The Report Committee for Sarah Casey Lineback

Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:

"They Think I Am a Pervert:" A Qualitative Analysis of Lesbian and Gay Teachers'

Experiences with Stress at School

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor:

Christopher McCarthy

Leslie Moore

"They Think I Am a Pervert:" A Qualitative Analysis of Lesbian and

Gay Teachers' Experiences with Stress at School

by

Sarah Casey Lineback, B.A.

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Abstract

"They Think I Am a Pervert:" A Qualitative Analysis of Lesbian and Gay Teachers' Experiences with Stress at School

Sarah Casey Lineback, M.A.

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Supervisor: Christopher McCarthy

Consensual Qualitative Research was used to develop a framework for understanding the demands faced by lesbian and gay (LG) teachers as a function of the interaction between sexual identity and professional context, including resources used in combatting those demands. Data sources included two interviews each with 11 teachers who each identified as lesbian or gay. Overall, the participants identified a far greater diversity of demands than resources/coping strategies. This speaks to the main finding, which indicates that neither remaining closeted nor being open about sexual orientation protected teachers from a variety of workplace demands explicitly tied to sexual orientation. Findings are discussed within the context of literature on minority stress, the transactional model of stress, and coping strategies. The present study adds to the literature on the types of demands and resources that are unique to LG individuals by highlighting specific interactions between sexual identity management and the

workplace. Additionally, the study contributes to the body of work on teacher stress by providing a framework for how elements of identity that do not directly relate to teaching can influence the demands experienced by teachers. Implications for supporting LG teachers and making their school environments less stressful are discussed.

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Introduction

Many sexual minority individuals still face workplace discrimination, despite steadily increasing acceptance of same-sex relationships in the United States (Flojo, 2005; Human Rights Campaign, 2013). Twenty-nine states lack job protections based on sexual orientation (Human Rights Campaign, 2013). Given this climate, it is understandable that some lesbian and gay (LG) individuals experience stress as a result of their marginalized status in society (Meyer, 2003b).

America's public schools have been identified as particularly discriminatory environments for LG individuals (deLeon & Brunner, 2013). Some research even suggests that education may be the most homophobic profession in the United States, due to unfounded stereotypes about LG individuals' relationships with children, including stereotypes about increased sexual behavior, pedophilia, molestation, and recruitment into a gay lifestyle (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Jackson, 2007; Mayo, 2008). As teaching involves working closely with children, some who hold discriminatory views have even argued that LG persons should be excluded from the profession entirely to mitigate the risk of sexual abuse (deLeon & Brunner, 2013).

LG educators' concerns about workplace discrimination and job security forces many to grapple with their level of openness about their sexual identity in the workplace (Anderson, Croteau, DiStefano, & Chung, 2001), and this decision-making process can cause substantial inner turmoil (Cox, Dewaele, Van Houtte, & Vincke, 2013; Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca, 2010), as there are inherent risks both in remaining closeted and in fully disclosing. To protect against some of these risks, many teachers are not completely "out" at school and, to varying degrees, may construct their identities as teachers separately from their sexual identities (Endo et al., 2010). Hiding parts of themselves from their students can be especially difficult because personal relationships

with students are central to teaching (Chang, 2009). Being closeted prevents them from sharing important aspects of themselves when building relationships with students, but, on the other hand, being open about sexual orientation makes teachers vulnerable to prejudice. Hooker (2010) noted that many teachers end up compromising by being out to varying degrees. Striking this balance allowed LG teachers some level of openness but also resulted in teachers experiencing some discrimination.

In the present study, we were interested in understanding LG teachers' workplace stressors that relate to their sexual orientation. Regardless of whether they are more open about their sexual orientation or more closeted, LG teachers are vulnerable to stressors as a result of their sexual orientation. We were also interested in identifying the resources they have to cope with those stressors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study drew primarily on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and Meyer's (2003b) theory of minority stress. Our interest in demands, resources, and coping came out of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory, which is the dominant model in stress and posits that when demands are encountered, two perceptual processes, or appraisals, take place: appraisal of the significance of the demand (primary appraisal) and appraisal of resources for coping with the demand (secondary appraisal; Lazarus, 2001). In the secondary appraisal, an individual weighs his or her resources against the demand and experiences stress when he or she perceives that there are insufficient resources to meet the demand. Lazarus (2001) also suggested that events are not appraised objectively. Instead, he believed that individuals view events realistically while also putting the best possible light on situations to maintain hope and cope as effectively as they can.

Coping is a subsequent and separate process that occurs after events are appraised as stressful. Coping involves cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage or mitigate a stressor, through use of available resources (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, and Gruen, 1986). Acquiring and developing sufficient resources serve as the foundations for coping strategies (Wheaton, 1983). Coping strategies refer to the way individuals utilize resources in combating demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe two main types of coping strategies—emotion-focused and problem-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Denton, Rostosky, & Danner, 2014). Problem-focused coping attacks the demand directly, and emotion-focused coping helps individuals deal with the emotions triggered by the stressor. For example, if a child disrupts class, a teacher using problem-focused coping might attempt to stop the behavior, while a teacher using emotion-focused coping might engage in deep breathing (McCarthy, Lineback, & Reiser, 2014).

In addition to problem- and emotion-focused coping, other researchers discuss a third category called social-based coping (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Denton et al., 2014). Social-based coping has been shown to be particularly important within the LG community (Lindquist & Hirabayashi, 1979; Meyer, 2003b). Social-based coping refers to coping achieved when seeking support from one's perceived social networks (Denton et al., 2014; Moller, Fouladi, McCarthy, & Hatch, 2003). Meyer (2003b) states that the support from an ingroup of other LG individuals can be particularly helpful in buffering stress. However, individuals must have access to ingroup resources before they can use them, which means that closeted individuals might not have access to the LG groups that could otherwise serve as a social-based coping resource (Meyer, 2003b). Lindquist and Hirabayashi (1979), on the other hand, found that participation in both gay and non-gay social circles mitigated gay men's stress.

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Research suggests that the analysis of demands, resources, and coping strategies is particularly applicable to understanding teacher stress. For instance, teachers reporting more demands than resources often also report more signs of stress than teachers whose resources outweigh demands (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009).

The demands, resources, and coping strategies experienced by members of minority groups often differ from those experienced by their majority counterparts. The term minority stress (Meyer, 1995, 2003a, 2003b) delineates stress-inducing aspects of the social world specific to minority groups. LG individuals face unique social stressors as a result of their marginalized status in society (Meyer, 2003b). Meyer (2003b) found that among LG populations, four specific stressors exist: internalized homophobia, expectations of discrimination, actual events of discrimination and violence, and hiding one's sexual orientation. Though all LG individuals are susceptible to minority stress, members of the LG community experience different amounts of minority stress depending on their lived or observed instances of discrimination and the presence of different resources (Meyer, 2003a).

GOALS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

Considerable research has been conducted to identify stressful aspects of teaching, including managing classrooms and high-stakes testing (Chang, 2009; Hastings & Bham, 2003), but there is a paucity of research on LG teacher stress. The minority stress model has shed light on some of the demands unique to LG individuals, and teaching has been identified as particularly stressful work (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Demands stemming from the interaction between membership in both of these populations have not yet been studied. Thus, exploration of the demands as well as the coping strategies and resources LG teachers use will help administrators, staff, and other

teachers build school cultures that create a safe space in which LG teachers can thrive. To address these gaps in the literature, the present study asked the following research questions: (1) What demands do LG teachers face specific to their sexual identity in the school setting? and (2) What coping resources and strategies do LG teachers use in managing those demands?

Methods

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited using snowballing procedures, which included emailing organizations that serve the LG community, contacting friends in LG and teaching communities, and posting on social media. These approaches were both practical and appropriate, as Ritchie and Lewis (2003) note that snowballing procedures are particularly useful for somewhat invisible populations. To be included in the study participants had to currently be or recently have been (within the past two years) public or charter school pre-K-12 teachers with at least two years of teaching experience. They also had to identify as gay or lesbian. The guidelines of Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) developed by Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) suggest having eight to 15 participants. The principal investigator (PI) decided a saturation point had been reached at 11 participants. Contact was lost with one participant, but data from her initial interview was included in the study. We initially made contact with an additional seven teachers, but two did not qualify for the study and five stopped responding to email after initial contact.

Participants were 11 LG teachers (see Table 1 for biographical information) who had taught between two and 28 years (mean = 8.77) and who primarily identified as white (one identified as Hispanic, and one as bi-racial). Seven were female, and participants ranged in age from 24 and 50 (mean = 33.18). Eight participants worked as public or charter school teachers. One participant recently retired, one was a former teacher working in district administration, and one was a former public school teacher working at a private school at the time of her interview. The participants were geographically diverse, living in the Southwest, Northeast, Midwest, and Southeast, and teaching in

rural, urban, and suburban environments. Participants are referred to by pseudonyms assigned by the PI.

INTERVIEWER AND ANALYSIS TEAM

Within qualitative methodologies, the researchers are important instruments of the study. It is impossible to understand the data completely objectively, because researchers have their own experiences, histories, and worldviews (Hill et al., 1997). Considering the potential influence of researchers' positionality (Hill et al., 1997), a team of four researchers with varying levels of experience in teaching and the LG community analyzed the data. The principal investigator (PI), a gay female graduate student who is a former teacher, conducted all interviews and led the analysis team. All members of the analysis team were white females; two were straight and two were gay. Two were former teachers. Three were Educational Psychology doctoral students. The auditor was a straight, white, male professor with expertise in stress and coping in education.

PROCEDURES

A semi-structured interview protocol was created. The PI piloted the questions with two LG teachers and revised the protocol using their feedback before conducting interviews with participants. Before beginning the each interview, a demographic questionnaire was administered to ensure that participants met study qualifications. The PI then conducted a one- to two-hour interview with each participant either in-person or via video-telephone service. Members of the analysis team transcribed and reviewed the interviews. Between two and six weeks after the initial interview, the PI conducted a 15-45 minute follow-up interview to clarify answers (as needed) and begin member checking. Finally, transcription of initial and follow-up interviews were sent to each participant for final member checking (Maxwell, 2013).

DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were analyzed following the guidelines of CQR (Hill et al., 1997). According to CQR, the research team first divides the interviews into general topics, called domains. Second, the team develops themes, called core ideas, that summarize material within the domains. Third, the team ensures consistency of domains and core ideas among all participant interviews. Fourth, the team re-codes all of the interviews. In addition to this process, an auditor, who is not part of the consensual meetings, serves as an additional validity check in code development and application. The auditor serves a role similar to a peer debriefer, a person who helps ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative analysis, outlined by Lincoln & Guba (1985); a peer debriefer is a person who remains outside of the analysis with whom the researchers can test their analyses.

Informed by the research questions, the analysis team began by developing domains based on four randomly selected interviews. Next, using the same four interviews, the team developed core ideas (See Table 2 for all domains and core ideas). According to Hill et al. (1997), it is important for team members to code the interviews individually before meeting as a group in order to ensure multiple perspectives and to avoid biasing others' coding procedures. Each researcher completed this process of coding interviews individually, then met to share their analyses and reach consensus.

Next, researchers read two more interviews and revised and combined core ideas where possible. The PI served as the note-keeper during this process, so that information could be shared with the team throughout and could serve as a validity check. The core ideas developed from these interviews were then used to code all of the interviews using the same consensual procedures. All team members coded all interviews and follow-up interviews. When coding differences emerged, the team discussed the codes until there was consensus. Past interviews were used as precedents for the sake of consistency.

Additionally, the auditor reviewed the codes, and, in some cases, we revisited and revised codes based on his suggestions. Initially, there were eight core ideas relating to the first research question (demands LG teachers face) and nine core ideas relating to the second research question (resources/coping LG teachers use). The final code list had 18 core ideas within demands and 9 within resources.

Once all coding was finalized, the PI entered codes and relevant excerpts into Dedoose, a software program used to organize qualitative data, to determine core idea frequencies and to organize representative excerpts. Based on those results, the list of core ideas was again adjusted. Hill et al. (1997) recommend dropping core ideas that apply to only one case, since they do not describe the sample, but including core ideas that apply to just two or three cases, since it is important to include variant core ideas. After applying these guidelines and dropping core ideas that applied to only one case, 14 core ideas within demands and six within resources remained

VALIDITY CONCERNS

We addressed threats to validity in several ways. First, we engaged in member checking (Maxwell, 2013), by having participants review their transcriptions. All participants were satisfied with the transcriptions. Second, members of the data analysis team had diverse experiences with the LG community and with teaching, reducing the likelihood of researcher bias. Third, the PI asked for clarification in the follow-up interview, allowing any ambiguity in the initial interview to be settled. Fourth, the length of the initial interview and inclusion of the follow-up interview prolonged the PI's engagement with the participants. Fifth, we looked for discrepant data and found information that did not neatly fit our core ideas (Maxwell, 2013). Negative cases were discussed at length, and we included and discussed core ideas that were endorsed by as

few as two participants. Sixth, through the process, peer debriefing with a professor who was not participating in the research itself served as both a conformability and inquiry audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

The domains of Demands of Lesbian and Gay Teachers and Resources of Lesbian and Gay Teachers emerged from participant responses. Domains and subordinate core ideas are found below. At least one illustrative quotation from an interview is also provided for each. Refer to Table 2 for a list of all domains and core ideas.

DEMANDS OF LESBIAN AND GAY TEACHERS

Fear of Discrimination

All 11 participants noted that a fear of discrimination permeated their work, and many times, prevented them from being more open about their sexual orientation. Participants described several types of fears. Many teachers feared that they could be fired for being gay. Others were anxious that their colleagues would not accept their sexual orientation. Max described why he chose to stay closeted with his colleagues: "I didn't have faith in them to be able to continue caring about me in the same way… because I saw teachers at my school openly harass other students for being gay." Brittany articulated her fear of staff members discriminating against her in a different way: "I'm just scared…of that off chance that for some reason they will flip and not like me anymore…it's…an unreasonable fear because I know my principal adores me." Though Brittany felt that her fear was "unreasonable," she worried about being shunned.

Participants also voiced concerns that others would perceive them as sexually deviant because they worked with children. Max explained, "It's kinda like the red scare…because you work with children… It makes me thought of as a pervert or something." Grace mentioned, "there's always those closed-minded people, and they catch that label and they think I am a pervert or a molester." For these teachers, their fear of discrimination was related directly to the fact that they worked with children. All

participants in the study worried that being more open about their sexual orientation would make them vulnerable to prejudice and acts of discrimination.

Derogatory Comments from Students

Four participants mentioned hearing derogatory comments from students. At times, the teacher understood that students did not know the exact meaning of the words they were using, as in Max's description of when a boy had called another boy a "faggot…He didn't know exactly what it meant, [but] he had an idea." When Therese was student-teaching, children would "use gay as a slur." Though this language was not directed at participants, the comments reinforced that being gay was negative.

Perception that Coming Out to Students Makes Teaching Harder

Three participants endorsed this code. When asked why she was closeted with students, Brittany stated, "fear and knowing that I want to do my job really well, and I don't want to jeopardize that or create any more stress for myself." Remaining closeted was a coping mechanism, protecting her from more stressors, but it also hid her true identity. Similarly, John thought working with parents would be more difficult: "I don't know how to…defend myself to a parent….there's a lot of ignorance out there…no one's ever told me what the procedures are." John felt confused at the lack of communication about how open he could be, so he chose to remain closeted.

Personalizing

Seven participants endorsed personalizing, defined by the team as internalizing a negative comment about another person as a negative view of one's own identity. One of the most salient examples came from Steve's description of overhearing a child in his classroom say, "that's gross" when the student found out what "gay" meant. Steve thought, "I spend all day loving you… that hurts so deep down." Therese mentioned that when students made negative comments about other identities, she addressed them, but

"if you hear gay or fag or whatever, it's like your first reaction is as a person, like 'oh God not another one…do I want to deal with this because it's gonna be upsetting.' " Therese's reaction might have even prevented her from intervening when necessary because doing so was too personally upsetting.

Negative Interactions with Parents

Three teachers mentioned negative interactions with parents. John stated that he was "reprimanded" when his students debated gay marriage because a parent complained. His assistant principal said that, although she personally agreed with John's use of the topic, he should "be careful." Liz also mentioned that parents complained about gay marriage debates in her government class. Both teachers understood these experiences as discriminatory, as parents wanting to shield their children from anything related to being gay.

Liz also had a harrowing experience with the father of a student she coached on a sports team. After suspending the player for disciplinary issues, the girl's fathers "literally jumped over the fence and came barreling over," and yelled at her. When talking to him did not work, Liz said, "Are you going to hit a woman right here in front of all these kids?" to which the father responded, "You're not a woman, you're a dyke!" Liz reflected, "I was really shook up…there's this terrible word, but also he had physically… confronted me. And I felt afraid." In his anger, the father had insulted Liz in a way that was "personal," according to Liz.

Stress of Censoring

Six participants mentioned the stress of censoring their speech at school. John mentioned that censoring interfered with his teaching: "I don't feel like I could…incorporate my personal experiences or stories into my class." In times when he wanted to use personal anecdotes, he stated, "I wanna jump in, but then I'm realizing that

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when I'm telling a story it's about my partner and…I have to…take it somewhere else, …so that's frustrating and…upsetting." Censoring also interfered with the way Jessica would ideally teach. Instead of modeling "small moments" from her own life as writing topics, "instead I have to say, 'oh, my husband and I…' and draw a male figure and just lie." Hiding their sexual orientation created an extra layer of cognitive processing and emotional consequences for John and Jessica.

Other participants articulated the mental strain of censoring their speech with teachers at school. Ashlee stated that, "It's also really stressful having to censor myself around certain people…when people ask, 'what did you do this weekend?' I can't be like 'I went to like the gay pride festival.' " When Julie talked with co-workers, she stated she was "constantly thinking about what you are going to say and who you are going to say it to before you say it." Ashlee and Julie both described a vigilance about keeping their sexual orientation private that created a cognitive strain.

Overt Discrimination

Seven teachers endorsed this core idea. Several participants reported overhearing fellow teachers make derogatory comments about students' gender expression or perceived sexual orientation. Julie heard another teacher say, "He is such a little gay boy, such a pansy" about a seven-year-old boy who played with dolls. In another example, Ashlee recalled finding a suicide note from a student who identified as a lesbian: "The guidance counselor basically said 'I don't know if this is for real or not…I have been telling her how sinful it is to be gay…how it is just not a good choice.'" The teacher described how difficult the entire experience was although, in the end, the student was safe.

For other teachers, the overt discrimination they faced was a direct affront on them. Max experienced his students "mimicking me…in a way that amplifies my

gayness." Liz experienced discrimination when she asked for sick leave to care for her wife. Her sick leave form was "denied: she's not your family," according to Liz's principal, even though Liz had accrued "like 75 sick days." Liz appealed to the superintendent who granted her an extra personal day. A straight teacher would not have had to appeal in order to care for her spouse.

Fear of Impact on Student Outcomes

A majority of the teachers, six out of 11, worried that their sexual orientation opened them up to discrimination that could have a direct negative impact on their students' academic outcomes. In a national environment where standardized testing is used to evaluate many district teachers' effectiveness and even determine their compensation, teachers are already stressed about their students' performance (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009). Adding the fear that one's sexual orientation might have a negative impact on student outcomes only adds to an already demanding job requirement. Several teachers feared that parents would pull their children from their classrooms if they knew the teacher was gay. Jacob stated that it would affect his relationships with students: "one of the most important things as a teacher is to build strong relationships with the kids, so if your kids…or your families are…looking at you in a negative light, then I won't be able to build that relationship." Max was worried it would affect his students' education, stating that "adding the whole gay part…would have just decimated my ability to do anything in the classroom."

No Extra Stress and No Reported Discrimination

Six participants mentioned that they either faced no extra stress or they reported no discrimination as LG teachers. Two reported no extra stress and five reported no discrimination, with one overlapping participant. Although the two teachers who reported no extra stress did not recall specific instances of overt discrimination, they both

mentioned subtle experiences that contributed to an atmosphere of covert discrimination. Additionally, most of the five teachers who reported no discrimination qualified their answers, explaining that they could not face direct discrimination because they had chosen to remain closeted. Many of these teachers still described discriminatory experiences that happened to students, which they described as having an impact on them as well.

Guilt Over Being Closeted

Closely related to the stress of censoring is the guilt of being closeted, which four participants mentioned. Jessica described the pain of being closeted in the Hispanic community where she taught. She stated that she was "ashamed to present myself with the community because I feel like I'm hiding." Brittany also mentioned, "I have had a lot of guilt surrounding this… because there aren't any openly gay role models that [students] have." Brittany believed that sharing her identity with students could be powerful, which made her feel guilty about remaining closeted.

Internalized Homophobia

The research team was cautious in assigning the core idea internalized homophobia, since it is an internal process. Two interviews, however, included clear descriptions of internalized homophobia. There were a few other interviews in which this core idea nearly emerged, but we declined to code them as such because they were not explicit enough to ensure unbiased coding. Julie recalled experiences from her life before teaching where she wanted to be straight. "Growing up in the church, I thought…I'm gonna go to hell…I would just start crying…thinking…I need to change now." Additionally, Julie mentioned that when she "wasn't out yet" with anyone at school, "things…happened all the time that I was like, 'I'm glad I'm not gay right now. I'm glad

I'm not out.'" Since other teachers did not know Julie identified as gay, she did not feel obligated to address derogatory comments she heard at school.

Heteronormative Experiences

While many teachers in the study described experiences of heteronormativity in their schools, four teachers specifically described these experiences as stressful. Brittany detailed the experience she had with one much older employee: "Oh it was awkward, and I still have like this one really gnarly 58 year old basketball coach who is constantly hitting on me." In addition to the fact that this might constitute sexual harassment, it also put Brittany in the awkward position of deciding whether to reveal her sexual orientation, and she ultimately did not. Julie noted that parents asked her "Are you married?" She described her answer of "No, I'm not married" as awkward, wishing instead to answer truthfully with, "No, I can't get married in this state because it's not legalized yet."

Stress of Inconsistency in Partner Openness

Three out of 11 participants dealt with stress of inconsistency in partner openness. Jessica plainly stated that she prefers to shop "far away because if I'm with my girlfriend…she loves to touch me and hold hands…There's 50 kids running around. She doesn't understand." Julie also stated that her girlfriend "gets mad whenever I don't want her to hold my hand when we are on campus." Julie and Jessica both felt that their girlfriends did not understand that public affection might allow their students find out they were gay, which neither of them wanted to address.

Passive Participation in Bullying

Many teachers talked about experiences where either they or other teachers ignored teachers' or students' negative and comments (i.e., "that's so gay") or gay slurs, but only two teachers described these incidents as bothersome. Julie described ignoring

these types of comments as "disappointing…either they join in or they ignore it, and I ignore it too sometimes, so I guess I'm disappointed in myself too."

RESOURCES AND COPING OF LESBIAN AND GAY TEACHERS

Participants did not make distinctions between resources and coping; thus, we did not make such distinctions in data analysis. The core ideas under this domain are explained below.

Verbal Processing

Six participants used verbal processing as a coping strategy. For some of those teachers, verbal processing happened outside of school. Julie stated that when she encountered a demand at school, "I probably go home and vent, like I don't know what to say to these people who aren't ok with it." Likewise, Ashlee sought the perspective of friends: "especially my friends who are in counseling, and I was like 'how do I deal with this?' "

Other teachers processed with coworkers. Brittany mentioned that, she had a "support network… if anything happens at school, other TFA [Teach For America] teachers are who I turn to." While Brittany was only open about her sexual orientation with some of her colleagues, they provided much needed support. Max expressed how processing helped him: "When you bottle everything up… [it] just kind of builds up pressure. I guess finding a time, putting things into words and sharing it takes away some of the stress."

Staff Support

Ten participants noted that support from staff at their schools was an important resource. When Liz's principal informed her that her request for sick leave to care for her wife was denied, Liz went to the superintendent, who told her "'I'm going to grant you an

extra personal day. Take that.' I went, 'Wow.' And so, from something that started as a stress…it actually ended up being pretty good." A few teachers felt supported when their colleagues addressed the derogatory comments that students made about gay individuals. Steve described that he "really appreciated that it didn't go straight to punishment." He appreciated that teachers approached these situations with, "'a conversation about the words you're saying and what they mean.' And to me, that is a transferrable life lesson, whereas just 'don't say that ever again'… I don't want you to think those words have a negative connotation." Other teachers mentioned instances where they felt staff support even when the demanding situations happened outside of school. Ashlee told another teacher, "'long distance sucks and I hate and I don't know if I'm gonna be in a relationship much longer,' and just cried to her…she was like 'I completely understand…if you ever need me, let me know.' " Even though the stressor happened outside of school, Ashlee felt supported by her colleague's empathy.

Using Humor to Cope

Two participants mentioned using humor to cope. Liz explained her use of humor when dealing with coworkers' derogatory comments:

I've always found that humor goes a really long way in those moments where somebody's like... 'That's so gay.' And then they look at me like, 'Oh shit.' And sometimes I try to wave, like, 'Yup, here I am. The gay person,' or I look at them and laugh…there are moments where…they check themselves, and look at me kind of horrified, isn't that kind of the point?

Liz's purpose in using humor was to diffuse a challenging situation and make others think twice about their language. Jacob, on the other hand, used humor to cope with parents asking about his love life: "If the parents say, '…do you have a girlfriend?

Or are you married?' …I turn it into a joke." Jacob used humor to deflect questions about his personal life to remain closeted.

Social Support

Five participants felt that social support outside of school was important. Julie noted that "going to Pride and going to gay bars" helped her cope. It reminded her that "other people are gay too it's not just me. So when other people look at me funny or like 'eww you love a woman, eww that's gross'…I don't feel so bad when I'm around those other people." Steve felt supported by his "roommate…[who] was also a gay teacher." Steve asked for his roommate's opinion when he encountered difficult situations at work. Ashlee, Liz, and Therese all mentioned that their friends supported them in difficult times.

Partner Support

Romantic partners were another source of support for four participants (at the time of data collection, eight participants were in relationships). Liz said that her wife helped her through the process of coming out at work, and she leaned on her wife for support as she negotiated that stressful experience. Steve also mentioned that his boyfriend served as a great support.

Suppression

Suppressing thoughts about challenging situations might be considered an unhealthy coping strategy, but suppression can help manage emotions in the moment. Two participants endorsed suppression. When Julie faced challenging situations with colleagues, "I try to not talk about it. That's not coping. That's what I do… I just try to ignore it or like change the subject." Julie does not recognize this process as coping, but it allows her to finish her day at school before going home to "vent." John mentioned encountering challenging situations when trying to bring in personal stories to help teach

his students, only to realize that the stories would reveal his sexual orientation to his students. John would "kind of ignore it, like it never happened…and move on…cause I don't know what to do." John mentioned that he uses this strategy because he lacks other strategies. Although healthier coping strategies exist, suppression allowed these individuals to move away from a challenging situation and refocus on job tasks.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to identify demands and resources specific to LG teachers with the hope of helping all teachers and school leaders understand the challenges faced by this population, increasing retention rates for this population, and of improving their work environments.

Core ideas within our first research question delineated the demands LG teachers faced. As the research team revisited and revised the core ideas within this domain, we recognized that LG teachers reported experiences with all four categories of minority stress as described by Meyer (see Table 2 for results; Meyer, 2003b), as well as stressors for which the minority stress model does not account. Data from the second research question described the resources and coping strategies that LG teachers used. The study revealed that for LG teachers, social-based coping was the most frequent type of coping resource, a finding supported by previous research on LG individuals (Lindquist & Hirabayashi, 1979, Meyer, 2003b). Further explication of the findings for each research question is provided next, followed by a discussion of what can be learned when taking both the demands and the resources into account.

DEMANDS ON LG TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS

The LG teachers interviewed in this study experienced demands that could be situated within the four types minority stress: events of discrimination, expectations of discrimination, hiding one's sexual orientation, and internalized homophobia (Meyer, 2003b). Additionally, they reported demands beyond those described in the minority stress model. Our study also revealed that neither hiding nor disclosing one's sexual orientation protected teachers from demands. Whether they were more closeted or more

open, all of the participating teachers faced demands as a result of their sexual orientation.

The core ideas of Derogatory Comments from Students, Personalizing, Negative Interactions with Parents, and Overt Discrimination are all based on events of discrimination, the first type of minority stress (Meyer, 2003b) and, perhaps, the most recognizable type. Participants experienced direct discrimination from a variety of places including parents, students, and colleagues. Even though the public is becoming more accepting of LG individuals on the aggregate, teachers were still the targets of hateful language like "dyke," and bore witness when other teachers called students names like "pansy."

Two core ideas—Fear of Discrimination and Fear of Impact on Student Outcomes—fall under the expectations of discrimination category in the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003b). For LG individuals, the mere expectation that one will face discrimination, even if those expectations do not come to fruition, can be a stressor (Meyer, 2003b), as individuals believe they must be constantly vigilant (Meyer, 2003b). Fear of Discrimination is the only core idea that appeared in all 11 interviews. For a majority of teachers (9 out of 11), this fear kept them closeted with students about their sexual orientation. Some individuals had witnessed others at their school discriminating against LG individuals and feared being treated the same way. Others feared being labeled as pedophiles, a fear rooted in a long-standing stereotype that LG individuals are perverts and should not be allowed to work with children (deLeon & Brunner, 2013). The fear of discrimination is considered a healthy paranoia, even though some evidence might lead a person to believe that the fear is unfounded (Meyer, 2003b).

Participants reported a particular type of fear unique to the role of teachers: Fear of Impact on Student Outcomes. Teachers anticipated that discrimination would have a

detrimental impact on their work and would affect their very ability to do their jobs well, to keep students in their classes, to build relationships with them, and to teach them academic content.

Our core idea of Internalized Homophobia fits well with Meyer's (2003b) category of the same name. Only two teachers in our study endorsed this code. We believe this code did not occur many times because, in the case of LG teachers, the particular stereotypes relevant to the workplace have to do with primarily with sexual misconduct and perversion. Although more participants may have internalized stereotypes of LG individuals in other areas of their lives (i.e., relationships, social lives, hobbies), the stereotypes are either unrelated to their professional performance or are too extreme to become internalized and endorsed.

Hiding one's sexual orientation is a more subtle form of minority stress. Being closeted was taxing for the participants, as reflected in the occurrence of two core ideas: Stress of Censoring and Guilt over Being Closeted. Teachers in the study felt the "cognitive burden" of staying closeted described by Meyer (2003b, p. 281), which we called the "Stress of Censoring." The teachers experienced this stress specifically in their roles as teachers. They mentioned stopping mid-lesson because they realized what they were going to say would reveal their sexual orientation. They also mentioned feeling guilty, wishing they were more open with their students in order to give them LG role models. These particular stressors, unique to closeted LG teachers, relate directly to issues with teacher retention, since teachers who are more closeted about their sexual orientation are less satisfied with their jobs (Juul, 1994)

Several core ideas also emerged from our analysis that move beyond the categories described in the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003b). First, the core idea Experiences with Heteronormativity includes instances when LG teachers were assumed

to be straight. The second unique core idea spoke to minority stress that is unique to professional settings, and we called it the Perception that Coming Out to Students Makes Teaching Harder. Researchers have identified schools as particular stressful work environments (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998) that are especially discriminatory to LG individuals (Jackson, 2007). When schools are not affirming, it adds to LG teachers' demands. Third, Stress of Inconsistency in Partner Openness does not directly fit within the four types of minority stress. It is related to hiding one's sexual orientation because in order to have inconsistency, at least one partner must somewhat closeted. It is a unique stress because it deals with how openness can impact relationships. In this study, participants mentioned their roles as teachers keeping them more in the closet than their partners, which caused stress in their relationship. Their work environments had a personal impact. Lastly, Passive Participation in Bullying is a specific reaction to event of discrimination that falls outside the minority stress model. Events of discrimination did occur before teachers decided to ignore the discrimination. Unlike events of discrimination though, the internal process that one teacher underwent, stating that she was disappointed in herself for not addressing a homophobic comments, is an internal demand. Rather than being social stressors like Events of Discrimination, Passive Participation in Bully points to an internal process, similar to internalized homophobia.

COPING RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES USED BY LG TEACHERS

Our participants actively sought resources, particularly social-based resources, to help them face stressors, do their jobs effectively, and, in Steve's words, "ground me in what mattered for my kids." In the stress and coping literature, there are three main types of coping: problem-focused, emotion focused, and social-based coping (Denton et al., 2014; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In our study, the coping and resources that participants

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used fell mainly into social-based and emotion-focused coping. Although participants found support from a variety of individuals (e.g., friends, partners, family), support from colleagues who worked in the same schools was the most frequently mentioned resource. Teachers also reported using suppression and humor, which are emotion-focused methods of coping (Geisler & Weber, 2010; Petkus, Gum, & Wetherell, 2012). Prior research has shown that social support within a school can protect against teacher burnout because fellow staff members can validate a teacher's beliefs about his/her ability and success in the classroom (Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzer, 1987).

Social-based coping

Social-based coping involves seeking support through one's perceived social networks (Denton et al., 2014; Moller et al., 2003). Participants identified four core ideas that fall within social-based coping: Verbal Processing, Staff Support, Social Support, and Partner Support. Based on Meyer's (2003b) research, participating in the LG community can help mitigate the stresses of being gay. In fact, he states that having connections in the gay community is likely more important than having connections in the majority community. However, our findings support the findings of Lindquist and Hirabayashi (1979), which revealed that connections with both the majority community and the gay community could serve as an important resource in helping gay individuals achieve positive outcomes. Many teachers relied on other LG individuals for support, whether those individuals were their partners, other teachers, administrators, or LG friends and acquaintances outside of school; but they also relied on straight individuals, their parents, friends, colleagues, and administrators, to help them through difficult situations.

It is particularly significant that ten out of 11 participants mentioned staff support as beneficial. Our findings are consistent with past research on LG individuals in the

workplace, which found that lesbians who remained closeted in the workplace had more detrimental psychological outcomes (McDermott, 2006) and that lesbian teachers who were more open felt genuinely happy at work (Rudoe, 2010). Our findings suggest that being open is beneficial in large part because it affords LG teachers the ability to use more social-based coping.

Emotion-focused coping

Emotion-focused coping involves dealing with the emotions that emerge as the result of a stressor rather than dealing problem of the stressor itself (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the current study, participants mentioned two core ideas that would be considered emotion-focused coping: Using Humor to Cope and Suppression. Minority stress researchers have not labeled these two types of coping strategies (Lindquist & Hirabayashi, 1979; Meyer, 2003b), though they are known in the coping literature (e.g. Geisler & Weber, 2010; Petkus et al., 2012; Szentagotai & Onea, 2007). The results of the current study complement current literature on humor, which has found that using humor to cope can protect an individual from feedback that is threatening to his/her self-image (Geisler & Weber, 2010).

Two teachers in our study also endorsed Suppression, a coping strategy that researchers have found to be less efficient than other strategies (Alberts, Schneider, & Martijn, 2012) and to be associated with psychological distress (Petkus et al., 2012). While suppression allowed the teachers to put challenging situations out of their minds; they both recognized this strategy as the lack of having a healthier strategy in place. Future experimental research could trace LG teachers' stress levels after introducing them to more beneficial coping strategies, such as acceptance-based coping (Alberts et al., 2012).

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE STRESS PROCESS WITH LG TEACHERS

Central to the transactional model of stress is the understanding that individuals appraise both their demands and their resources within the stress process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When demands outweigh resources, an individual becomes stressed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is significant, then, that, in our study, LG teachers identified many more demands than resources and coping strategies (see Table 2). Although we cannot definitively draw the conclusion that each of our participants appraised that they had more demands than resources, we can conclude that overall, participants found demands in a variety of places and found that resources and coping only came in two main forms: social-based coping and emotion-focused coping. Facing demands in many areas and finding resources in very few places could be overwhelming to some LG teachers, particularly since closeted teachers have limited access to social-based coping within the school.

Notably missing from our results was an important component of coping: problem-focused coping. Problem-focused coping refers to coping that directly addresses the demand itself (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and is an adaptive coping strategy for changing one's circumstances. Other methods of coping are helpful as well, but using them in isolation without problem-focused coping likely will not change the stressful circumstances that LG teachers face or prevent them from happening in the future. Many of the demands faced by LG teachers, however, may appear to be beyond their control, or in some cases even dangerous to address. For this reason, formal policies protecting LG teachers from discrimination are needed.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

Even though much of the literature on sexual minority populations includes the entire LGBTQ population, we purposely limited our sample to gay and lesbian teachers.

In their article reviewing research on career issues for the transsexual community, Pepper and Lorah (2008) clearly make a distinction between sexual orientation (which includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals) and gender identity issues (which includes transgender/transsexual and gender-queer individuals), and critique research that appears to include transgender issues (by lumping LGBTQ in the title or abstract) without actually addressing these issues. Additionally, we did not include bisexual individuals in the study. In his quantitative study of LGB teachers, Juul (1994) found that his bisexual participants functioned as a separate group from LG participants and had very different results. Thus, while studies including bisexual and transgender teachers would be worthwhile endeavors, they were outside the scope of this study.

Limitations of the study include the fact that our teachers were mainly female, white, and relatively young, though our demographics did closely match the overall demographics of teachers in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). It will be important for future researchers to include older participants, especially since older generations were raised during times when homosexuality was even more taboo. They might introduce new or different demands not identified by our current participants. The lack of individuals of color is also a noteworthy limitation. Core ideas of intersectionality did not appear in our results because only one participant mentioned intersectionality of race and sexual orientation in her interview. This is likely an added demand for LG teachers of color, and future research should aim to include a greater number of racial minority teachers.

Additionally, future research should also include administrators' perspectives to investigate how they help create a welcoming environment for LG teachers. Studying LG and straight administrators' perspectives on supporting gay teachers is an integral part of creating a safe space for LG teachers.

CONCLUSION

Although research on gay and lesbian teachers' experiences in public school settings is becoming more common, there is still a dearth of research exploring the nature of stress faced by this group. The current study adds to the body of literature by identifying demands that LG teachers face and the resources they have to cope with those demands.

Tables

Table 1: Profile of Study Participants (N=11)

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Type of School	Years Taught	Grade Level Taught	Content Area
Jacob	White	29	Charter	4.5	5th	Math
Brittany	White	24	Public	2.5	High school	Biology/ACT
Ashlee	White	24	Public	2.5	7th & *8th	Science
Julie	White/Hispanic	27	Public	5	4th & 5th	Interventionist
Grace***	White	50	Public	28	9th & 10th	Science
Jessica	Hispanic	47	Public	14	2nd	All
John	White	28	Charter	5	Middle school	Spec. Ed.
Therese**	White	39	Public	7	8th	Humanities
Steve*	White	26	Charter	4	3rd & 4th	All
Liz	White	46	Public	20	11th & 12th	Gov't, Psych.
Max	White	25	Charter	4	8th	Science

Note. *Steve recently became a district administrator. **Therese taught in a public school for years and recently moved to a private school. ***Grace recently retired.

Table 2: Domains, Core Ideas, and Percentages*

Domains and Core Ideas	n** (%)
Demands as a Gay Teacher	
Derogatory Comments from Students	4 (36.4)
Personalizing	7 (63.6)
Negative Interactions with Parents	3 (27.3)
Overt Discrimination	7 (63.6)
Fear of Discrimination	11 (100)
Fear of Impact on Student Outcomes	6 (54.5)
No Extra Stress or No Reported Discrimination	6 (54.5)
Stress of Censoring	6 (54.5)
Guilt over Being Closeted	4 (36.4)
Internalized Homophobia	2 (18.2)
Heteronormative Experiences	4 (36.4)
Perception that Coming Out to Students Makes Teaching Harder	3 (27.3)
Stress of Inconsistency in Partner Openness	3 (27.3)
Passive Participation in Bullying	2 (18.2)
Resources and Coping as a Gay Teacher	
Verbal Processing	6 (54.5)
Staff Support	10 (90.9)
Social Support	5 (45.5)
Partner Support	4 (36.4)
Using Humor to Cope	2 (18.2)
Suppression	2 (18.2)

Note. N=11.

*Core Ideas that included fewer than two cases not shown. ** n = number of participants endorsing each core idea.

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