'That's me'…and she went: 'Oh…' and she went into this big apology, and I said to her at the time, I said: 'Well, it worries me you're apologising to me.…because, actually, whether or not I'm the Head you should have treated me exactly the same'…it makes me really see red (makes a sort of whistling sound, escape of air sound, through her teeth)…but yeah, yeah and I worry…that our cleaner should be treated exactly the way I am…

In this passage George begins to imply that that the suit jacket differentiates her from other staff in a way with which she is

uncomfortable. She removes her jacket to denote that all staff have equal value and deserve equal respect whatever their role in the school. George continues:

> I'm not that keen on hierarchy…because what it does, it becomes another façade for people to treat other people differently…I saw some really bad things going on…so…for example, years ago, teachers who were not good teachers, who did not give children a good deal…continuing year after year, and people wouldn't talk about it…so formality and professionalism was a façade…which is not dealing with things properly…so I made a big point of saying…that formality is not important to me but that I was concerned with professionalism in a true sense…Yes…and so I…you know what…I've made an absolute priority to say you know what, what will come first is children…and people's well-being…and I won't have a façade of formality that truly covers up what's important in this organisation…

Thus, George suggests that the suit jacket is the symbol of hierarchy and pseudo-professionalism that masks, in her opinion, the right and proper values of a school. By removing her jacket every morning George symbolically removes the façade and, in doing this, embodies and demonstrates her educational values.

Furthermore, George divested herself of another key symbol of the Headteacher's power, the Headteacher's office:

> …and because we have an open door for the…um…office…I kind of got rid of it being the Head's office…I didn't feel comfortable about that…

Yet having argued against hierarchy and divested herself of key symbols of the power of the Headteacher, George notes of her management style:

> I'm quite happy to be making decisions…making the strategic direction…I'm not a…not erm…soft at making decisions…erm…I'm quite…erm the Deputy would say I'm quite controlling about some things…

Thus, George presents a multi-faceted analysis of herself at the intersection of lesbian identity and professional (Headteacher) identity. Her dress and appearance both accept and reject symbols of Headship. George embraces the suit as emblematic of the leadership role but customises it to emphasise the gendered performance of her lesbianism. At the same time the suit jacket represents the cloak of fake professionalism that she removes daily. Removing the jacket signals George's egalitarian principles as a Headteacher, yet, she closes this

section of the discussion by highlighting an autocratic component to her leadership.

On the other hand, Wendy does not appear to have experienced any dissonance in assuming her version of the Headteacher's suit. She felt the role demanded that she should mark herself as distinct from other staff. Her feminized suit supported Wendy's identity management strategy as a lesbian, as well as being the cultural norm of the time. Of her leadership style Wendy observes:

> I don't know what it's like now, but it was always there…and a lot of teachers didn't treat teaching assistants that well, they…they were kind enough to them but there was always a…a marker…I'm the teacher, you're the classroom assistant but I never behaved like that…never demonstrated that with my classroom assistants…I didn't have a distance, I always supported them and saw them as equals…I was…erm… egalitarian, yes, that's right… I always put myself out to support their professional development and made sure they were an integral part of the team…even to the point when, you know, insisting they came to…they came to…erm…staff meetings. Prior to that there was always a staff meeting for teachers and a staff meeting for classroom assistants. And I was very, very vocal in saying that shouldn't happen. I carried those principles with me, really…erm…and it's interesting that because I think I've always been quite out-going and gregarious but also very, very capable and efficient…able…erm…I was able to…it sounds terrible, but…I was able to achieve more and get more out of people, 'cos they felt valued and they wanted to contribute…

Thus, despite adopting a more orthodox version of the Headteacher suit which helped to distinguish and distance herself as the Headteacher, Wendy is also driven by a desire for egalitarianism. Furthermore, she describes an inclusive and collaborative management style which contrasts with George's description of being 'controlling about some things'.

Towards the end of the research interview George returned to the impact of wearing men's suits. She gave an example, one of several, of being mistaken for a man. George had visited another school for a lengthy meeting with the Headteacher:

> …we were just leaving…and she went: 'Now, would you like the gentlemen's before you leave?'…I was so stunned, I just went: 'No'…it was really weird, and I still keep thinking: 'Can you *really* have thought that?'… because I know that I wear…I'm seen as wearing quite male attire, but I don't think I'm particularly male, really…

Shortly after this visit George decided to leave Headship, citing her disillusionment with the impact of contemporary political policy on primary school education. She observes:

> …like…God, if that's what it takes to be outstanding I've no interest whatsoever…because they were like robots…er, the children…on a conveyor belt, with no voice, with no passion for learning, really ill-equipped for the future…but good at getting through tests…I felt really shocked…

In addition, being mistaken for a man by the Headteacher seems to have influenced her decision. George's visibility as a butch lesbian had been misread, leaving her unsettled. Her beliefs about primary education felt invalidated by political policy and school practice. As Lugg and Tooms (2010, p. 79) write of a School Administrator who did not wear a 'feminized' version of the tailored suit:

> [She] paid the price for her insubordination. Her political status dropped within the circle of administrators and often she felt like an outsider because she did not fit – either visually or philosophically.

Perhaps George began to feel like an outsider: she felt her educational philosophy was at odds with the mainstream and she was no longer read as a lesbian woman. Consequently, the dissonance George felt led her to resign: her performance and experience of lesbian Headteacher was no longer generating a liveable professional life.

7.5   Discussion

In considering how some participants used dress and appearance in an attempt to calibrate their lesbian visibility, I have further illustrated one of the central concepts of this thesis: that lesbian visibility is relational, contextual and may be calibrated. Even though some participants endeavoured to mask their lesbianism through the use of dress and appearance, it could be argued that it was not an especially effective strategy. These participants were recognised and therefore visible, despite their efforts to the contrary.

The ability of people around these participants to 'read' their lesbianism may have resulted from a subconsciously communicated discomfort or inauthenticity on the part of the participant. Alternatively, as society has changed to become more inclusive with greater representation of LGBTQ

sexualities and lifestyles, perhaps 'gaydar' has become a more widely available sensibility. A third possibility is that with greater dismissal of the notion of essentialist sexuality (and related stereotypical attributes), combined with a more permissive culture, the performance of lesbian has become more fluid and personalised. As a consequence, perhaps gaydar has become an out-dated and blunt tool.

The examination of dress and appearance has also introduced my analysis of the fourth research question which asks how lesbian school leaders navigate visibility. Wendy and George have illustrated complexity at the intersection of lesbian identity and professional identity which was symbolised and performed through the 'Headteacher's suit'.

As a female Headteacher and lesbian in the 1980s Wendy assumed a 'feminized' suit comfortably. The dress code was expected of women at that time and, coincidently supported Wendy's approach to masking her lesbianism at work. Wendy accepted that the suit symbolised her status as Headteacher and distinguished her from other members of staff. Wendy's suit provided a synergy between her professional identity and lesbian visibility that supported her in developing a liveable professional life.

However, George was more uncomfortable at the intersection of dress, lesbian identity and professional identity. George felt she could not (and perhaps should not have to) mask her masculinised performance of lesbian. Even the prospect of having to adopt a feminized suit meant that George initially avoided Headship. Ultimately, to assume the professional identity of Headteacher, George adapted the symbolic Headteacher's suit (by wearing men's clothes) to accommodate her lesbian identity.

Yet George was still uncomfortable with the symbolism inherent in the Headteacher's suit. She felt that the suit represented pseudo-power and fake professionalism: to represent her rejection of this George removed her suit jacket every morning. In doing this she reduced her visibility as the Headteacher.

Thus, for George the performance and intersection of her lesbian and professional identities did not appear comfortable. She resisted aspects of organisational power that typically rest with the Headteacher. She was uncomfortable both with the feminized suit but also with the fact that her masculinized adaptation of the suit rendered her invisible (in some

instances) as a lesbian and as a woman. While George had previously managed to integrate lesbian and teacher identities, she was struggling to do the same with lesbian and Headteacher identities. It appeared that George was not experiencing a liveable professional life when I met her and therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that she intended to leave Headship a matter of weeks after the interview.

I continue to examine the intersection between lesbian identity, professional (Headteacher / organisational leader) identity and the generation of a liveable professional life in the next chapter.

8   Chapter Eight: Lesbian women and school / organisational leadership

Throughout this study I have engaged with research literature, relating it to the analysis of my own data. This process of integrating reading and reflection with analysis has led me to examine intersections and composite influences on lesbian visibility in the school workplace. In particular I have become interested in the performance of lesbian, its inter-relationship with the performance of 'school leader' and the discursive influence of social relations.

Thus, in this chapter I examine two rich and in-depth narratives offered by Wendy and George: the two participants who had been Headteachers. Through analysis of their narratives I shall consider the intersection of lesbian and professional / leader identity and the relationship to a liveable professional life. In particular I offer an analysis of the relationship between lesbian visibility and professional vulnerability of school / organisational leaders, demonstrating that professional vulnerability can result from both lesbian visibility *and* invisibility.

As described in Chapter Three I move away from thematic analysis in this chapter. Rather I use narrative analysis (Cortazzi 1993) to present and explore Wendy and George's narratives. In using narrative analysis, I seek to take a more holistic perspective on difficult events in the professional lives of the narrators. I use this method to help consider both the significance of the narratives to the narrators, and how the narratives may speak more widely about lesbians, school / organisational leadership and visibility.

As I described in Chapter Three, I also 'borrow' from psycho-social analysis (Hollway and Jefferson 2000) to examine the narratives. In particular I pay attention to

> …the idea that there is a *Gestalt* (a whole that is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda) informing each person's life which it is the job of biographers to elicit intact, and not destroy through following their own concerns…(p. 31).

By turning to this analytic method, I also have the opportunity to consider both conscious and possible unconscious processes influencing events within the narratives, and how they are recounted.

In Section 8.1 I examine George's narrative. In the first instance I use narrative analysis to demonstrate the structure and content of the tale. This analytic method also helps to demonstrate the sense, or meaning, that George places on her narrative.

Then in Section 8.1.1 I turn to psycho-social evaluation (Hollway and Jefferson 2000) to consider a particular aspect of George's story. Specifically, I focus on a phrase used by George: she says that she did not want to "cause a fuss" when she experienced intrusive and threatening stalking. Using this analytic method, I consider possible motivations for wanting to avoid 'causing a fuss' and the implications for George's ability to experience a liveable professional life.

In Sections 8.2 and 8.2.1 I evaluate Wendy's narrative. Again, in the first section I examine her tale through the lens of narrative analysis; while in the second section I use Hollway and Jefferson's version of psycho-social analysis to consider the following influences on Wendy's (in)visibility and her professional vulnerability:

- Wendy's view of herself as a leader and manager
- Wendy's relationship to the organisation
- The impact of social relations.

8.1   George's narrative: using narrative analysis

During the interview George acknowledged that Section 28 generated a sense of fear amongst lesbian and gay teachers (including her) which lasted long after its repeal. She presented herself as unable to camouflage her lesbianism but as courageous in deploying her visibility in the school workplace. George demonstrated a willingness to integrate her lesbian and professional identities, so embedding herself within the curriculum in the interests of pupils' well-being and education.

Yet the narrative I shall examine in this chapter presents George as vulnerable. She is placed at risk and vulnerable because of sexually motivated stalking. She is also vulnerable because of inadequate support and lack of appropriate action by her Headteacher and the Local Authority. She is vulnerable because of her own beliefs and affective conditions: that is, her beliefs and feelings about herself and professional social relations.

I shall use narrative analysis to consider the content and structure of George's narrative. During the narrative George makes explicit evaluations that elucidate the importance and meaning she attaches to her story. I shall then re-evaluate the narrative following Hollway and Jefferson (2000). Specifically, I shall focus on a phrase used by George: she says that she did not want to "cause a fuss" about being stalked. If taken at face-value this might seem odd: it seems entirely reasonable that George should "cause a fuss" to stop the unwanted attention. To understand why George may have said this and what she may have meant by it I shall consider a possible intersection between George's lesbian identity, her familial and other relationships and her professional identity.

George's narrative told of events that took place just after the repeal of Section 28. She was a Deputy Headteacher and had, to date, navigated her career successfully despite being an overtly butch lesbian. To achieve her success George had 'compensated' for her lesbianism by adopting the role of 'super-teacher' to "deflect interest from [her] sexuality" (Ferfolja 2009, p. 385).

George introduces her tale with the abstract (Cortazzi 1993):

> …I think the most difficult…I had a really difficult time with a member of staff who had been a classroom assistant…who essentially stalked me…

She goes on to set the scene by providing background information in the orientation phase:

> Mm…and this was not the Head who put my civil partnership in the newsletter but the other one…and Section 28 had a BIG impact on education across the country…and I also think it created the excuse for it also to be shameful…and I look back and I think: 'Oh George…why were you so weak at that point?'…because what had happened…she was a classroom assistant… and I was teaching two days a week at the time…maybe more, actually, but I can't remember…I had classroom responsibility for part of the week…and I taught her child actually as well…

Thus, George has identified herself, the Headteacher, a classroom assistant and a pupil (who is the classroom assistant's child) as the key protagonists. She has already indicated in the abstract that the classroom assistant had "stalked" her but that she herself was "weak".

Citing Labov, Cortazzi (1993) argues that evaluation is central to this model of analysis and occurs throughout the account, as well as in the specific evaluation stage. This is because evaluation by the narrator makes explicit the meaning of the narrative. Continuing to cite Labov, Cortazzi (1993) argues that multiple linguistic devices may be used to provide evaluation and meaning. For example, George deploys different linguistic tools to emphasise aspects of her narrative. In describing the 'BIG' impact of Section 28 she demonstrates internal evaluation by using an intensifier. This is linked to external evaluation where she makes explicit the meaning of the narrative: that is, despite the repeal of Section 28 its impact was long-term and profound. It created a climate where lesbian (and gay) teachers could be treated badly or "shamefully".

George also evaluates her own behaviour by asking: "Oh George…why were you so weak at that point?" In this comment she uses external evaluation via an "interpretive remark [which] is attributed to *narrator* as a principal, addressing himself at the time" (Cortazzi 1993, p. 48). However, the narrative has yet to provide a fuller explanation of George's self-criticism.

The complication "shows a turning-point, a crisis or problem, or a series of these…It is basically the content of the narrative" (Cortazzi 1993, p.46).

> G   …and suddenly she *really* changed in terms of what she looked like…she had her hair cut and she…and she started to look what people would identify as masculine etc etc…and then…erm…she suddenly…actually I think it was before that…yes, it was definitely before she underwent the transformation…she had…she had spoken to me, one day, and said to me: 'Oh a friend of mine…a friend of mine…thinks she's fallen in love with a woman…and what would you recommend?'…and I said: 'Well, I think she should speak to good friends of hers'…and she went: 'She hasn't really got any' and I went: 'This is the…'…I gave her the lesbian and gay line…I can't remember what it was, but I gave her something like that. And that was the end of that and I carried on with my work and I was just leaving that day and she jumped out of this cupboard and went: 'It's me…it's you' (half laughs)…and I went: 'I really think you should speak to…you probably just feel it's me because I'm the one lesbian in this organisation'….and…and…'and perhaps you should phone that line'… and I was just trying to be nice about it…and, erm…and then it just became really, really…she just became really obsessive…

K   Disruptively so?

G   Yeah…yes…and I felt really awful because she was so really in need, but I wasn't the right person to help her…and to the point she was putting suicide notes on my car…and she obviously…er…developed quite a bad issue with drink and…she was turning up really drunk…and shouting: 'I love you' with all the parents there…

K   Oh!

G   …and it became really awful…and when I spoke to the Head at the time about it…she kept leaving me notes…so I went straight to the Head and said I actually felt really worried about it…and she pretty much told me to put up with it…mm…and then she'd…and then it became really bad…to the point where various staff were like on duty to tell me where she was so I could walk down the corridor…it became really awful actually…she obviously had quite significant mental health issues…and I felt really awful for her…but I became really nervous…and I thought: 'People who are that desperate do desperate things…'

K   Yes

G   …and there was this series of notes on my car about how she was going to top herself if I didn't go out with her and blah, blah, blah…and I didn't realise what I was doing to her…so I went back to the Head and said: 'I'm really worried about her…and I'm really worried about me'…and…erm…she contacted the Local Authority who actually said: 'Please tell your Deputy to be quiet about it because it will create a fuss in the newspapers'…

K   No! But it was harassment!

G   And, I look back and think: 'I CANNOT believe that…I can't believe that...I can't believe that'…as a response from a Local Authority that was just dreadful.

K   Yes, indeed.

G   And, now I think: '*Oh,* the lack of support from that Head'…

K   Yes…

G   …if a member of staff came to me with anything like that, I couldn't *imagine* saying that to them…

K   I wonder what she would have said if it was a woman and a man was behaving like that?

G   She'd…I'm **absolutely sure** she would have had a court order against him…

Within the above section George makes two external and explicit evaluations: "as a response from a Local Authority that was just dreadful" and "And, now I think 'the lack of support from that Head'". Each of these is emphasised by intensifiers: "I CANNOT believe that…I can't believe

that...I can't believe that" and "*oh,* the lack of support from that Head".
Thus, George expresses her shock and disappointment that when she
faced an extreme situation, she was not supported by those
professionals who should and could have helped.

George's final evaluation, again a combination of an explicit eternal
evaluation supported by an intensifier (Cortazzi 1993), was prompted by
a question from me:

> K   I wonder what she would have said if it was a woman and
>   a man was behaving like that?

> G   She'd…I'm **absolutely sure** she would have had a court
>   order against him…

George emphasises that she was treated badly, in her view, because of
prejudiced beliefs and discriminatory practice of those in power and
authority.

In the evaluation stage of her narrative George "highlights the point of the
narrative" (Cortazzi 1993, p. 46). She returns to and re-emphasises her
evaluations of the previous sections, emphasising that her "shameful"
treatment resulted from homophobic discrimination against her visibility
as a lesbian in a position of senior leadership:

> You know, it was really shocking how I was treated…because I
> was a gay woman…and it was a gay…you know…I think if I'd be
> a straight woman and a woman was doing it, I'd have been
> protected…and it was all about it being embarrassing and getting
> to the newspapers…Lesbian Deputy Head…you
> know…shocking, really shocking.

The fifth stage of the evaluation model "describes the result or the
resolution to a conflict in a narrative" (Cortazzi 1993, p.47). In George's
case, it was a direct question from me that moved her into the next stage
of the narrative:

> K   How was it resolved?

> G   It wasn't really. It just went on for years and years…she
>   ended up getting the sack…which is awful
>   really…considering, if I look back…I think it was the other
>   Deputy that was in charge of the classroom assistants at
>   the time…and that was for being drunk on the job and not
>   doing the job very well…(laughs)…and her children were
>   at the school for quite a number of years afterwards…and
>   there were a few things I was very fearful of…because her
>   child said to me…because she'd changed her name to
>   George…

K   Gosh

G   Yeah…and her child said to me: 'My mum's got photos of you *all over* her room' and there were just things…it was obvious that it was very obsessive...and I…I look back and think: 'I could have gone to the NUT'…and…

K   Yes?

G   But, I didn't…and, do you know, I just didn't want to cause a fuss. And I got an email from this woman…it's not difficult to work out school emails actually…it just said…it was something like…oh…'I know where you are'…I just ignored it…and actually I've seen her since and she's managed to really resolve things for herself and she's…you can tell when you see someone…a couple of years ago…I was at a thing in the local town, giving away books, and she came up and said: 'Hello'…and 'How are you?' and so that was a…resolution for me…

George observes that the stalking continued for years and it was only partially resolved by the dismissal of the classroom assistant in unrelated circumstances. George continued to be fearful but did not request union support because she "just didn't want to cause a fuss". Combined with a strained relationship with the Headteacher perhaps George felt unable to 'rock the boat', even though she was legally and morally entitled to seek support. It perhaps also explains George's self-criticism in the abstract when she questions her own weakness. It may be that George would now be more confident in using the law and / or the school system to protect herself and challenge the discriminatory practice of the Headteacher and Local Authority. I shall come back to the phrase 'didn't want to cause a fuss' in my subsequent analysis of George's narrative.

For George the actual resolution was seeing the classroom assistant some years later and realising the woman had "managed to really resolve things for herself".

George deploys a coda to return "listeners to the present moment" (Cortazzi 1993, p. 47):

…but in terms of the school it was all just left…so, yeah…so I think it probably…I look back on it and it makes me realise how I would treat staff now. So, I think it's been quite enriching in that way.

George makes a final external, explicit evaluation of her narrative: the experience continues to inform her own leadership and management of staff, with the implication that she would act differently from the Headteacher and Local Authority.

Thus, Cortazzi's model has offered a framework to illustrate the structure of George's narrative. It also demonstrates how George makes sense of the events in her story. From George's perspective the narrative illustrates that even after the repeal of Section 28 homophobic prejudice and practice was still evident in the school workplace. This is despite the protagonist's behaviour being severely threatening to George as an individual, and disruptive to the school as an organisation. As Ferfolja (2009, p. 381) observes:

> …teachers' concerns regarding potential discrimination are not necessarily allayed by anti-discrimination legislation alone, which may be ineffective if not reinforced by school administrations. Indeed, laws may police explicit discrimination but do not necessarily halt discriminatory covert acts.

The narrative also contains elements of evaluation which are conflicting. George, having been fearful both for both herself and the classroom assistant, expresses shock that the Headteacher and Local Authority did not address the stalking more appropriately. However, she also judges herself as 'weak': perhaps George feels she should have been more assertive with the classroom assistant in stating that she would not have an intimate relationship with her rather than "trying to be nice about it". In addition, or perhaps alternatively, George may see herself as weak for not seeking help more insistently: either from the Union or from the Headteacher and Local Authority. Her explanation is that she 'didn't want to cause a fuss'. George concludes her narrative by trying to take a positive from the experience: it makes her realise how she would treat staff "now" as a Headteacher herself.

8.1.1 George's narrative: using psycho-social method

In reflecting on how George ended her story (in trying to 'take good from bad') it seemed that her narrative 'faded out'. As she spoke, she lacked the passion and emphasis she had demonstrated earlier in the narration. It was at this point, therefore, that I considered referencing Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) psycho-social approach to further analyse George's data. As Hollway and Jefferson argue the researcher may miss something of significance if she fails "to notice inconsistencies, contradictions, changes of tone and other textual interruptions…" (p. 53).

As noted in Chapter Three Hollway and Jefferson adopt a particular theoretical construct of the research participant. Firstly, each individual has a "*Gestalt* (a whole that is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda)…" (p. 31). Although George's narrative could be read as coherent and complete within itself, I wondered what further illumination might be gained by making connections with other salient parts of her interview.

Secondly, Hollway and Jefferson argue that

> …threats to the self-create anxiety, and indeed this is a fundamental proposition in psychoanalytic theory, where anxiety is viewed as being inherent in the human condition. For psychoanalysis, anxiety precipitates defences against the threats it poses to the self and these operate at a largely unconscious level (p.17).

Thus, from this perspective it is the human condition to be anxious and unconsciously defensive against threats to the self. Hollway and Jefferson deploy this approach to theorise "…how conflict, suffering and threats to self…operate on the psyche in ways that affect people's positioning and investment in certain discourses rather than others. This will help us to understand the workings of the psyche and the social simultaneously" (p. 17).

In re-examining George's narrative with reference to Hollway and Jefferson I shall focus on her desire not to "cause a fuss" about the classroom assistant's stalking behaviour. On reflection it seems to be entirely reasonable that George should "cause a fuss" if that meant: (a) insisting that the classroom assistant stops her intrusive and passive-aggressive behaviour; and (b) asking those with senior responsibility in the organisation act to stop extreme and inappropriate behaviour in the workplace, and (c) seeking external union help when internal requests for help have failed. In considering 'not causing a fuss' I shall pay particular attention to the intersections between George's lesbian identity, familial and social relationships, her professional identity and vulnerability.

I began the interview with George by inviting her to "tell me a bit about you growing up, to set you in context…". George focused immediately on her school days, her sexuality and her relationship with her parents. George identified as lesbian and came out around the age of fourteen: she described her parents as having significantly different responses to her sexuality. Her mother "found it [her sexuality] excruciating to talk

about" and "it took my mum A LOT of years to get used to it…". As a consequence, and also because George felt she had been "toughened up" by attending boarding school, she "didn't go to…mum for any emotional help".

In contrast George spoke of her father as "a lovely man…he's, you know, a very inclusive person". Perhaps because of this George identified more closely with her father than her mother:

> …so…I was quite a 'daddy's daughter' actually…because I was a **good** girl…so I was very quiet and…amenable…and calm…

George identified personal and professional consequences that stemmed from these differing parental responses. From a personal perspective she became 'disconnected' from her parents: "[there was]…at least a ten year period where I wasn't estranged…but where I would only come [home]…twice a year…and see my parents…and we didn't really talk about much…".

It was not until much later in her life that George believed her mother had come to accept her sexuality. George argued that this change resulted from her mother returning to higher education, developing an identity beyond that of 'wife' and so "becoming the person she really was...". Consequently, George and her mother were reconciled and developed a much closer relationship.

From Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) theoretical position it could be argued that George was anxious to be approved of and not rejected because of the 'fatal flaw of…[her] lesbianism". This anxiety and desire for approval may have led her to adopt unconscious defensive strategies. Initially in relation to her mother, it could be argued that she adopted an approach described by Hollway and Jefferson as the "paranoid-schizoid splitting of good and bad…" (p. 18). Rejection of her sexuality came from her mother, acceptance and approval from her father; mother was bad, father was good. It was only much later in her life that George could appreciate the complexity of her mother's response, setting it in a context of class, education and religion. Hollway and Jefferson typify this perspective as 'depressive', suggesting that "…the depressive position involves the acknowledgement that good and bad can be contained in the same object…" (p. 18).

As well as identifying the impact of her parents' response to her sexuality on her as a daughter, George made a direct link with her professional life. George felt her lesbianism: "…has made a difference to me career-wise because I always felt I had to work harder to be the *good* daughter…". George's emphasis in this statement is on the word 'good' rather than on 'daughter'. However, it is striking that she says 'daughter' rather than 'teacher'; perhaps this was a slip of the tongue that betrayed an unconscious belief about the relationship between family and work. Alternatively, George may consciously hold this belief (although she never expanded further or explored the idea explicitly in any part of the interview).

What impact, then, did George's efforts to be the 'good daughter' in the school workplace have on her professional life? As I have discussed earlier in the thesis George recognised that the legal and social context in which she started teaching would make it difficult to be overtly lesbian. On the other hand, she felt unable to be an 'invisible' lesbian in school because of her butch appearance (which she felt unable to disguise). Consequently, George determined to excel as a teacher. Just as being calm, quiet and amenable was the pay-off for being daddy's *'good'* (visibly lesbian) girl at home, perhaps being an excellent teacher was her defensive strategy to manage her anxiety about not being perceived as the good, visibly lesbian 'daughter' in the school workplace.

However, when considering parent-child relationships there may be other unconscious factors to consider in the inter-relationship between family and professional life. For example, Hollway and Jefferson (2000, pp. 43 – 44) observe that "there are influential unconscious dynamics in organisational structures that often mimic the power and other emotional dynamics of family relations".

In recounting her response to the classroom assistant's stalking, it may be that George not only recognised the Headteacher's professional role within the organisation, but also unconsciously viewed this older woman as the matriarch. Even before the events recounted in her narrative George had clashed with the Headteacher, feeling that that Headteacher's criticism of her professional practice was potentially based on homophobic views. Thus, it may have been that for George there was an unconscious resonance between the relationship with the

Headteacher and with her mother. Initially George's mother did not acknowledge or engage with her lesbianism. Perhaps this resulted in an unconscious need for George to defend herself against the anxiety generated, and so she became self-reliant and solved her own problems. It is possible, then, that when the 'matriarchal' Headteacher did not accept or protect George as a lesbian under threat, George attempted to 'find her own solution'. Hence in the first instance, 'not causing a fuss' meant that George reacted by "trying to be nice" to the classroom assistant and offering the telephone number for a LGBTQ helpline.

As the situation escalated George become increasingly fearful and decided she did need assistance from the Headteacher. This was an appropriate and professional course of action. However, the Headteacher's response seems inadequate and did not provide a resolution to the situation. Just as earlier in her life George did not approach her mother for emotional support, perhaps "not making a fuss" reflected George's limited expectation of the Headteacher's willingness and ability to support and help her in a difficult situation.

However, as I re-visited George's transcript to analyse it through a psycho-social lens, I noticed my role in creating, or compounding, a particular version of the narrative. Following Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p. 9) I began to reflect upon "the role of the interviewer… in the making of meaning".

It is evident in the narrative that I was shocked at some of the content. I also accepted, or perhaps colluded with George's view that the Headteacher's inadequate response to the stalking was rooted in homophobia; for example, I asked a leading question when I wondered what the Headteacher might have done if the stalker had been a man. The Headteacher may have been homophobic, or she may have disliked / disapproved of George for some other reason. Alternatively, the Headteacher may 'simply' have been a weak leader with poor people management skills. On the other hand, the Headteacher may have been homophobic *and* a poor leader and manager. Perhaps George, with my implicit support, was deploying "a defensive strategy, a strategy of intellectualising, of 'managing' painfully confusing emotional experiences through words which offer (apparently) the comfort of comprehension and the prospect of control" (Hollway and Jefferson 2000, p. 31).

What, then, does it add to the thesis by examining George's narrative from a psycho-social perspective? Despite a more supportive legal and regulatory context George demonstrated her vulnerability as a lesbian in a position of school leadership. Social relations in the school were both influenced by and shaped George's performance of her lesbian identity and professional role. In turn these led to risk and vulnerability for George. Arguably these difficult or toxic social relationships, and the vulnerability they spawned, disrupted George's ability to realise a liveable professional life.

At the immediate and personal level George was vulnerable because her visible lesbianism attracted the unwanted and threatening attention of the classroom assistant. In her professional role, at an organisational level, George became vulnerable because she lacked appropriate support from the Headteacher and Local Authority.

Additionally, it is also possible that George's vulnerability was influenced by her inner, unconscious defences. For example, I have considered whether George's response to the Headteacher may have mirrored an earlier version of George's relationship with her mother. While over time her relationship with her mother changed, George's view of the Headteacher did not, rather it ossified. Thus, to George the Headteacher became totemic of poor professional practice. In response, as described in the previous chapter, George performed a daily ritual of rejection when she removed her jacket. Potentially such behaviour, although its unconscious purpose may have been to defend, made George vulnerable to emotional exhaustion and burn-out.

In the next section I consider a narrative offered by Wendy. She reflects on a staffing issue which I shall again examine via Cortazzi's (1993) evaluation model and then with reference to Holloway and Jefferson psycho-social perspective (2000).

8.2   Wendy's narrative: using narrative analysis

Wendy's narrative also describes an intersection between lesbian and professional identities in the context of troubled and troubling social relations in the workplace. As a consequence of these social relations Wendy became potentially vulnerable. However, where I argued that

George was vulnerable *because* of her visibility, I shall suggest that Wendy was vulnerable because she sought to mask her lesbianism in the workplace.

During the interview I asked Wendy whether she had ever managed LGBTQ staff, either as a Headteacher or in her subsequent role. She responded with the abstract that begins her narrative:

> …I did, actually, over a period of time, have some problems with a couple of my staff…some women…

Wendy indicates she is going to tell a tale of 'trouble' relating to female staff members. She then provides background information in the orientation phase:

> W   …and I'd forgotten all about it…as time goes by…erm…and I think that…some of the problems between staff were exacerbated by the fact that I had one girl who…erm…was very flirtatious…and a bit predatory…

> K   So this woman was gay or…

> W   She was gay…she was gay…young girl and she was very, very flirtatious…with other women…and, er…and again she…I eventually promoted her…to a senior, to a team leader and she…yes, I don't know… (thoughtful for a while).

> K   So, she was flirtatious with other staff? How was that?

> W   Well she would…erm…she would focus on them, if she fancied them she would focus on somebody and……and was always around them, always making sure that if two members of staff had to go out in the minibus, to go swimming or something, it was her…she would always choose the other woman to go with her in the team…erm…she'd end up sitting next to her at staff meetings, you know…and all the staff perhaps, at some time or other, would be out in the garden having a coffee, or after work a few of them used to go out to the pub, that sort of thing…so she took every opportunity that she could to just…follow them round I think..

At the start of this section Wendy uses an external explicit evaluation to summarise the essence of her story: there was difficulty amongst staff members because a young lesbian was flirtatious and predatory towards other, often previously heterosexual, women. Wendy provides details of the 'flirtatious' woman explaining that she had been promoted to a senior position; she also starts to describe how this woman targeted and pursued other women.

Wendy moves to the complication, or content of her narrative. She describes how the 'flirtatious' member of staff (Lisa) and another female member of staff (Mel) began a relationship and the consequences that followed:

W   There was only one situation that happened…I'm just trying to think of it now…there was one situation…erm…and I'd almost forgotten all about it, it's strange isn't it…she befriended a member of staff who was having problems in her marriage…and who left her husband and had run away… and I know that Lisa, and a few of them, were very, very supportive of Mel…very, very supportive of Mel…and Lisa particularly. Mel was a very…she was somebody who came in off the street, she didn't have any experience with that kind of work, and I gambled and gave her a job…taught her on the job and trained her up…NVQ…sent her on every course because I could see the potential…and ultimately, she became one of my senior staff and was excellent…but anyway, I eventually…Mel came in to see me…asked to see me…'cos I always had an open-door policy…if you're a good manager…and I…staff would come to me for anything…they knew if they had a problem, they could go to Wendy and Wendy would sort it…and if Wendy couldn't sort it, she'd find somebody else who would…and I can remember Mel coming to me and…erm…telling me that she was in a relationship with Lisa…

K   Right…you hadn't known…

W   No, I hadn't known anything about it and, apparently, a gang of them…after a staff Christmas party had all gone back to somebody's house and Lisa and Mel had ended up on the sofa together, kissing…so that's the story. And it had been going on for about a month and Mel came to me and told me about it. Lisa didn't, I had absolutely no idea. So…erm…I basically…well, Mel felt that she had a responsibility to tell me that she…that her and Lisa had started this relationship…she was tearful, she was upset…you know, I can only imagine what women would go through in that situation…to come to terms with your sexuality or whether you're just exploring it, I don't know. Anyway, I'm going off the point, aren't I…she was very emotional, very tearful…she told me all about it…erm… and she basically said: 'I don't know what's going to happen'…erm…'Do you think I ought to leave?'…

K   She offered that, did she?

W   Yeah…and I said: 'Well, hold on a minute…you've got enough on your plate, at the moment…this might just be a one-minute fling. As long as it doesn't come into the workplace…this is your private life…as long as…erm…I said: 'Do other staff know?'…'No, nobody knows'…she didn't want anybody to know, so it was basically left that: 'This is your private life, this is your personal life, keep it

where it is…I don't want anything here within the establishment…and if anything happens that I may feel is inappropriate…then that will be the time to sit down and say: 'What do we do next?'…you know, and suggest about her moving on or whatever…and I said: 'It'll be interesting to see if Lisa comes to tell me'…but Lisa didn't…

K   Right…

W   And as it transpired…I don't know how long they were together for…a couple of months…then Lisa finished with her and Mel was devastated…absolutely devastated…absolutely mortified…er…oh dear, I had to deal with that…you know, to help her through that, although at that point I think she'd told a couple of her close friends…nobody at work knew…

K   There were no behaviours in the workplace that…

W   No

K   …that you were concerned about?

W   No, none at all…and then, that was that. And then after a while, I don't know how long it was, I had a knock on the door and in comes Lisa. Quite sort of serious, quite…er…'You've got a problem, you've got to deal with it…this is your problem'…

K   What was the problem, then?

W   The problem is 'Mel is stalking me'…And, I had to say: 'What do you mean Mel is stalking you? Why would she stalk you?'…and, you know: 'This is another member of staff you're accusing…is this happening in work?'…'No, it's not'…'Is it happening on my land? Is this happening on my land…on my business?' 'No, it's not…it's happening outside'…and I said: 'What's going on then?'…so she told me the story about them getting together…as far as she was concerned she liked Mel, but you know, it was a fling and etc. etc. etc…that Mel had taken it very badly when she had finished with her and that, as far as she was concerned, nobody knew about this fling with Mel…and apparently Mel would wait for her after work…and try and talk to her, crying:…'Take me back, take me back' type of thing…and 'I really need to talk to you'…'Can we go to the pub somewhere…can you just listen to me…talk to me?' and, er…I think Lisa did that a couple of times but said: 'No, this isn't going anywhere…I don't want to be with you'…that type of thing. And…and I don't know, really, thinking about it now whether Lisa was trying to cause problems…trying to get Mel the sack or something…Lisa went out with a number of girls who'd never been with a woman before…so the conquest, the thrill of the chase and that would've plateaued and she'd be off to her next conquest…she was out of her depth with Mel because Mel fell in love with her...

K   Mm

> W   I found out many years later that Lisa had a bit of…er…an
> unkind, nasty streak and I don't know whether she'd come
> to me to cause problems for Mel…so she might genuinely
> have been trying to talk to her…whatever…as far as
> stalking is concerned… I don't know whether it was
> stalking but what I said to her was: 'This is your business;
> this is your personal business…if you are that worried
> then you need to go the police. The police will take it very,
> very seriously and that would be my advice if you think
> you can't deal with it…if it does get serious…and,
> however, once it comes into work…once it's on my land
> and if I see anything happening or you tell me it has, then I
> would have to deal with it…I would have to follow
> procedures and policies…'…and I would've done it…but I
> would have had the police coming to the door…the staff
> would see it…the parents…the village…that would have
> been…that would have been…horrendous…imagine the
> fall-out from that…

Cortazzi (1993, p. 46) suggests that the complication may be "an
extended section" which is the case here in Wendy's narrative. She uses
a range of evaluative devices to illustrate the twists and turns at the heart
of her story. Wendy prided herself on her open-door policy and that
members of staff felt confident speaking to her about problems. It was in
this context Mel approached Wendy to discuss her relationship with Lisa:
an explicit external evaluation.

Wendy illustrates her approach to management where she quotes herself
addressing Mel. She uses this device to illustrate how she gathered
information about the relationship before taking any action. Wendy also
makes it clear, through using the same linguistic device, her expectations
of staff and what they might expect from her.

In the next part of the sequence Wendy reveals the end of the
relationship between Mel and Lisa. Wendy again uses external, explicit
evaluation to explain "and Mel was devastated…absolutely
devastated…absolutely mortified…er…oh dear, I had to deal with
that…you know, to help her through that…". This is consistent with
Wendy's earlier portrayal of herself as a manager who 'sorted things'.

The next twist in this tale is Lisa's accusation that, since the end of their
relationship, Mel was stalking her. Wendy uses an "interpretative
remark…*attributed to any other character* in the narrative" (Cortazzi
1993, p. 48) to make this part of the narrative clear. Again, Wendy
illustrates how she gathered information about what was being reported
to her by quoting her conversation with Lisa. As she had with Mel, Wendy

makes clear what Lisa can expect of her and illustrates this by quoting herself. The similarity in the way she treats both Mel and Lisa is suggestive of Wendy's egalitarian approach to leadership and management noted in the previous chapter. Wendy also indicates that she would use policy and procedure to address inappropriate behaviour at work, while suggesting the police as a possible source of support. Again, Wendy paints a consistent picture of her leadership practice: if she cannot solve a problem, she will find (or suggest) an alternative solution. However, Wendy feared the possibility of having to involve the police in case clients' parents and local neighbours became aware of the situation, so potentially causing reputational damage to the organisation.

Wendy then interrupts her narrative "to step outside the recounting to tell listeners what the point is" (Cortazzi 1993, p. 48):

> …and I don't know, really, thinking about it now whether Lisa was trying to cause problems…trying to get Mel the sack or something…

Wendy doubts the truth of Lisa's claim that Mel is stalking her and wonders if her intent is malicious. Wendy again steps outside of the narrative to say that later she discovered that Lisa "had a nasty streak" and re-iterates the possibility that Lisa "was trying to cause problems for Mel".

In the evaluation stage Wendy provides explicit clarification of the purpose of the narrative.

> W   But, you know, in that situation…it's all down to evidence…it was just Lisa's word against Mel's…
>
> K   How did all that feel for you?
>
> W   I think I felt really angry…no, not really angry, I shouldn't say that…I hadn't had experience…I led a very…(laughs)…narrow, sheltered life and it was beyond my experience of…of knowing anybody…or seeing anybody being flirty and, you know cavalier in their attitude to relationships…and this that and the other…so it was totally and utterly beyond me. And…so…it was a bit of a wake-up call, I suppose being exposed to what I assumed would be…what went on in some sub-cultures in the gay community…I don't know…
>
> K   You said, but you stopped yourself…you said you were very angry…what were you angry about?
>
> W   I think shocked and knowing, afterwards, the number of people Lisa actually flirted with and had relationships with. She did prey on straight women…erm…and I think

> must've, you know, been having affairs with a good four or five of my staff…over the years…I think she saw them as easy fodder, you know what I mean…you work so closely with people in that type of environment…she almost exploited it…she used work as a playground…she thought she was untouchable…it was difficult because I knew her parents from the village…they knew us…It sounds horrible, really, when you think about it…and it was nothing to do with the fact she was gay…if it had been a bloke, or a woman that was chatting up all the men staff…then I would have felt exactly the same.

Wendy clarifies several key purposes of the narrative. Central to the tale is Wendy's shock and anger that a senior member of staff could exploit the workplace and other women working there. Wendy was shocked to discover the number of colleagues with whom Lisa had relationships. She was dismayed by Lisa's "cavalier" attitude and predatory tactics. She was shaken by Lisa's apparent belief that there would be no repercussions for such behaviour in the workplace: this was complicated by the fact that Wendy "knew her parents from the village". It is possible that Wendy felt that Lisa had violated the culture of the organisation and Wendy's own trust and support. Perhaps she felt unable address the behaviour because she knew Lisa's parents. I shall come back to this aspect of Wendy's narrative when I examine it from a psycho-social perspective.

Finally, it is important to Wendy to clarify that neither the gender nor the sexual orientation of the protagonists was relevant to her management of events. She would have adopted a similar approach whatever the gender or orientation of the staff members. For Wendy this was not just a tale about inappropriate lesbian behaviour in the workplace; rather, it illustrates emotional exploitation of one person by another and Wendy's response as a leader and as an individual.

Wendy was prompted to describe the resolution of the narrative by a question.

> K   So, how was that scenario resolved?
>
> W   It was resolved…erm…interestingly enough…erm…I think Mel had some kind of…she had quite a bit of time off…for some illness and for the life of me I can't remember what it was… but it was legitimate……er…and then eventually when she came back, I think she had decided to sort her life out and sort herself out and she actually resigned and handed in her notice…

> K   Mm…and what about Lisa?

> W   I found out much later there was another member of staff…she split up her relationship and just had a fling with this woman…so, yes…a shame really…not a very nice character, really…not a nice person…and quite sad really…she had that flaw in her personality…

Thus, the story was resolved by Mel's resignation, although Lisa continued to pursue relationships with other colleagues. For Wendy the sad conclusion was that Lisa was "not a very nice character", that she was "flawed".

Wendy adds a brief coda that concludes the narrative and brings attention back to the present:

> W   …it all feels a long time ago now…

8.2.1   Wendy's narrative: using psycho-social method

As I illustrated with George's narrative, deploying different analytic techniques with the same data can enrich and extend the core arguments of my thesis. Therefore, I shall take three aspects of Wendy's narrative and examine them following Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) psycho-social perspective. In particular I will consider:

- Wendy's view of herself as a leader and manager
- Wendy's relationship to the organisation
- The impact of social relations.

In taking the idea of *Gestalt* as presented by Hollway and Jefferson (2000), Wendy's narrative can be understood more fully by linking it with other parts of her interview. In the narrative Wendy presents herself as a people-focused, problem-solving manager:

> …staff would come to me for anything…they knew if they had a problem, they could go to Wendy and Wendy would sort it…and if Wendy couldn't sort it, she'd find somebody else who would…

This is consistent with Wendy's view of herself, expressed elsewhere in the interview, that she was a successful and effective leader and manager:

> …I was very blessed in my career, very lucky…but I worked damned hard and I always enjoyed…my role, my leadership role…and being in the forefront of leadership developments in special schools…and I always had a very high profile…around

> the county, and at one point nationally…erm…and that gave me a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure…

In telling the story of Lisa and Mel, Wendy describes in detail how she managed the situation and exemplifies her 'investment' in viewing herself as professionally competent and effective. Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p. 13) observe:

> By investments, we mean someone's desires and anxieties, probably not conscious or intentional, which motivate the specific positions they take up and the selection of accounts through which they portray themselves.

Wendy was invested in understanding herself, *and* being perceived, as professionally competent. Therefore, one purpose of Wendy's narrative may have been to demonstrate her professional competence, albeit unconsciously, to me as a fellow Headteacher.

As well as illustrating Wendy's view of herself as a manager, adopting psycho-social analysis may exemplify Wendy's relationship to the organisation that she had created. After Wendy retired from Headship on the grounds of ill-health, she re-habilitated herself and developed the education-related, social care business described in her narrative. Wendy observed that 'every cloud has a silver lining…it was like a phoenix…erm…rising from the ashes…'. Thus, her business offered Wendy a way to regain a successful and meaningful professional identity: her investment in herself as professionally competent remained intact.

It is possible that since the business had 'saved' Wendy so she must protect it: perhaps she developed another subconscious investment. The Lisa / Mel narrative illustrates this:

> …'is this happening in work?'…'No, it's not'…'Is it happening on my land? Is this happening on my land…on my business?'

Wendy's emphatic and repeated use of the word 'land' creates a sense of 'sacred' land, somewhere that must be protected from violation. In managing Lisa and Mel, Wendy may have been 'juggling' conflicting investments. On the one hand she was invested in seeing herself, and being seen, as a pro-active problem-solving leader; on the other hand, Wendy was committed to protecting her business:

> I would have to follow procedures and policies…'…and I would've done it…but I would have had the police coming to the door…the staff would see it…the parents…the village…that would have

> been…that would have been…horrendous…imagine the fall-out
> from that…

Thus, to follow procedures, as Wendy would have wanted to do as an effective manager, might risk damaging the reputation of the business. The police may have crossed Wendy's land and come to the door; the outside world may have questioned and criticised what was happening within the walls.

Finally, taking this psycho-social approach to re-analysing Wendy's narrative demonstrates an intersection between Wendy's professional identity, her lesbian identity and social relations. Wendy considered that Lisa used the workplace as a 'playground' for developing multiple relationships with other woman, without regard for the individual or organisational consequences. According to Wendy, Lisa believed herself to beyond reproach or sanction: she believed she was 'untouchable'.

At first glance the proposition that Lisa could not be sanctioned seems strange given the effort Wendy has taken to demonstrate herself as a capable, solution-focused leader and as the protector of her business. However, she continues:

> …it was difficult because I knew her parents from the
> village…they knew us…

Taken at face value this could mean that Wendy felt uncomfortable having to manage a delicate staffing matter that involved the daughter of friends. However elsewhere in the interview Wendy described herself as "brave" in a professional context, so fear of tackling difficult situations seems unlikely. Thus, I began to wonder whether the difficulty might be that Lisa, or her parents knew about, and might 'weaponize', Wendy's lesbianism against her.

Earlier in the interview Wendy had discussed at length how she hid her sexuality from the outside world:

> I've always been a very good actress…I've always assumed that
> nobody's going to find out because we…I'm very good at hiding
> it…and wherever we went…or wherever I went…there were
> always men around me…

I went on to ask Wendy whether she thought that friends and colleagues made the assumption that she and her partner might be a couple:

> Well, they were never told…but yes…I suppose perhaps they did
> make assumptions…

Wendy's investment in masking her lesbian identity may have made her vulnerable. She was personally vulnerable to exposure as lesbian should Lisa, or her parents, 'gossip' or speculate about the nature of Wendy's relationship with her partner. Wendy was also professionally vulnerable: knowing Lisa's parents socially may have inhibited her approach to personnel management within work.

8.3   Discussion

In examining Wendy and George's narratives in this chapter I have sought to address the fourth research question: 'How do lesbian women who lead schools navigate visibility?'

George was visible as a lesbian throughout her career, seemingly with little difficulty even during the Section 28 years. This changed when her lesbian and professional identities became embroiled with a set of toxic relationships. George's lesbian visibility led to vulnerability: visibility posed a risk to her individual safety and well-being, and to her status as Deputy Headteacher.

Furthermore, by following Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) psycho-social approach to data analysis, I have suggested that subconscious and affective factors may have influenced George. For example, old subconscious constructs of George's relationship with her mother (regarding her lesbian identity) may have informed George's relationship with the Headteacher in her narrative. Potentially, therefore, George was vulnerable to the possibility of repeating behaviours that were either no longer helpful or that were ineffective in a professional context.

Thus, I have argued that a particular set of social relationships collided with George's lesbian identity, with her professional identity and, in so doing, disrupted her ability to generate a liveable professional life.

I have also examined an inter-section between social relations and Wendy's beliefs about the nature of her lesbian and professional identities. In managing a difficult and dysfunctional relationship between members of staff, Wendy found her identities unsettled and potentially threatened. She was a solution-focused manager, committed to the protection of her business and the people within it. However, these investments were disrupted because one of the protagonists could have

compromised her lesbian invisibility. Where George's lesbian visibility became vulnerability in the professional context, Wendy's invisibility risked becoming her professional nemesis.

In the next and final chapter, I shall summarise the findings of my research bringing together theoretical and practical insights. Crucially I shall demonstrate the original conceptual and applied contributions of my work.

9   Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis has explored the nature and degree of visibility amongst lesbian teachers in the U.K. over the last forty years. Specifically, I asked four research questions:

> Has a changing political and legal context influenced the visibility of lesbian women who work in U.K. schools?

> Are there additional or other influences on the visibility of lesbian women in the school workplace?

> What strategies do lesbian women in the school workplace use to manage their visibility? Have these strategies changed over time?

> How do lesbian women who lead schools navigate visibility?

To answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative research project that involved a series of semi-structured, narrative interviews with nine self-identifying lesbians. These women were or had been teachers / school leaders. I then used thematic, narrative (Cortazzi 1993) and psycho-social analysis (Hollway and Jefferson 2000) to understand and present the data.

The conceptual basis for this study considers 'lesbian' to be a social and discursive construction, where intersections of identity 'create' the person. Lesbian visibility has been presented as relational, contextual and adjustable: that is, where there are positive social relations and a safe context, visibility can be calibrated upwards to highlight a lesbian identity (for example Cox et al. 2009). Where those 'safety features' are lacking, visibility may be adjusted downwards to mute or camouflage lesbianism.

This final chapter concludes the thesis by doing three things:

> Summarising the key findings of the study;

> Taking a reflexive perspective on the methods and approach;

> Exploring the contribution to original knowledge and presenting insights generated by this research.

9.1   Summarising the key findings of the study

In examining the participants' lesbian visibility in U.K. schools over the last forty years, this research re-asserts that many lesbian teachers were fearful of being identified as lesbian before and during the Section 28 years. The participants in this study feared prejudice and dismissal, and therefore most of them denied or camouflaged their lesbianism during that time: again, a feature consistent with other research. Thus, this work confirms that, as Edwards et al. (2014) argue, Section 28 did act as a 'panoptic schema of surveillance' and generated a "coerced form of…*invisibilisation"* (p. 2).

However not all participants could, or would, camouflage their lesbian identities despite Section 28 being statutory. They developed differential approaches to identity management even from the start of their teaching careers: they were out to colleagues but not to pupils and their parents. Thus, these participants adjusted their lesbian visibility according to the social groupings within the school.

This upwards calibration of visibility at the start of a teaching career appears atypical in relation to earlier research (for example Nixon and Givens 2007). In addition, the findings are distinct from other work because they suggest that differential identity management strategies are deployed according to different social groups, rather than according to the various spaces within the school (for example Rudoe 2010).

The one participant who felt she *could not* mask her lesbian identity suggested that her masculinised lesbianism was essential to her identity and that attempts at 'feminisation' were discordant. Consequently, some of the identity strategies available to other participants (for example passing and covering) were unavailable to her. As a result, this participant developed the compensatory strategy of excelling as a teacher.

This research project has also illustrated the significance of other influences on the visibility of lesbian teachers, even while Section 28 provided an oppressive legal context; for example, the culture and location of the school, social relations and individual psychological conditions were all influential.

9.1   Summarising the key findings of the study

With the repeal of Section 28 and gradual introduction of equalities legislation many participants felt greater recognition and protection as lesbian teachers. As a consequence, most of the participants felt more confident in declaring their lesbianism and enhancing their visibility in the school workplace: that is, they felt more able engage with 'identity politics', integrating their lesbian and professional identities to educate and empower pupils. However, this was not the case for everyone: again, the culture of the school, social relations and personal beliefs were significant. Thus, the scope to engage with identity politics in the professional (school) context is limited by the context.

Furthermore, with a changing external context and growing personal confidence and conviction, several participants felt able to come out to pupils. In some instances, this was to address homophobic bullying; in other cases, it was to support pupils as they fashioned their own (sexual) identities and responded to the diverse sexualities in society. I have suggested that in doing so, these participants integrated their lesbian identity with their teaching identity in the service of their pupils. Often these participants appeared to receive recognition and validation from their pupils.

In discussing pupils, teaching and learning (particularly since the repeal of Section 28 and introduction of equalities legislation) many participants noted the greater inclusion of alternative sexualities within the sex and relationship curriculum. They also considered that while not eradicated, homophobic bullying has been reduced in schools: because of changed legal and social norms and through the implementation of anti-bullying policies in schools. However, most participants believed that anti-homophobic practice was inconsistent, both across and within schools. They argued, therefore, for greater and wider-ranging staff development to help ensure that all staff members are skilled in, and take a consistent approach to, tackling homophobic behaviour.

This study is consistent with others when it demonstrates the influence of social relations in determining the nature and degree of an individual's visibility in the school. Where participants enjoyed positive social relations and supportive professional relations, they were more likely to adjust their visibility to enhance their lesbianism. As argued earlier, for many of the participants this meant adopting, in the first instance, a

differentiated approach to coming out: lesbianism was first declared to colleagues and only later, if at all, to pupils and their parents.

However, this strategy was not without its dangers and problems. For example, several participants reported that information about their lesbianism was shared throughout the school: the boundaries between the social groups in the school were porous and information about individual sexuality spread to 'un-intended' places. I have suggested that where information about an individual's lesbianism was shared without consent, this could be categorised as 'coerced visibilisation'. Discussion of this concept is extended in section three of this chapter.

In considering the strategies deployed by participants to manage and calibrate their visibility, I have paid particular attention to the role of dress and appearance. For several participants there appeared to be a weak link between dressing to camouflage a lesbian identity and actually remaining unrecognised. I speculated that with the development of a more inclusive society and wider representation of LGBTQ citizens perhaps heterosexual citizens are more able to recognise a greater range of identities and sexualities.

The consideration of dress and appearance also introduced a discussion about lesbian leaders and visibility (the fourth research question). I argued for complexity at the intersection of lesbian identity and professional identity which may be symbolised and performed through the 'Headteacher's suit'.

For one participant the suit represented a synergy between her performances of lesbian and Headteacher. She chose to mute the visibility of her lesbian identity by appropriating the contemporary feminized version of the Headteacher's suit. Furthermore, this dress code was consistent with, and symbolic of her beliefs about leadership and management.

The other participant was more troubled at the intersection of lesbian and Headteacher. She adapted the Headteacher's suit to incorporate her masculinised lesbian identity and then discarded the suit jacket to symbolise her beliefs about school leadership. These actions made her less visible, both as a Headteacher and as a lesbian woman. I suggested that this participant struggled to find a comfortable fit between performance of butch lesbian and of Headteacher.

Finally, through analysis of lengthy narratives I argued that lesbian visibility can result in professional vulnerability: one participant was targeted and harassed because of her visible lesbianism. However, I also suggested that lesbian *invisibility* can generate professional vulnerability: the other Headteacher became personally vulnerable to being outed but also professionally vulnerable to being compromised as a consequence of masking her lesbianism.

9.2 Methodological reflexivity

In this section I examine how my choice of methods and approach influenced the research outcomes. Corlett and Mavin (2018, p. 384) suggest that if reflexivity is understood to be "a process of opening ourselves up to scrutiny (Cunliffe, 2003), then this involves questioning the way we do our research (Cunliffe, 2011) and 'understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes' (Hardy et al., 2001: 533)". Thus, this section extends the examples of 'methodological reflexivity' found in Chapter Three (Methodology and Methods).

Since completing the research project, I have considered the recruitment of participants and how I conducted the interviews. For example, in relation to the recruitment of participants, it would have been interesting to have interviewed younger lesbians in addition to the nine women who took part in the study. On reflection I had time within the project to continue to search for younger participants: although it did not feel so during the course of the research. While snowballing produced the current participant group it may have been productive to use social media as a recruitment tool to extend the study to younger lesbian teachers.

Interviewing younger participants may have generated perspectives on teaching well after (and perhaps with no knowledge of) the Section 28 years and on growing up in a more permissive society.

In reflecting upon the process of interviewing, I would have liked the opportunity to conduct more than a single interview with the participants. In this way, as my conceptual understanding developed through further reading and data analysis, I might have had the opportunity to refine, deepen or 'check out' data. To achieve this, I would have moved from very open-ended to more focused questioning.

In Chapter Three Section One I discuss my commitment to research methods that capture the complexity of the lived worlds of the participants in a way that is true to each of them (as well as offering analytic distance and intellectual independence). As I reflect on my methodological approach, I note Corlett and Marvin's (2018, p. 393) suggestion that:

> Reflexivity 'systematically takes stock of and inserts the positions and perspectives of spokespersons in social-scientific reports about the world. Reflexive texts tend to reiterate the question: Who says so?' (Pels, 2000: 2, emphasis in original).

As I come to the end of my research and in the interest of confirming 'who says so', I now feel that it may have been instructive to offer participants an opportunity to comment on my representation and interpretation of their data while the thesis was in draft form. Engaging in such a process may have both confirmed and challenged my analysis.

Finally, in Chapter Three Section Six I describe how and why I extended my data analysis to include psycho-social evaluation (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). However, I also clarify that I am 'borrowing' from Hollway and Jefferson's approach. If I were to extend this study, or conduct another similar study, it might be helpful to be more fully immersed in that analytic tradition to enable me to offer even more authoritative analyses and robust findings.

The next section of this chapter closes my thesis by stating its contribution to knowledge and the theoretical and practical insights it offers.

9.3 Contribution to knowledge, theoretical and practical insights

In this section I demonstrate how my research makes unique contributions to both lesbian and educational studies.

This study has asked what influences lesbian visibility in the school workplace and what strategies lesbian teachers deploy to manage their visibility in the professional context. It has also considered whether identity management strategies have changed over time, particularly given a changing legal and social context.

In addressing these questions, I have understood a 'lesbian identity' to be socially constructed and discursive (for example, Hall 1996; Wilton 1995; Wilton 2004) and intersectional (for example Gilchrist et al. 2010). Furthermore, I have argued that visibility is relational, contextual and adjustable (for example Cox et al. 2009).

A key concept developed in this study is that of a 'liveable professional life'. In considering how lesbian and ethnic minority women may negotiate "the multiple strands of their identities in place and through relations with others" (Cox et al. 2009, p. 189), Cox et al. argued that "women perform and (re-)iterate social identifications…[to]… manage 'liveable lives'" (pp. 175 – 176). Furthermore, Cox et al. define the concept of 'liveable lives':

> Liveable lives involve both being able to be literally alive – that one's life is not ended, for example, through a violent homophobic or racist attack – and being able to live in a way that is not 'loathsome' (Butler, 2004a: 3, 2004b) to the individual (pp. 175 – 176).

I have expanded the concept of a liveable life and argued for the notion of a 'liveable (lesbian) professional life'. I have suggested that for the lesbian teacher, a liveable professional life is one where she is institutionally recognised and protected from homophobic abuse and attack, through both legislation and school policy. Furthermore, a liveable professional life means that she is able to function in the workplace "in a way that is not 'loathsome'" (Cox et al. 2009, pp. 175 – 176) because day-to-day practice and social relations enable her to flourish both as a teacher and lesbian.

This research has confirmed that Section 28 constituted institutional homophobia that disrupted the possibility of lesbians achieving liveable professional lives in the school workplace. In many cases, participants calibrated their visibility downwards in order to feel safe from scrutiny and discrimination at work. However, I have also argued for a lack of linearity between legislation and the generation of a liveable professional life. For example, positive social relations could ameliorate the impact of Section 28; while personal beliefs and affect led some participants to calibrate their visibility upwards despite the legislation.

This research has also demonstrated that the repeal of Section 28 and introduction of equalities legislation has significantly enhanced the

likelihood that lesbian teachers may generate a liveable professional life. Furthermore, the participants illustrated that school policy, procedures and practice may also contribute to this process. However, the existence of equalities legislation and, more locally, anti-homophobic school policies does not guarantee a liveable professional life. Where legislation and school policy are dis-regarded or inadequately and inconsistently implemented, the possibility of a liveable professional life is disrupted. Additionally, poor social relations in school may damage the lesbian teacher's scope for achieving a liveable professional life, despite a more permissive legal and social context. This may be particularly true where she experiences 'coerced visibilisation'.

In developing the concept of 'coerced visibilisation', I have suggested that schools should be conceptualised as networks of social relations. These social relations tend to be bounded by roles within the school: pupil, teacher, parent, governor and the like. When the lesbian teacher experiences positive social relations and perceives the context to be safe, she is more likely to calibrate her visibility upwards and to declare her lesbian identity within the particular social groups of the school. For example, a number of participants in this study chose to declare their lesbianism to colleagues long before coming out to other groups in the school. Thus, these lesbian teachers calibrated their visibility differentially and contingently, and in ways they judged would best help them generate a liveable professional life.

However, this research has also demonstrated that the boundaries between the different social groups in school are porous: sometimes because individuals possess multiple roles, sometimes because social relations ignore institutional boundaries. As a consequence, lesbian teachers may have reduced agency in the calibration of their visibility. For example, where a participant came out to colleagues, she discovered that knowledge of her lesbianism had crossed group boundaries and leaked into both the parent and pupil groups. Thus, her visibility was calibrated upwards by other people and in un-intended places.

Where Edwards et al. (2014) argued that Section 28, as oppressive and discriminatory legislation, generated 'coerced invisibilisation' I have suggested that losing the power to determine individual lesbian visibility may be understood as 'coerced visibilisation'. Where individual agency is

usurped and lesbian visibility violated in this way (even if the intent is not overtly malicious), the lesbian woman is subject to assault and neo-oppression.

As well as considering the visibility of individual lesbian women who work / have worked in U.K. schools, this study offers insights into policy and professional practice in schools. For example, participants suggested that school curricula are much more likely to present LGBTQ sexualities to pupils than they were in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the participants also suggested an inconsistency across schools. Thus, schools might re-examine curricular policies to ensure that LGBTQ sexualities are presented consistently and appropriately and that they are not dependent on the commitment, or whim, of individual teachers.

Likewise, policies regarding bullying on the grounds of sexual and gender-orientation were presented as inconsistent by the participants. Schools might usefully review policies on a regular basis to ensure that all staff members are aware of them and to embed them in the culture of the school.

Furthermore, such policies could begin to address 'coerced visibilisation'. School policies might be extended to consider not only what direct language and behaviour is inappropriate, but how and when it is inappropriate to share information about someone else's sexuality.

Finally, several participants spoke about the need to extend staff training about LGBTQ sexualities beyond the teaching staff. Schools might review how they train all staff to challenge discriminatory and bullying behaviour towards LGBTQ pupils, pupil parents and staff; for example, through programmes of induction and regular equalities training.

9.4 Coda

When I started this research, I was asked if such a study could offer anything other than a personalised and retrospective view of the challenges faced by lesbian teachers in the 'bad old days'. It was suggested that, as legislation and societal norms have changed, 'everything is different, everyone is the same now'.

On the contrary, this study has illustrated that while the grip of heteronormative hegemony may be slightly looser, it retains its prevalence. Thus, to be a lesbian and teacher still requires negotiation at the intersection of professional and personal identity. The social, legislative and policy conditions may make it easier for lesbian teachers to generate a liveable professional life, but it can still be disrupted by thoughtless or malicious social relations and poor or prejudiced school leadership. We may have come a long way, but while the lesbian teacher is still notable in the school workplace; true and embedded equality has yet to be achieved. We should travel with justified hope while being alert to corrosive complacency.

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ACTS OF PARLIAMENT

Local Government [Amendment] Act 1988

Local Government Act 2003 Section 122

Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003

Civil Partnerships Act 2004

Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

Equality Act 2010

Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013

Appendix 1

Dear (name)

I have been given your name and contact details by (friend's name). I have been friends with (name) since (date) when we were neighbours.

I am currently researching the experience of lesbian / gay women who work in schools (or have worked in schools previously). I'm particularly interested in understanding whether people feel their experience has changed as society's view of LGBTQ people has changed. I attach an information leaflet which provides more detail about the project.

I wonder whether you would be willing to be interviewed to talk about your professional experience, please? An interview usually lasts for about 90 minutes – there are no set questions and it feels more like a conversation about your experience of working in school. I'm happy to travel to meet you at a time and location of your choice.

Please do contact me if you have any questions about the project. I hope we will be able to meet in due course.

Best wishes

Kathryn

Appendix 2

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY LGBTQ RESEARCH PROJECT
INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

This information sheet provides a brief description of a research project looking at the experience of lesbian / gay women who work in schools in the UK.

About the research project

The research is being carried out as part of a PhD study at Cardiff University. The study sets out to understand the particular experience of lesbian / gay women who work in schools, and, specifically it will examine these questions:

- o Has a changing political and legal context influenced the visibility of lesbian women who work in UK schools?
- o What strategies do lesbian women in the school workplace use to manage their visibility? Have these strategies changed over time?
- o How do lesbian women who lead schools navigate visibility?

About the researcher

My name is Kathryn Rhodes and I am studying for a PhD at Cardiff University. I am interested in the research questions because I am both a lesbian woman and a former Headteacher. I was a Headteacher in primary schools in Surrey and Inner London. More recently, I have worked in Higher Education, delivering leadership development programmes and providing consultancy in organisational development and leadership.

My doctoral research work is being supervised by Professor Amanda Coffey and Professor Valerie Walkerdine.

About the participants

Women who identify as lesbian / gay and work in schools (or have done so previously).

What will happen during the research project?

Initially I will contact anyone expressing an interest in participating in the study in order to explain the research in more detail. Once a potential participant has agreed that she wishes to take part, I will ask her to sign a brief consent form in accordance with University requirements.

During the course of the project participants will take part in a face-to-face interview.

The interview will cover broad areas of discussion, focusing on the particular experience and perspective of the individual participant.

How will personal information be kept safe?

With the consent of a participant I will tape record each interview to ensure that I capture and understand the detail of what is said. I will transcribe these recordings but all personal data will be anonymised. For example, names will be changed and details of workplaces will be altered so that they are not identifiable. Each participant is welcome to read the transcripts of her interviews if she wishes.

All the interview data will be kept securely. For example, written documents will be kept in a locked cupboard in the University; electronic data will be kept in a secure area of the University computer system which is password protected. Data can only be accessed by me or by an appropriate member of the University academic staff in order to assess my work.

What if a participant changes her mind about taking part in the research?

Should a participant change her mind about taking part in the research project, she is free to withdraw at any time and without giving any reason.

Further Information

You are welcome contact me should you require further information or are interested in taking part in the study:

RhodesKN@cardiff.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Kathryn Rhodes

Appendix 3

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Participant name:

Title of Project: *The changing visibility of lesbian women in U.K. schools*

Name of Researcher: Kathryn Rhodes

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I understand that the information held about me will be anonymised and held securely in accordance with the latest requirements of the Data Protection Act.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

5. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

Signature of Participant   Date

Signature of person taking consent   Date

Name of person taking consent   Date

Appendix 3

Appendix 4

Interview Prompts

Introduction

- o   Thank for taking the time to be involved.
- o   Confirm that they have read the information sheet, check if they have any questions.
- o   Go through consent form (this includes checking re tape recording, withdrawing etc.).
- o   Explain format – questions to give shape to conversation but want to be led by what participant wants to say. Have these in front of me, just to remind me of areas to cover.
- o   Confidentiality and its limits.
- o   Any questions? Happy to start?

Just to get us started could you tell me about your life when you were growing up?

- Family, location, key relationships in family, age
- School life – what was that like for you
- Significant friendships / relationships
- Identifying to self as gay, language, feelings and consequences
- Coming out, decisions, feelings and consequences
- Leaving school – what next? Describe the decision-making process; feelings

University / teacher training

- So, you're 18 / 19 at X University, what was that like for you?
- Changing as a person – gay identity, other identities – relationships at University, at home, within family – how feel about self as changing. What does lesbian mean for you?
- Out /not out / partial and implications
- Significant personal relationships
- Relationship to studies – positive / negative / stimulating etc – how this began to guide thoughts about what might do next
- Facing the world of work as a gay/lesbian woman – how was that for you?

Training as a teacher

- What drew you to the idea of becoming a teacher (may be another story if did other work before training to teach)
- Did you think about how it might be for you as a lesbian / gay student teacher and teacher?
- Describe the experience of being a trainee teacher – in college, in school, socially
- Was lesbian / gay identity managed? How did it feel? Out / not / partially?
- How experience compared with straight students?

So, coming to the end of your teacher training / have finished, tell me about your first teaching job.

- Date, location, type of school, responsibility
- How did it feel in the first weeks and months: joys and challenges?
- Was lesbian / gay identity managed? How did it feel? Out / not / partially?
- Did lesbian / gay influence relationships with students, parents, colleagues, governors, LA staff
- How work relates to personal life, domestic life, social life

Tell me about the next phase of your career?

- Need sense of how long stayed in first post; move of school and reasons; new responsibilities etc.
- Career aspirations – how did these sit with being gay / lesbian e.g. choice of place to live, work etc.
- Identity management; out etc.
- Did lesbian / gay influence relationships with students, parents, colleagues, governors, LA staff
- In what way were things different from first post – was this in any way related to lesbian / gay identity?
- How work relates to personal life, domestic life, social life

Depending on age and number of job moves, may need to repeat similar sort of probing for move into DHT and HT roles

- Need to draw out observations on whether anything changes for the individual because she's gay as she moves into more senior leadership roles.
- Also need to get sense of whether participants relate events in wider society to experience of working in school.

Some sensitizing concepts to listen for:

- How participants conceive of themselves as lesbian.
- Hiding or concealing lesbian identity in school: what influences this?
- Where people trying to hide, what strategies did they use?
- Did participants feel oppressed by and hide their lesbianism because of Section 28? What did they actually fear? Have things changed with more recent legislation? Is a professional life more comfortable for lesbian teachers now?
- The influence of social relations on individual lesbian visibility.

Closing comments: anything else you'd like to say? Thank you etc.