Homophobia in Secondary Schools: An Investigation of Teachers’ Perceptions of Homophobia Through a Collaborative Professional Development Program

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The author was born in Atlanta, Georgia on June 24, 1975. He attended The University of Alabama at Birmingham from 1994 to 1998, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1998. He completed 30 hours of graduate course work at the University of Montevallo, in Montevallo, Alabama. He came to the University of Rochester in the fall of 2002 and began his doctoral studies in teacher education. He pursued his research in queer theory and homophobia under the direction of Professor Joanne Larson.
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Abstract

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According to Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network, GLSEN, (2003), 84% of GLBT students experienced homophobic remarks or verbal harassment and of those, 91.5% reported hearing the word “faggot” or “dyke” on a regular basis, and over 60% felt unsafe in their schools because of their sexual orientation. More recently, several middle school students committed suicide as a result of being harassed because of their sexual orientation. In October of 2010, a Rutgers University freshman committed suicide after being bullied because of his sexual orientation (GLSEN, 2010). These incidents and others attest to the problem of homophobia in schools and classrooms.

Because homophobia is a rampant problem in schools and because scholars suggest that professional development is a viable avenue for addressing homophobia, this research study examines teachers’ perceptions of homophobia as obtained through their participation in a professional development program about homophobia. The eight participants were from diverse backgrounds, had different educational levels, and had different numbers of years of teaching experience. Their content areas were English, music, history, art history, math, and physics. The age range for the participants was 32 to 54. This study used a qualitative methodology to analyze teachers’ perceptions of homophobia.

Study findings suggest that these teachers are unaware of the extent of the problem of homophobia in schools. Participants also believe that there is a false tolerance
in schools concerning different sexual identities. Further, teachers in this study discuss homophobia by constructing binary oppositions about sexual identity. Specifically, they discuss the sexual identity of gay males in terms of masculine identities and feminine identities. Also, participants discuss how certain language uses (although homophobic) may be appropriate within their classrooms and schools because of their self-constructed binary oppositions. These binary oppositions dictate how they define homophobia in their schools. The study suggests several implications for addressing homophobia in schools. One implication of this study is that teachers should be made aware of the problem of homophobia. Second, teachers need to examine the reality of heterosexism in their schools and classrooms through reflective practices. Third, because society defines sexuality through binary oppositions, it may be beneficial for teachers to view homophobia outside of binary constructions in order to recognize how heterosexism functions in their schools. Finally, another implication is that administrator support is vital in combating homophobia in classrooms and schools. Specifically, school administrators must recognize how homophobia affects schools and classrooms and begin developing school-wide initiatives to address the problem. In doing so, such support provides avenues for teachers to effectively combat heteronormativity in their classrooms.
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Foreword

The author performed all of the experimental procedures in this dissertation.
Chapter 1: Introduction

As a former high school English teacher, I daily observed the prejudice against gay and lesbian students. Many times throughout the day, I verbally addressed the hate language that some of my students endured in the hallway and the cafeteria by reprimanding students’ language choices. Also, I attempted to address homophobia by discussing the lives of GLBT authors whom we were reading. As a teacher, I saw how homophobia affected the lives of gay and lesbian students. According to the 2003 National School Climate Survey by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Education Network (GLSEN), 84% of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) students experienced homophobic remarks or verbal harassment of those, 91.5% reported hearing the words “faggot” or “dyke” on a regular basis, and more than 60 % felt unsafe in their schools because of their sexual orientation. Further, GLSEN (2008) also reports that to date these statistics have not changed significantly.

In attempting to address homophobia, many scholars suggest that professional development for teachers is a viable tool. However, to date there is no published research literature examining professional development and its role in helping teachers address the problem of homophobia. Because of a lack of research exploring professional development and homophobia, for this study, I designed and conducted a professional development program about homophobia. This study explored the following questions: What are secondary teachers’ perceptions of homophobia in secondary classrooms? How do teachers participating in professional development programs about homophobia grapple with the issues that arise? The study used a qualitative methodology to analyze
these questions. Before exploring the findings of the study, I will first lay out the problem of homophobia in schools.

The present social and political climate related to homosexuality affects the treatment of sexual identity in schools (Glasgow, 2002). In 2004, an Alabama teacher was fired because he was believed to be a closeted homosexual. Although he had implemented new programs and won statewide awards, he was replaced with an uncertified teacher. Also in 2004, then President Bush pushed for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage as a rebuttal to Massachusetts’ legalization of same-sex marriages (Cloud, 2004). When Bush’s attempts failed, many states implemented state constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage. However, six states now allow same-sex marriage. Also in 2004, the first openly gay clergyperson was confirmed as a bishop for the Episcopal Church. Furthermore, according to Gallup’s Values and Belief poll (2008), Americans are evenly divided concerning the morality of homosexuality. The poll revealed that homosexuality was the most divisive social issue in America.

Because the beliefs of a community affect how its schools address homosexuality, Poteat (2008) argues that social communities are instrumental in perpetuating homophobia. As discussed later in this chapter, Glasgow (2002) suggests that social and political climates within a community play a tremendous role in how teachers and educators address the topic of homophobia in their school environments.

In terms of homophobia in schools, the most recent National School Climate Survey also revealed that faculty or staff intervened in only 3.4% of the harassment. Furthermore, 36.5% of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender students reported skipping
school at least once within the previous month because they felt unsafe in school (GLSEN, 2003). The study also revealed a negative correlation between harassment and the grade point averages of GLBT students. Moreover, students who reported facing a great deal of harassment reported having no plans to attend college. Data examining schools argues that there is little change in the ways that GLBT students are treated in classrooms and schools (GLSEN, 2008). In addition, Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, and Koenig (2008) argue that GLBT students are more likely to engage in substance abuse and have high levels of distress as compared to heterosexual students. Attached to this notion of distress, the media has reported that four students have committed suicide within the last five months in the US as a result of homophobic bullying. One student hanged himself in July; his parents were told that he was constantly bullied in schools because of his sexual orientation (Crary, 2010). Further, research also argues that homophobia has lasting effects on the post-secondary lives of GLBT students, which may range from psychological to physical challenges (Aggleton, Chase, Warwick, 2004; Cowie & Rivers, 2006).

The problem of homophobia in schools is more rampant than most people realize. Comer, (2010) posits that 60% of gay and lesbian students who are victimized do not report the incidents to teachers or administrators, and those who do report receive little support (Kissen, 1991). Moreover, 30% of all attempted teenage suicides in America are committed by GLBT students (Besner & Spungin, 1998). Finally, in February 2008, a middle school student was shot and killed in California because he was believed to be gay (GLSEN, 2008). Evidently, the student, Larry, asked one of his classmates if he would be his valentine. The next day, Larry’s classmate brought a gun to school and
killed Larry. Students like Larry are being victimized and assaulted in schools because of their sexual orientation.

Because homophobia is such a widespread problem, our schools and campuses need to be made places where gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students can feel safe (Watson, 2004). Presently, researchers and educators are attempting to deal with the problem through curriculum and instructional development and teacher education programs. By examining each of these areas in this chapter, I will explore what has been can be done to improve school climates, and consider how professional development could be a new avenue to address heterocentricity, or the belief that heterosexuality is the dominant type of sexuality.

Attempts to address homophobia

Researchers and educators have used curriculum as a place to combat homophobia in schools as they see a connection between homophobia and other forms of discrimination. McLaren (1995) argues that teachers and educators should examine the curriculum for biases when dealing with GLBT students, as educators have done with racism and other issues facing minorities. He argues that the language of school curricula perpetuates anti-gay rhetoric and shapes the way that students view homosexuality. Moreover, most curriculum does not provide opportunities to teach about same-sex relationships or to discuss sexual issues surrounding homosexuality. By omitting such topics from the curriculum, it does not enable students to reflect on sexual identities. Instead, a critical curriculum can create classrooms where the “language of analysis and discussion breaks the binaries of sexuality” (McLaren, 1995, p. 119), yet many teachers use curriculum that does not address issues of sexuality because of fears of dismissal,
reprisals from community and parents (McLaren, 1995), general lack of awareness, or because they harbor homophobic sentiments.

Scholars (e.g., Glasgow, 2002; Kissen, 2002; Lipkin, 2002) have examined differences in instruction and materials for specific grade levels. They imply that homophobia should be addressed through age-appropriate materials and pedagogy. In the following sections, I examine various strategies for curriculum development across all levels of education as well as suggestions that researchers and educators offer for K-12 and postsecondary education.

**Elementary Education**

For curriculum to become a tool to combat homophobia, many educators believe that elementary education should be the starting point for addressing hate language and biases about sexual diversity (Goodman, 2005; Kissen, 2002; Pinar, 2007). By discussing GLBT issues in the early grades, homophobia in schools may decrease as these students move through the educational system. Merkle (1997) suggests that teachers should begin to discuss homosexuality in fourth grade. He proposes that the science curriculum is a viable place to discuss the biological aspects of sexuality, with such a discussion leading into a larger discussion of same-sex relationships. Furthermore, he suggests that other subject areas reinforce discussions taking place within the science classroom. Because most elementary school students spend the day with one or two teachers, the discussion could be carried into other lessons. However, Merkle’s approach risks teachers pathologizing homosexuality if discussions are not conducted in the appropriate manner.
Other scholars also believe that the lower grades are the most appropriate place to begin discussing sexual diversity. For King and Brindley (2002), the elementary curriculum should incorporate the different family structures that exist in society. They advocate that teachers use books such as *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Newman, 1989), *The Library* (Stewart, 1995), and *Daddy’s Roommate* (Willhoite, 1990), which deal with homosexual themes. By making the books the focal point of class discussions, teachers can address homophobia through questions and comments.

However, conducting such discussions can present numerous challenges. Glasgow (2002) expresses concern with adding discussions of homosexuality to the elementary curriculum. As a school administrator and a lesbian, she understands the need to create safe environments in which all students can learn. For example, she implemented a sexual diversity day at her elementary school that involved teachers volunteering to read age-appropriate texts examining sexual diversity in their classes and engage students in appropriate discussions about sexual difference. Glasgow’s (2002) choice to use curriculum to teach sexual difference came at a time when the number of students of openly gay and lesbian parents began to rise. She believed that every student should feel safe and supported by their teachers and school. For her, affirming the lives of students through children’s literature and having a sexual diversity day in her school became a pedagogical tool to combat homophobia. Although she had support from her school board, others such as the Christian Coalition and Pro-Family Law Center actively opposed her actions concerning implementing the reading day with petitions and student exemption forms.
For many scholars, elementary education is a viable place to begin discussing
sexual diversity; however, simply adding gay and lesbian themed books to one class
reading day and having a day for all teachers to discuss sexuality with their students, as
Glasgow (2002) did, is only a step in the right direction. In order for homophobia to
decrease, it may be important for teachers to examine what is being taught on a daily
basis and how it may influence the lives of GLBT students. For example, students with
gay and lesbian parents need to feel validated through what is read and discussed
(Glasgow, 2002). Teachers should examine the language and illustrations of texts and
how they depict family structures. Furthermore, teachers should question how such
depictions may influence all students’ validation of their family structures (Glasgow,
2002). Because of changes in family structures, families are no longer predominantly
composed of a male and female of the same race; thus it is important that teachers begin
to examine the myths their texts perpetuates (Glasgow, 2002). Furthermore, Glasgow
(2002) points out that teachers are often not ready to defend their curriculum choices to
parents, and thus need to be trained in how to deal with community and organizational
opposition to teaching about sexual diversity. Researchers suggest that such training
should be addressed through extensive professional development programs and teacher

Secondary Education

Some secondary educators are also seeking to decrease homophobia through
instructional strategies. However, there is considerable difference among the levels of
curriculum change within the secondary environment. In the opinions of many scholars
who address homophobia, the secondary level curriculum should include texts that focus
explicitly on issues surrounding homosexual identities. For example, Crocco (2001) suggests adding discussions to history classes about social forces and events, such as the gay liberation movement and the Stonewall Riots as an appropriate method for combating antigay rhetoric. Likewise, Walling (1996) argues for the inclusion of gay and lesbian literature in the English classroom, thereby engaging students in reflecting on the lives of gay and lesbian authors and characters. He believes that all students should be required to read gay and lesbian texts, just as all students are required to read Shakespeare or other canonical authors. For him, this approach provides gay and lesbian students a sense of validation for their sexual identity. Moreover, it offers an environment where students can discuss issues related to same sex relationships, sexuality and homophobia.

Other scholars advise a more conservative approach to revamping the secondary curriculum. For some (e.g., Rowse, 1977; Uriber, 1995), discussing biographical information about gay and lesbian individuals who contributed to their specific subject area will provide enough room for discussing sexuality. Others suggest that health education and sex education curricula are the primary places to discuss homosexuality because they provide natural forums to discuss such topics (Anderson, 1994). However, if homosexuality is primarily discussed in health or sex education classes and only references sexual issues, then homosexuality may become strictly linked with sex. All students need to understand that sexuality is only one part of an individual’s identity, and linking homosexuality strictly to sex may perpetuate the social myth of homosexuality as a deviant sexual behavior (Anderson, 1994). Furthermore, by using health and sex education environments as the primary discussion places of homosexuality, educators are perpetuating a binary opposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality. By doing so, they
treat homosexuality as the opposite to heterosexuality, and do not consider the fluidity of sexual diversity (Gard, 2002).

Additionally, many scholars believe that teachers should capitalize on teachable moments, such as antigay remarks, television shows, and other discussion topics to challenge heterosexism by juxtaposing a remark, television program, etc., to a text that can be studied in class that deals with sexual minorities (Daley, Goldstein, & Russell, 2007). Aggleton, Chase, and Warwick (2004) suggest that these teachable moments may include having students reflect on social justice issues, and identifying and challenging stereotypes. Attached to the notion of teachable moments, Bedford (2002) suggests that gay and lesbian teachers should come out to their secondary students and use their coming out as a pedagogical tool to help students think critically about the lives of gays and lesbians. He suggests that their discussion should revolve around a text that deals with character development or minority issues. For example, an English teacher could discuss how a character develops in a text through making difficult decisions, and how such decisions influenced the life of the character. The teacher would then talk about personal decisions that the students and he or she have had to make. Such a discussion could develop into a class discussion about the lives of GLBT students.

Conversely, Hammett (1992) suggests that all discussions about sexuality should remain on intellectual and theoretical levels, to keep the classroom atmosphere comfortable for everyone by providing guidance and structure. For him, it is not desirable for teachers to impart their own experiences about coming out, or their struggles as a gay or lesbian individual. The classroom discussion should be deeply grounded in the text students are reading, so that every student feels safe. This approach implies that teachers
need to be aware of the feelings of all of their students, both GLBT and straight, and how discussions may affect students’ emotions.

Over the last decade, educational scholars have pushed for a change in the curriculum of schools to combat homophobia. Some advocate for explicit gay and lesbian literature to be taught in English and history classrooms. Others maintain a less confrontational strategy by, for example, simply discussing the sexual orientation of authors, or mentioning how homosexuals were treated during the Holocaust. However, for many teachers, countering the societal hegemony about sexuality can be dangerous because such actions may affect their employment (Mills, 2004); thus, teachers who fear for their jobs may not be willing to teach explicit gay and lesbian literature or discuss gay and lesbian issues (King & Brindley, 2002). Furthermore, without proper training, teachers may not be comfortable teaching gay and lesbian issues. They are unlikely to know all of the biographical information about authors, scientists, or historical figures. For example, teachers such as Hammett (1992), who taught A Raisin in the Sun (1995) for 15 years without knowing that its author, Lorraine Hansberry, was a lesbian, must be prepared appropriately or discover the necessary resources. Therefore, instructional strategies and curriculum development must be linked to teacher education programs and professional development, which I will discuss later.

Postsecondary Education

Finally, scholars in postsecondary environments are also addressing the problem of homophobia through curriculum and instructional strategies. Proponents for curriculum change on postsecondary campuses suggest avenues such as lectures by visiting GLBT scholars, incorporating homosexual texts into all disciplines, and using
creative writing in English classrooms. Blumenfeld (2003) argues that issues facing GLBT students should be formally addressed across the curriculum of each discipline on campus, which could be as simple as a guest speaker exploring how homophobia influences GLBT students’ college experiences. He suggests that visiting scholar positions in GLBT studies be created and supported on a continuing basis.

Additionally, college English classrooms are becoming a key place where homophobia and the marginalization of the GLBT community are being addressed through pedagogy and curriculum. A number of postsecondary educational institutions are offering writing classes specifically for gay and lesbian students to write about their lives and topics related to sexual diversity. These classes provide group validation for students’ sexuality and become a place where students can feel safe to express their views (Gulla, 1999; Miller, 1994).

Other English professors are implementing pedagogical strategies that incorporate what Britzman (1995) terms “queer pedagogy.” Queer pedagogy focuses on how students read texts from a heteronormative\(^1\) stance, and how such a reading influences the students’ interpretation. According to Britzman (2000), heterosexism is perpetuated in classrooms where students only examine texts through a heterosexual lens rather than one that incorporates all types of sexual diversity. She argues that because of heternormativity, most students view texts from strictly a heterosexual identity thus a heterosexual reading occurs. Therefore, she argues that a queer pedagogy is necessary to equip students with additional lens through which to view texts.

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\(^1\) A heteronormative stance views heterosexuality as the dominant form of sexuality within a culture. It posits that heterosexuality is the only “normal” form of sexuality, thus, it creates oppositions with other sexualities, and identifies non-heterosexual identities as deviant (Butler, 1990). I explore these issues further in Chapter 2.
Some college English professors are also combining queer pedagogy and queer theory.² By doing so, professors can discuss how society often places individuals into binaries, and as a result marginalizes minorities. For example, Zeikowitz (2002) uses queer theory to discuss how Grendel (Beowulf), the Green Knight (Arthurian legends), and the Pardoner (The Canterbury Tales) are marginalized because each is rejected by his society, thereby becoming the “queer” of his culture. Additionally, Spurlin (2002) suggests that using queer theory in the English classroom creates opportunities for students to reflect upon their possible role in the marginalization. By examining the lives of queer characters, the reader is given the opportunity to explore his or her treatment of the other in his or her community and how such treatment may influence the lives of others.

Although some college departments are using curriculum as a way to oppose homophobia, these efforts appear to be confined to academic departments such as English and cultural studies programs. There is no available literature that discusses how other departments such as history, science and art are using curriculum and instruction to decrease homophobia on their campuses.

Although many scholars believe that curriculum is the key to combating homophobia within school settings, beliefs among scholars in using curriculum and instructional strategies differ widely among disciplines and academic settings. For some, simply adding gay and lesbian texts to the curriculum is an appropriate method, while for others, implementing school-wide sexual diversity discussions is the best avenue to approach this problem.

² Queer theory is a critical theory that seeks to destroy heteronormativity through deconstructive readings and examinations of texts and cultures (Nowlan, 2008). I will discuss queer theory in more depth in Chapter 2.
Instructor Preparation

In addition to using curriculum and instruction to address the problem of homophobia, many scholars believe that preparing instructors at all levels of education is the key to creating safe classroom environments. Presently, there are large differences between how K-12 teachers and postsecondary instructors are being prepared to deal with homophobia. As I discuss below, most colleges of education are inconsistent in their preparation of teachers to deal with sexual diversity. Some researchers wish to include sexual diversity training in their multiculturalism programs. However, there is no available literature that discusses how college campuses are preparing instructors for anti-homophobic teaching.

K-12 Education

Many scholars believe that teacher education programs are the most viable avenue for addressing homophobia. For example, Lipkin (2002) proposes that college courses should teach pre-service teachers to understand the significance of GLBT issues and how to reduce bigotry, self-hatred, and violence by increasing tolerance for sexuality differences. However, most teachers do not study these concepts in undergraduate teacher education programs (Elsbree, 2002). Further, anti-homophobic pedagogy is rarely included in many colleges of education’s curriculum (Taylor, 2009). In fact, Stiegler (2008) and Taylor (2007) argue that although many colleges are dedicated to the idea of teaching social justice issues, many schools neglect discussing homophobia and heterosexism in teacher education programs. Specifically, of major concern for scholars are questions such as: How will elementary teachers address students who come from same-sex parents? How will secondary teachers address issues around students who are
self-identified as gay or lesbian? Although Sanlo (2002) provides a specific course syllabus to address sexual diversity in teacher education programs, he argues that most schools of education have not adopted a formal curriculum which teaches sexual diversity. Often there is little push for integrating GLBT issues in education unless there is one faculty member who is willing to fight. If that faculty member leaves, little may be done to sustain the process (Middleton & Young, 1999). Therefore, many education professors have a limited notion of what they should teach (Lipkin, 2002).

It also becomes problematic when most texts used by colleges of education only mention homosexuality when referencing health related issues such as HIV, AIDS, or other sexually transmitted diseases, or as an opposite lifestyle to heterosexuality (Middleton & Young, 1999). Thus, many scholars suggest that sexual diversity topics should be included in the arena of multiculturalism so that some consistency among teachers and how they address sexual identity can be established when dealing with issues related to sexuality. In Chapter 2, I explore the connections between multiculturalism and homophobia.

Postsecondary Education

Presently, there is no available research discussing how college departments, outside of teacher education departments, prepare future college and university instructors to deal with homophobia in their classrooms. However, many colleges and universities are beginning to implement campus-wide staff development programs (such as Safe Zone training) that address the problem of homophobia (Blumenfeld, 2003). For many academics, professional development programs provide a method to address the pedagogy of instructors, to address the tolerance of staff and administrators, and to
establish safe zones in college environments. I discuss the role of professional
development in addressing homophobia in more depth in Chapter 3.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored the problem of homophobia and the attempts to address this challenge to date. Current attempts of researchers and teachers to deal with homophobia are not succeeding in removing the hatred and harassment that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students face. Most of the programs that I have discussed have been implemented for several years, but homophobia continues to rise within K-12 education (GLSEN, 2008). Furthermore, scholars are divided in their beliefs about the best avenues for combating homophobia. For some scholars, curriculum is the necessary path for change; for others, teacher education programs are more appropriate.

By comparing the different instructional methods for addressing homophobia at all levels of education, I have elucidated a need for secondary educators to consider how this problem may be addressed. K-12 educators must consider what can be done to make classrooms safer environments. Outside of college environments, attempts to address the issue of homophobia have been made by developing curricula that use age-appropriate material. But as Glasgow (2002) finds, teachers are often not prepared to defend their curriculum choices to their community. Moreover, many teachers are afraid to discuss and use explicitly gay and lesbian literature in English and language arts classes or to discuss individuals such as Harvey Milk in history classes.

Nonetheless, it is important to begin to explore what creates a safe environment for GLBT students and how feasible it is to create such an environment given the political and social constraints on teaching about sexual diversity. It can become
problematic for teachers to discuss homosexuality with students in communities that are intolerant of sexual diversity. Thus, I propose examining how professional development may be a viable tool in helping teachers address homophobia.

In regard to examining how professional development may affect homophobia in schools, one aim of this research study was to explore teachers’ perceptions of homophobia and non-heterosexual identities. For a number of years, scholars have used multiculturalism and queer theory to examine diversity and otherness. Thus, in the next chapter, I briefly discuss the tenets of multiculturalism and queer theory and why I have chosen to use these as the theoretical frameworks for this study. Chapter 3 discusses the qualitative methodology used in the study. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I discuss the findings and implications of the study, and Chapter 7 summarizes and discusses the limitations of the study.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks: Multiculturalism and Queer Theory

To create safe places for GLBT students in schools, many educational scholars (Banks, 2006; Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Jordan, Nieto, Scofield, Stephan, 2001; Kumashiro, 2004; Letts, 2007) argue that multicultural education is a viable way to create safe classrooms. However, to truly create safe classrooms, one must examine the influence of homophobia in educational settings. To do so, it is useful to analyze homophobia in schools using the lenses of queer theory and multiculturalism. These theoretical frameworks also help us understand how sexual identity exists in the school community. In exploring the constructions of sexual identity, both multiculturalism and queer theory examine how communities create understandings of different cultures through social interactions. As I discuss below, in combining these two theoretical frameworks, I am able to do work that each theory alone does not support. I will briefly discuss the tenets of each theory, and discuss how the theories complement each other and provide an appropriate analytic framework for this study.

Multiculturalism and homophobia

For the purpose of this study, I use a definition of multiculturalism as the process of creating acceptance of multiple cultures within educational settings. Through the process of multiculturalism, individuals are able to express their own culture without the fear of rejection and intolerance (McLaren, 1995). Further as Asante (2007) states, “multiculturalism in education is the quality of creating and sustaining curricula, academic activities, programs, and projects that actively enhance respect for all human cultures” (p.1). In exploring multiculturalism as it relates to homophobia, I posit that multiculturalism is a viable tool for analyzing the data from this study because of its
origins in the Civil Rights Movement, its role teacher preparation programs, its notions of cultural diversity, and its acknowledgment of queer culture.

Multiculturalism can be traced to the Civil Rights Movement (McLaren & Sleeter, 2000). According to McLaren & Sleeter (2000), “African-American scholars and educators, working in conjunction with the Civil Rights Movement as a whole, provided much of the leadership of multicultural education” (p. 16). Originally, the term “multiethnic education” was used to address issues surrounding race and race relations. “Multicultural education” was used later to include other areas of diversity, including gender and sexuality. In fact, “culture” became a part of multicultural education to entice the audiences of the white educators who believed that the movement was not embracing all cultures (McLaren & Sleeter, 2000). Also during the development of multicultural education, Title IX became a part of educational institutions. Title IX was enacted in 1972 as a federal law that prohibits any educational program that receives federal funding to deny the participation of someone based on biological sex. Title IX became a catalyst that helped white middle class educators embrace multiculturalism because it now included issues of sexism. Through the progression of history and the gay rights movement, multiculturalism embraced queer culture, as I discuss later in this section (McLaren & Sleeter, 2000).

In addition because of its roots in the Civil Rights Movement, multicultural education became a part of college accreditation processes. Specifically, multiculturalism became an official part of colleges of education in 1979 when the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) programs added multiculturalism to its list of requirements for accreditation to address all areas of cultural differences in teacher
preparation (Messner, 1994). NCATE requires that teachers must be committed to cultural diversity in all areas of education. Such a commitment begins with the education of the pre-service teachers (Messner, 1994).

In discussing race and oppression, multiculturalism became an avenue for colleges of education to begin to think about the struggles of power and language through educating pre-service teachers. Through colleges of education, pre-service teachers learned about different cultures and how to incorporate cultural diversity into their classrooms. Because of teacher education programs, cultural diversity became an attribute of multicultural education. McLaren (1995) suggests that multiculturalism became a way for students and teachers to validate other cultures within classrooms through pedagogical practices. Bedford (2002) argues that multiculturalism enables individuals to live and work in places that cherish diversity of all types. Moreover, one aim of multicultural education was to ensure that students’ different cultures are understood in the classroom and school. Indeed, Gay (2007) argues that multicultural education should provide tolerant places where students feel validated so that they can engage in learning. Therefore multiculturalism became a philosophy that embraces the importance and the legitimacy of cultural diversity (Gay, 2007).

In acknowledging and accepting different cultures, multiculturalism provided a foundation for a reform movement to change school atmospheres through including the idea of cultural pluralism within multicultural practices. Cultural pluralism, as Grant (2007) suggests, is the idea that there is no one dominant culture that defines what it means to be an American. Cultural pluralism thereby redistributes power from the dominant culture and away from Eurocentrism (Grant, 2007). The constituents of cultural
pluralism are grounded in the concepts of respect for all individuals, acceptance of differences among cultures, and understanding other cultures (Baptiste, 1979). Because of cultural pluralism, multiculturalism in schools became a philosophy that involved more than the content taught but included policies and pedagogical methodologies (Bennett, 2003). For example, schools began to examine several core principles including teaching about the influence of stereotypes about different cultures, values that are shared among cultures (justice, freedom, peace), and how to interact with others from different cultures (Banks et al., 2001).

In addition to the notions mentioned above, Banks et al. (2001) also argue that one of the main purposes of multicultural education is to provide places where different social and culture groups can interact without fear. Because of this belief, multiculturalism became a catalyst that promoted tolerance and safety for GLBT students by educating teachers about the GLBT culture. In order to educate teachers about GLBT culture, one must first understand the reality of an existing GLBT culture. GLBT culture, or queer culture, is a shared set of beliefs and acknowledgments among the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community (Tierney, 1997). It is a culture that maintains a history of oppression and hatred, civil rights, and community activism. According to Nowlan (2007), queer culture can be traced throughout history, including events such as the Stonewall Riots, the AIDS epidemic, and the modern gay rights movement. In addition to the historical aspect of culture, Nowlan (2007) argues that GLBT individuals live and function within a community that has established a distinct culture with contributions to literature, art, film, history, and language. It is a culture that maintains a set of practices and belief systems that one must navigate in order to function within
GLBT community (Tierney, 1997). Such practices can be as simple as understanding that gay men who are in committed relationships may choose to wear wedding bands on their right hand, instead of the left hand. Beyond acknowledging the GLBT culture, Letts (2002) suggests that adding sexual diversity to teacher education programs through multiculturalism helps to make visible lives of gay and lesbian students. It prepares teachers to deal with sexual differences in the same manner that it prepares teachers to address differences in race, class, and gender.

Other scholars also believe that multiculturalism is key in constructing tolerant classrooms for GLBT students. Mathinson (1998) suggests that in order for gay and lesbian students’ culture to be validated by schools, teachers need to learn appropriate ways to integrate GLBT culture into classrooms, which can be done through multiculturalism. Kumashiro (2004) suggests that for teachers seeking concrete methods for addressing homophobia in their schools anti-oppressive education\(^3\) and multiculturalism may be a viable tools. Further, in addressing the GLBT issues in classrooms, Asher (2008) argues that multicultural education can destroy the oppressive nature of binaries such as self and other, queer and straight. In doing so, teachers must work against the oppression that exists within society (Kumashiro, 1999). For these scholars, multiculturalism is an appropriate method to address GLBT culture within schools and classrooms.

However, only using multiculturalism as a framework for this study has limitations. One challenge relates to the concept of multiple identities. Because sexual identity is not solely founded within one’s culture traditions (Banks, 2009), there are

\(^3\) According to the Center for Anti-Oppressive Education, anti-oppressive education addresses the many ways through which educators can challenge the many different forms of oppression in schools. By oppression, they mean the ways that certain ways of being or identity in society are privileged over others.
possibilities for multiple identities, and multiculturalism is not able to examine such multiplicity thoroughly. In fact, Douce (2005) posits that the multiculturalism model is premised on the notions of a dominant culture versus a minority. Therefore, this model does not address the ways that marginalized groups relate to each other, nor the reality of multiple identities. Thus, it does not take into account the possible interactions and tensions. As I discuss later in this chapter, queer theory seeks to understand how one’s different “identities” are constantly in tension with the dominant group, and how the fluidity of identity creates spaces for movement in society’s categorizations of identity (Nowlan, 2007). Thus, queer theory seeks to show the possibilities of multiple identities within communities.

A second challenge in using multiculturalism as the theoretical framework for this study involves how multiculturalism addresses hegemony. To address homophobia in schools, one must focus on the individuals or institutions that hold the power and examine why those institutions are allowing heterocentricity to continue. Multiculturalism seeks to address hegemony through elucidating how dominant cultures control society. In doing so, the main focus of multicultural education is to show how hegemony functions in society in relation to cultures (Asante, 2007). Although multicultural education addresses hegemony in schools in this broad sense of cultures and hegemonic forces, queer theory enables us to examine the specific relationship between hegemony and sexual identity in a more comprehensive manner than multiculturalism. As I discuss later in this chapter, queer theory developed primarily to address the hegemonic treatment of different sexual identities. Therefore an analysis of homophobia in schools
through a lens that combines queer theory and multiculturalism will be most productive for this project.

I will next discuss the tenets of queer theory and how queer theory emerged as an approach to explore how society marginalizes non-heterosexual identities. Queer theory examines how non-heterosexual identities are defined according to the hegemonic structures that exist within society (Butler, 1990; Nowlan, 2007).

_queer theory_

According to Nowlan (2007), queer theory is a combination of postmodern critical theory and GLBT studies. Specifically, it examines the constructions of sexual and gender identities and how those constructions relate to binary oppositions. Queer theory explores how binary oppositions related to sexuality are fallacies constructed by hegemonic forces to control the fluidity of sexual and gender identities. Thus, queer theory rejects normalized constructions of sexuality and gender. Queer theory emerged in the late 1980s and offered students in college English classrooms a way to examine the sexual underpinnings of literary texts (Dilley, 1999). As the theory developed, academics began to use queer theory lens to examine canonical texts by such authors as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton to examine how the dominant group marginalized others (Zeikowitz, 2002). Additionally, scholars outside of English (e.g., Butler, 1990) began to use queer theory to explore the notions of sexuality and gender and how hegemony affected the construction of sexual and gender identity. Queer theory explores how non-heterosexual and heterosexual identities are defined according to the hegemonic structures that exist within society (Butler, 1990). It examines how the construction of knowledge about sexual identity and heterosexism is socially situated (Gamson, 2000).
Queer theory offers particular notions that are useful to my study: sex/gender, performativity, hegemony, and binary oppositions. I will next discuss these ideas.

**Sex and Gender**

For Butler (1990) “sex” is the product of a society’s declaring one to be a boy or a girl. Butler postulates that at birth, a “sex” is assigned to an individual. When medical personnel declare “It’s a girl/boy!” after the mother gives birth, they are not simply reporting on what they see in terms of sex organs, but are actually assigning a “sex” and a gender to a physical body. Thus the process of what it means to be a particular “sex” begins for that child (Salih, 2006). When medical personnel assign a “sex,” society also attaches, through societal norms, a gender that aligns with the assigned “sex.” A boy receives an attached masculine gender and a girl receives an attached feminine gender. The child must begin to accept what it means to be this sex and this gender or be labeled as a deviant by the dominant culture (Butler, 1990).

Through this process gender is constructed through relationships between language and sexuality that exist in society, which means that no gender identity exists outside of language. In other words, calling a baby a “boy” attaches an understanding of how a person of masculine gender should act. Further, in the process of naming a sex and a gender, the infant child begins the “repeated inculcations of a norm” (Butler, 1993, p. 8). In other words, the child must begin to “act” in the way that it has been labeled, or be considered deviant. Therefore, the child’s gendering process begins through the normative power regimes of his or her society and culture. Thus, to avoid being labeled a deviant, the child must perform his or her gender for the community.
Butler (1990) argues that society does not want individuals to conceptualize the possibilities of additional “genders” because it is within the notion of other possibilities that the dominant group may lose its power. Thus, the labeling of appropriate gender behaviors allows the dominant power regime to continue to control the ways through which gender is understood. Further, it is through the idea of gender performativity that the dominant culture remains dominant.

**Performativity**

For the purpose of this study, performativity is process through which individuals act in order to display an “accepted identity” for the dominant culture. Drawing on Derrida’s (2001) notion of performativity, queer theory argues that gender is a sequence of repeated acts. Thus gender is not something one is, but rather the repetitive acts in which one engages. For Butler (1993), performativity is not a “singular act, for it is a reiteration of a norm or set of norms” (p. 12). In other words, performativity is the repetition of acts that construct a socialized understanding of what something is.

The notion of reiteration underpins the concept of performativity. Reiteration begins at birth and consists of the process of repetitive acts that display for society an acceptable gender. According to Leitch et. al (2001), for example, “the little boy learns that his crying is not masculine; he must grow into his masculinity by imitating the behavior designated as “male” to the point that such behavior becomes “second nature.” (p. 2486). It is through the process of reiteration that the little boy displays an appropriate gender to his community. If the boy does not adhere to what society deems as normal behavior, he becomes a “deviant.” To that end, there will always be deviants (homosexuals, bisexuals,
etc.) in society because society continually attempts to establish normative sexual and gender identities.

Further, performativity and reiteration require “citationality” to exist in society (Derrida, 1972). Citationality suggests a word only has a meaning because its meaning is understood and repeated through history. Drawing from Butler (1990), Kumashiro (1999) argues that citationality involves the ability to maintain a meaning by drawing on the history of a word or stereotype. Queer theory argues that this history, performativity and citationality, allow hegemony to exist in society. For example, in western civilization, historical actions have defined what a marriage is. When an appropriate individual (clergyperson, judge, etc) states, “I now pronounce you man and wife,” a particular act has been cited by the individual in charge, the man and woman, and society. Hegemony begins to operate if the man and woman decide to define their marriage in a way that has been deemed inappropriate by the dominant group. For example, if the man and woman decide to have a sexually open marriage, the couple will be labeled as deviants, according to the dominant group. Thus, queer theory argues that history, performativity, and citationality allow hegemony to control the ways through which a marriage is defined and functions.

Hegemony

Hegemony is the power exerted by the dominant culture to control other groups of individuals. It is the predominance of one thought over another. According to Gramsci (1992) hegemony is the dominance of certain ideologies, practices, principles that are placed on other cultures for the purposes of controlling others. In addressing how hegemony influences sexual identity, queer theorists cite Foucault’s (1978) notions of
power regimes. Foucault argues that human beings are constantly engaging with a regime of power that wishes to regulate society’s sexuality. Foucault believes that social institutions such as school, medicine, law, and religion govern sexuality and sexual desires through establishing categories that are continually placed in opposition to each other through discursive regimes. In discussing the history of sexuality, Foucault traces how society has marked certain sexual practices (masturbation, sodomy, adultery, etc.) as deviant from the norms of modern culture as established through social institutions. For example, he cites how schools separated young children to discuss their sexuality. In these same sex groups, the children are taught how to speak properly about sexuality in rigid and technical terms (Foucault, 1978). Thus, the institution of school engages in hegemonic practices by controlling the ways the children discuss and engage in sexual activity.

Further, Foucault uses the example of teachers in male boarding schools who aimed to produce acceptable behavior concerning masturbation. Foucault (1978) argues that through discussions of this sexual act by school officials, the nature of sexuality and sexual desires enters into regimes of power that label and categorize masturbation as anti-normative according to the teachers, who hold the power. The teachers controlled students’ sexual acts through labeling something as anti-normal.

Drawing on Foucault’s (1978) discussions of power regimes and sexuality, queer theory proposes that culture dictates acceptable displays of gender. These displays do not represent an innate gender, but rather are a product of a regime of power. In exploring this power regime, Butler (1990) suggests that there is no innate or real gender, but that gender is fluid and a reiteration. Because “sex” and gender are a reiteration, or a
repetition, of the norms forced upon individuals by society, queer theory seeks to examine social hegemony. Thus, through queer theory, one can understand the notion of “sex” and how discourse governs social understandings of “sex” and gender. Moreover, through queer theory, one can conceptualize how the dominant culture controls the development of sexual identity. For Butler (1990), the hegemony is broken by realizing that gender identity is not an indwelling part of an individual, but is rather a performative act. Therefore, the question is not whether to perform, but rather what to perform. Thus queer theory articulates a critique of how identity is constructed through language, power, and social constructions. Butler (1990), through descriptions of drag queens, posits that an individual can break hegemony by demonstrating for society the fluidity of gender identity constructions. For example, while the drag queens are biologically male, they act and dress like females. In fact, some drag queens act so feminine that it is difficult to determine a “true gender identity.” Thus, Butler (1990) suggests that there is no fixed gender because outwardly these men appear to be females, but are biologically male. Therefore, society’s labeling of gender through actions becomes invalid. Likewise, Leitch et al. (2001) argue that queer theory “is interested in any and all acts, images, and ideas that ‘trouble’, violate, cross, mix, or otherwise confound established boundaries between male and female, normal and abnormal, self and other” (p. 2487). Further, Leitch et al. (2001) argue that the broader goal of queer theory is “a general troubling, an attempted unfixing, of the links between acts, categories, representations, desires, and identities” (p. 2487). Therefore, queer theory seeks to elucidate the underpinnings of normative sexual identity by positing that individuals do have not a “real” or a “true” sexual or gender identity, but rather are reiterations constructed through an individual’s socialization and
society’s regimes of power. For the queer theorists, the mechanism by which society regulates sexual identity is the constructions of binary oppositions.

**Binary Oppositions**

One of the purposes of queer theory is to identify binary oppositions and how they perpetuate society’s desire for fixed identities. By using Derridian philosophy to explore how binary oppositions influence categories such as homosexual and heterosexual, gay and straight, queer theorists hope to illuminate a fluidity between sexual identities. Derrida (2001) suggests that all human beings are influenced by binary oppositions, such as good and bad, true and false, writing and speech, father and son, inside and outside, original and copy, and philosophy and literature. According to Derrida (2001), binary oppositions are two opposing concepts that society, specifically Platonic philosophy, have placed against each other. Because of the need to define concepts as they relate to other concepts, such oppositions will always exist. Thus, there will always be the contrasting notions good versus evil, God versus nothing, true versus false, and so forth, because we define something by juxtaposing it to what it is not. In contrast, Derrida (2001) believes that words represent not an either/or principle, but rather a fluidity of different meanings.

Queer theory seeks to dismantle the binary constructions surrounding sexual identity that exist in society. It attempts to show the superiority in binaries. For example, society understands straight because it is the opposite of gay. In the straight versus gay binary, society considers straight to be superior, or the more accepted form of sexuality. However, “you can’t define or explain what heterosexuality is without doing so in relation to, and distinction from, homosexuality; heterosexuality therefore needs
homosexuality to make any sense, even to exist at all” (Nowlan, 2008, p.2). Therefore, heterosexuality is not superior because in order for heterosexuality to exist, there must be homosexuality. Thus, queer theory seeks to destroy the presumed superiority that exists in binary oppositions, and thereby establishing an equality in language. Queer theory thus offers a way to define what it means to have a fluid definition of gender and sexuality. In other words, queer theory seeks to show that there is no innate gender or sexual identity

**Conclusion**

In addressing homophobia in schools and classrooms, it is important to create safe environments. To do so, multiculturalism provides educators with an avenue to creating safe places for GLBT students (Banks, 2004). It equips teachers with tools that can create a pluralistic and democratic school for all cultures, including GLBT culture. Further, multiculturalism, through cultural pluralism, allows teachers to examine the ways that hegemony functions within a classroom and how hegemony can be disrupted through cultural diversity (Kumashiro, 2004).

In order to examine homophobia in schools, I posit that in addition to multiculturalism, queer theory is useful for understanding how knowledge about sexual identity is constructed through binary oppositions and reiteration. Like multiculturalism, queer theorists seeks to create safe and tolerant classrooms, and at the same time to elucidate why socially constructed categories influence definitions of identity. Because of society’s desire to establish fixed definitions, queer theory becomes a way to dismantle society’s fixed definitions. Finally, because its foundation rests on the categorization of individuals through such attributes as masculinity, sexuality, and the way that such
categories structure knowledge about who or what something is, queer theory allows us to examine how heterocentricity can be broken within classrooms and schools. It also allows us to examine how heterosexism affects teachers’ understandings of homophobia in their classrooms and schools.

Therefore, in this project it is beneficial to use both multiculturalism and queer theory as theoretical frameworks. Used together, these theories help to analyze data about homophobia in schools. In next chapter, I discuss the methodology used in this study.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In the previous chapters, I discussed the problem of homophobia in the schools, how the problem is currently being addressed, and theories of multiculturalism and queer theory. In this chapter, I will discuss the specifics of my research study and how this study addressed the problem of homophobia through a collaborative professional development (PD) model.

My study used a qualitative approach to studying and addressing the problem of homophobia and heteronormativity in secondary schools. It examined how eight secondary school teachers explored homophobia in discussions about their classrooms and schools through a collaborative professional development program. The eight participants came from diverse backgrounds, had different educational levels, and represented a range of years of teaching. Their content areas were English, music, history, art history, and physics. Participants’ ages ranged from 34 to 53 years old. The PD consisted of nine sessions taking place over six months, which I facilitated. I collected data through the following methods: unstructured focus group interviews, unstructured individual interviews, audio taped PD sessions, participant reflective journals, researcher field notes, and a research journal. In this chapter, I will describe the tenets of professional development, provide a rationale for using the collaborative PD model, and discuss the PD program I developed for this study. I will then discuss qualitative methodology and provide the specifics of my study.

Professional Development

As stated in Chapter 1, researchers hypothesize that professional development programs have the potential to combat homophobia in the schools (Armstrong, 1994;
Crocco, 2001). Some scholars believe that professional development programs should instruct teachers about how to intervene when hearing homophobic remarks (Armstrong, 1994; Kissen, 1991; Underwood, 1998). Along these lines, Lipkin (1995) proposes that teachers should be taught how to broach the subject of homosexuality and sexual diversity in their schools. Other researchers suggest that professional development should focus on instructing teachers about specific texts that could be used in their classrooms and specific pedagogical practices for discussing homosexuality (e.g., Marinoble, 1998).

There are two types of professional development: independent and group (Darling-Hammond, 1995). In independent professional development (which does not involve an administratively required formal structure), teachers learn by reading professional journals, engaging in discussions with other educators, and by implementing action research projects. Conversely, in the group model, participants address a shared challenge together through inquiry, discussion, and reflection. Darling-Hammond (1995) argues that collaborative professional development is one of the most effective forms of professional development because it provides space for different perspectives to be heard on how to address challenges in schools. Collaborative inquiry can provide teachers with powerful learning experiences by fostering dialogue among groups of teachers who want to address key challenges (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Collaborative model of professional development may help to develop ongoing dialogues that allow participants to engage in discussions over an extended time (Marshall & Snow, 2002).

I used a collaborative PD for this study because it aligns with the principles of queer theory and multiculturalism in terms of its treatment of power. Queer theory and multiculturalism ultimately seek to dismantle power structures. Likewise, collaborative
PD attempts to recognize the power relations that inevitably arise within group situations and to create an equal sharing of power by allowing each participant the opportunity to engage in every aspect of the PD.

In my study, I facilitated nine PD sessions over six months on a weekday evening that was convenient for the research participants. I chose nine sessions because Darling-Hammond (1995) suggests that the most effective PD allows teachers to meet regularly throughout an academic year to discuss a challenge in an ongoing manner. I chose a six month time period because I wanted to incorporate Darling-Hammond’s belief in establishing regular meetings with teachers. The PD program took place on the University of Rochester’s River Campus, which was centrally located for all participants and held in a room that provided privacy. An informal arrangement was used with the participants seated at tables in a U-shaped pattern, which fostered an atmosphere that aligns with the collaborative and reflective philosophies of professional development, one that I characterize as a “community of learners” (Rogoff, 1990). By ‘community of learners’, I mean a setting that validated each teacher’s ideas and thoughts about homophobia as being important in our discussions. A community of learners allows each person to contribute his or her knowledge to a discussion. By doing so, the community uses all contributions to construct new knowledge about the topic (Lenz, 2007). As Sparks (2009) posits, a professional development meeting should last longer than 45 minutes, but not overwhelm the teachers involved. The professional development sessions in my study lasted approximately one hour per session.

Additionally, the project drew on the knowledge and expertise of all participants. It entailed collaboration between the participants and researcher because I allowed the
participants a voice in choosing the topics that were discussed during the sessions. At the end of Session 1, I asked participants individually to list the topics related to homophobia that they would like to discuss as a group. I used the lists to develop Sessions 2 to 5 and to choose the readings for these sessions. I was unable to cover all of the topics that the participants submitted. Some of the topics that the participants chose were: how does homophobia impact New York State schools, homophobia in schools across the nation, and how do students react to homophobia. Participating teachers were also asked to bring curriculum topics and texts from their academic disciplines which became the focus of Sessions 6 through 8. With the exception of Sessions 1 and 9, the sessions followed this plan: a journal writing activity (10 minutes.), a collaborative discussion of the texts (40 minutes), and an ending journal writing activity (10 minutes). Appendix 2 lists the texts used in the PD sessions. In Chapter 6, I present my analysis of how the PD functioned in relations to the goals of this study and the research questions. Next, I discuss how I incorporated qualitative methodology into this project.

*Rationale for Qualitative Methodology*

Qualitative research is a research approach that attempts to comprehend the social setting of a system of participants from their own perspectives, rather than making predictions or testing hypotheses (Key, 1997). A characteristic of qualitative research is to seek to understand an individual’s reality and how an individual’s reality is based on his or her perceptions (Key, 1997). Qualitative research therefore involves examining people’s experiences and documenting those experiences in detail, or “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). It is through documenting rich observations along with rigorous analysis that researchers aspire to create credibility and transferability.
Credibility is the process of establishing the results of the study as being believable from the perspectives of the research participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). In other words, the participants’ agreement with the research findings establishes credibility. According to Key (1997), the participants in the research alone can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. Credibility can be obtained by including member checking and triangulation in the study. Member checking involves allowing the research participants the ability to view and comment on certain aspects of the researcher’s analysis (Janesick, 2000). In terms of triangulation, Denzin (2000) posits that the two most accepted types of triangulation are: investigator triangulation and combination triangulation. The first type entails multiple researchers involved in one investigation. The researchers examine and code the data separately, and later compare their analyses. Second, combination triangulation uses multiple data collections to examine phenomena. In my study, I collected and triangulated five types of data related to homophobia in schools. Below, I discuss how my data were triangulated.

In addition to credibility, transferability is also a vital part of qualitative research. Transferability is defined as the degree to which the findings of a study can be applied to other settings (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). Transferability can be reached by means of the following: comparison sample of demographic areas and dense descriptions (Key, 1997). A comparison sample of one demographic area or characteristics of a group implies that the demographic area of the study is similar to another area or similar group. In this case, some of the implications can be transferred to the second setting.

*Qualitative Methods of Data Collection*
Qualitative research involves using a range of methods of data collection and analysis to understand the ways through which individuals construct meaning about themselves and their community (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In doing so, qualitative researchers attempt to produce a plausible explanation about people’s experiences. For this project, I used the following methods of data collection: unstructured interviews, audio-taped focus group interviews (as part of the PD), participant reflective journals, researcher field notes, and a research journal. Next, I discuss each of these methods as they relate to my project.

The interview can range from being structured and formal to unstructured and creative. It is often used to gain information about people’s daily activities and the methods through which they construct meaning in their lives (Fontana & Frey, 2000). A structured interview asks pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories, with little room for divergent responses. The interviewer controls the sequence of the questioning and records the answers according to a pre-established scheme (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Therefore all participants are asked the same questions at the same moment in the interview. One positive aspect of structured interviews involves the ability to gain information from participants equally (same questions, same time, etc). In doing so, there is little room for the interviewer to interject his or her own thoughts into the interview process (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This is a benefit because it allows the participants’ thoughts to be at the forefront. One drawback to using structured interviews, as with all interviews, is that it takes place in a social context which inevitably influences the interview to some degree. The challenge arises if the researcher
does not consider the influence of the social context in his or her analysis of the interview data (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

As Briggs (1986) suggests, a structured interview gives most of the control to the interviewer. Further, semi-structured interviews are interviews that allow the interviewer to develop questions as the interview is taking place, but the topics were decided prior to the beginning of the interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This type of interview is beneficial if the researcher wishes to maintain control over the topics discussed, but has flexibility in the questions asked. Conversely, in an unstructured interview, the researcher wishes to explore specific topics, but asks open-ended questions to comprehend individuals’ understandings without imposing any of the researcher’s thoughts or beliefs (Fontana & Frey, 2000). An unstructured interview allows the researcher the ability to explore topics which may have not been considered prior to the interview. However, the unstructured interview can develop in ways that take the interview into areas which the researcher may not wish to discuss.

I used the unstructured interview because of its theoretical connections to queer theory’s commitment to equalizing power relations. In an unstructured interview, the researcher and the participant jointly control the direction of the interview. The researcher does not work from a pre-constructed set of questions, but rather broad topics. For example, he or she may want to discuss “homophobia” as a broad topic and not have pre-constructed questions prior to the interview. Thus, the interview unfolds in a conversational manner. Although the interviewer is the instigator and maintains a great deal of control, this type of interview attempts to equalize the power relations inherent in interviews (Briggs, 1986). I conducted one unstructured interview with each participant
within the two months preceding the PD program. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and took place in the same room as the PD sessions. The interviews were audio taped (and later transcribed, as I discuss below) and field notes written.

In addition to unstructured interviews, I also chose to use focus group interviews as a method of data collection. A focus group interview elicits various facets of individuals’ attitudes, beliefs, and experiences as they relate to other individuals (Madriz, 2000). This method has historically been used in marketing and other business-related disciplines, but its popularity has grown within social sciences research because of its usefulness (Morgan, 2002). A focus group provides researchers with the ability to examine the lives of a community through group interaction and social exchanges. Ideally, it creates an atmosphere where participants can share ideas, beliefs, and attitudes with others who share some commonality (Madriz, 2000).

As with unstructured interviews, I chose to use focus group interviews because of their relationship with power. Although power relations inevitably arise within any group, the focus group situation enables precedence to be given to what participants deem to be important, their own words, and the frameworks they use to describe their experiences. I conducted two unstructured focus group interviews with all participants during Session 1 and Session 9 of the PD program. The sessions lasted approximately one hour and took place in the same room as the PD sessions. The focus group interviews were audio taped (and later transcribed) and field notes written.

**Recording**

In considering interviewing, it is necessary to briefly discuss recording and transcribing. Qualitative interviewers use video- or audiotape recorders to capture data to
preserve data for later analysis (Babbie & Rubin, 2001; Duranti, 1997). To that end, Duranti (1997) and Egbert and Keating (2004) posit that recording devices are necessary to support researchers’ evidence of data collection. In my project, I audio-recorded the PD meetings and individual interviews. I chose audio recording over video recording because I was more concerned with the verbal interactions of the participants and how they discussed their perceptions of homophobia rather than with their non-verbal actions.

However, recording devices can be problematic. Warren (2002) warns that the use of a recording device can create an unwanted atmosphere in a research site. Specifically, participants may feel uncomfortable about being recorded and become nervous, thus hindering the gathering of in-depth and rich data. Warren therefore argues that researchers must be aware of the possible effect that recording devices may have on the interviewing process. Indeed, she has noticed that participants tend to interact differently (than they had prior to the recorder being turned on) with the interviewer once the recorder is turned on. For example, some participants may speak more succinctly, rather than elaborating on their thoughts.

While I was initially concerned about potential negative participant reactions to recording devices, participants in my study raised no objections and seemed comfortable with being recorded. As other scholars (Babbie & Rubin, 2001) have suggested, the atmosphere in my project may have mitigated some of the challenges that Warren (2002) encountered. During the first meeting, participants appeared to be open about discussing homophobia despite being recorded. As I built rapport with participants, they became accustomed to the presence of the recorders. Also, the arrangement of the room with a conference table may have positively influenced participants’ attitudes to being recorded.
In discussing audio-recorded data, it is necessary to also discuss how transcription influenced my data collection and analysis.

Transcription practices are guided by the analytic purpose of the researcher (Duranti, 1997; Erikson, 1991) as well as his or her theoretical stance (Roberts, 2007). For example, if one is using discourse analysis, then he or she may want to transcribe at a level that involves nonverbal as well as verbal interactions. In this regard, a researcher’s transcription is premised on his or her research priorities and may or may not use traditionally standard transcription symbols (Egbert & Keating, 2004). In my project, I used relational analysis, which I define in the analysis section of this chapter. I transcribed my audio data on a broad level that was concerned with whole words, phrases and sentences rather than non-standard utterances, interactions and gestures (Duranti, 1997). In terms of symbolic representation, I used transcription symbols to make transcribing a more efficient process (Roberts, 2007). I modeled my transcriptions symbols after the work of DuBois (2006), Fritz (2008), and Jefferson (1984). In doing so, I was able to conduct an appropriate analysis of the transcripts. Appendix 1 depicts the transcription symbols I used.

*Participant Reflective Journals*

Participant reflective journals were another form of data collected because they allow participants a safe outlet for personal concerns. They also promote internal dialogue, which enables participants to continue the reflective process involved in the PD (Spalding & Wilson, 2002). After each PD session, on their own time, participants wrote reflective journals which explored issues raised in the session or other issues. I did not provide prompts or specific topics because I was interested in how the participants were
grappling with the problem of homophobia and their questions or concerns. Participants word-processed their journals and emailed them to me. In total, I received 35 reflective journal entries from the participants, approximately one page responses.

**Field Notes and Personal Reflective Journal**

In addition to the methods above, I gathered data by writing research field notes and keeping a personal reflective research journal. I used these forms of data collection because queer theory and multiculturalism both aspire to illuminate how power affects our personal constructions of knowledge about difference (Nowlan, 2008; Nuby, 1996). By collecting data through these methods, I created a written account of how my own experiences, values, and conceptions and the power that exists within my own constructions affected the research project (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). Because I was leading the PD sessions, I wrote my field notes after all nine PD sessions. Field notes allowed me to construct a thorough description of what happened during the professional development sessions without generalizing or making assumptions (Angrosino & de Perez, 2000). Additionally, I wrote entries in my personal research journal immediately after writing the field notes to capture my reflections (Weber, 2003). Scholars argue that research journals are valuable as an outlet for the researcher to discuss his or her choices, assumptions, and personal thoughts about the project (Breuer & Mruck, 2003; Ortlipp, 2008).

**Qualitative Analysis**

In this research project, the two key units of analysis are the participants in the PD program and the individual teacher. According to Singleton and Straits (2005), a unit of analysis is the person or thing being studied in a research project. The research questions
in this project seek to understand teachers’ perceptions of homophobia within secondary school settings; teachers’ process of grappling with issues related to homophobia; and teachers’ responses to anti-homophobic discussions in the PD program.

I begin by discussing grounded theory and content analysis, so that I may situate my choice of a relational analysis approach to analyzing my data. Many qualitative researchers use grounded theory in their data analysis. When using grounded theory, a researcher does not begin a study with a preconceived theory, but rather the analysis generates a theory that describes a reality for the participants in the study (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). In fact, Glaser (1967) argues that the ‘purist’ form of grounded theory posits that researchers should not conduct literature reviews prior to undertaking research because the reviews can cause the researcher to develop preconceived notions and theories about the topic. Following this purist form, Glaser (1967) argues that the purpose of grounded theory is to allow the researcher to create new concepts for explaining human behaviors without the possibility of contaminating the data with preconceived ideas. In this way, the results of the analysis are “grounded to the data” (p. 43). Thus, grounded theory in many ways is a reversal of traditional analytic methods, which apply theories to data (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). In this regard, grounded theory moves from the most specific aspects of research to a broader understanding of the participants’ constructions of reality. That being said, Charmaz (2000) posits that researchers maintain theoretical beliefs which can be used as “sensitizing concepts” for their analysis.

In conducting grounded theory, the researcher initially examines data and codes through an “open coding” process as data is being collected (Charmaz, 2000). “Open
coding” involves the researcher building codes, categories, and themes that surface within the data by using a line-by-line approach (Bernard & Ryan, 2000). In this way, the data analysis guides further data collection (Charmaz, 2000). Thus, the analysis that transpires in grounded theory “is the interplay between researchers and data” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p. 13). Moreover, in grounded theory all of the steps of analysis are conducted simultaneously (Charmaz, 2000).

Although grounded theory is widely used, there is one major criticism to using a grounded theory approach. According to Charmaz (2000), some argue that “grounded theory research might limit understanding because grounded theorists aim for analysis rather than the portrayal of subjects’ experience in its fullness” (p. 521). In this regard, grounded theorists do not examine the “social structures of communities” but rather are concerned with “slices of social life” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522).

For my research, I chose to use a relational analysis approach, which is a type of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). In content analysis, researchers determine the presence of certain words, concepts, and themes within texts (“texts” are defined broadly as any item that contains a form of communication). Stemler (2001) argues that content analysis allows researchers to analyze texts through systematic procedures, through which he or she can discover the important concepts of how individuals construct their reality. While quantitative content analysis is concerned with the frequency with which words, concepts, and themes occur in the texts, qualitative content analysis is concerned with going beyond numerical representation to an integrated view of the data (Wildemuth & Zhang, 2005). In doing so, it allows the researcher to examine social reality in a manner that does not revolve around numerical counting.
Further, according to Krippendorff (2004), qualitative content analysis is rooted in critical literary theory, with three main attributes: a close reading of the text, an interpretation of the literature into new narratives that are accepted within the researcher’s scholarly circles, and the researcher’s interpretations, which are all are based in their own social, cultural, and contextual understandings. In qualitative content analysis, after the texts are coded and analyzed, the researcher makes inferences about the meaning created among the text(s), the writer(s), the audience, and perhaps the culture and time at which the texts were created.

In terms of coding in qualitative content analysis, there are three approaches (Krippendorff, 2004). The first allows the codes and categories to emerge directly from the raw data. The second approach is directed content analysis, in which initial coding begins with a theory. The purpose of the second approach is to explore and reapply a theory to the data. Finally, the third approach is summative content analysis, which starts with the counting of words, then moves the analysis to include latent meanings. Although this approach seems quantitative in the early stages, its ultimate goal is to explore the usage of the words/indicators in an inductive manner (Wildemuth & Zhang, 2005). In doing so, qualitative content analysis is concerned with patterns, themes and categories that depict a social construction of the participants’ realities.

As a form of content analysis, relational analysis takes the attributes of content analysis and extends beyond identifying how patterns, themes and categories depict realities to how those patterns, themes and categories are related to each other, thus, providing a different analysis. It allows the researcher to examine how those relationships between those concepts reveal how participants’ realities are constructed.
Relational Analysis

Relational analysis is a form of content analysis that involves discovering relationships within data. It suggests that social phenomena are best understood in relationship to the larger environment to which they belong (Taxel, 1991); thus, phenomena have no meaning apart from the text. Relational analysis is a tool that researchers in the humanities use to study the relationships within poetry, historical documents, and works of literature. Burkit (1997), a gender identity theorist, argues that relational analysis offers researchers a way to examine how identity is constructed through the relationships between gender and sexuality. By examining historical documents, he explores how gender identity is constructed through what he terms socio-historical connections between identities. He argues that categories of identity are premised on historical connections to sexuality, power and the power relations that exist in communities. It is through these relationships that one is able to see how gender is intertwined with many notions of sexual identity.

I chose to use a relational analysis approach in this project instead of content analysis because relational analysis goes beyond the typical purposes of content analysis to examine the relationships in data to help researchers understand phenomena. Further, I chose to use a relational analysis approach because the main theory informing relational analysis approach is Derridan deconstruction, which also informs queer theory, as discussed in Chapter 2. Deconstruction plays a key role in examining how relationships are constructed and persist in society. Queer theory seeks to deconstruct social constructions of sexual identity to reveal how hegemony perpetuates fixed definitions of sexual identity and to illuminate the concept that there is no “real” sexual identity.
Moreover, relational analysis is premised on the construction of relationships in the data and how those relationships help determine a social reality (Wildemuth, 2005). Similarly, one purpose of queer theory is to explore how relationships (such as citationality and performativity) perpetuate society’s constructions of a social reality especially concerning sexual identity (Butler, 1990). Moreover, queer theory seeks to illuminate how such relationships perpetuate heteronormativity. Finally, I chose to use relational analysis because of its philosophical connection to the notions of power, which is always inherent in relationships (Burkit, 1997). Conducting a relational analysis in gender studies allows a researcher to explore power within gender constructions.

In conducting a relational analysis, I analyzed the data using the whole-to-part method, which involves a deconstructive reading of the data. A researcher examines the data as a whole and slowly breaks apart the data to construct its core meanings. According to Francisco, Maher, and Powell (2003) there are several steps in an analysis involving whole-to-part analysis: reviewing, describing, transcribing, identifying critical events, and coding. I describe these next.

Reviewing, the first step, involves listening to the data tapes and/or examining the transcripts several times (Francisco, Maher, & Powell, 2003). In step two, the researcher notes in a research journal specific important events or situations in the recorded data. The third step entails reviewing the data again and identifying critical events. A critical event is one that “demonstrates a significant or contrasting change” (Francisco, Maher, & Powell, 2003, p. 416) in an understanding that may confirm or challenge a previous conceptualization of the problem being studied. The fourth step involves coding the data. These steps are conducted in the same manner throughout all interviews and focus group
discussions. During the fourth step, codes are assigned through the process of inductive coding (Johnson, 2008). Afterward, the codes are applied to the other sources of data.

In coding my data with a relational analysis, I used an inductive coding method. Inductive coding involves developing the codes from the data, rather than using a predetermined set of codes (Johnson, 2008). After coding the data, relationships between homophobia and racism, masculinity and homophobia, and awareness and change emerged. For triangulation, I coded all the forms of data. After coding my data, I grouped the codes into 12 overarching categories that illustrated the relationships among the participants’ perceptions of homophobia, including these codes: normal, otherness, tolerance, intolerance, racism, masculine, feminine, difference, awareness, language. Appendix 3 presents a list of codes used in this project.

Demographics of the Study

In discussing the demographics of the study and the participants, I provide national and regional demographics to help establish the context of the study and because they may influence the transferability of my findings. In 2008, the United States’ population was 304.1 million, of which 75% was Caucasian, 15.4% Hispanic or Latino, 12.4% African American, 4.4% Asian, .8% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 4.9% other. The average single household income was $46,326 and a family household income of $67,348.

According to the 2000 census, Monroe County, New York (the location of my study), has an average household income of $44,891, and the average family income in the area was $55,900. Approximately 11.20% of the population lives below the poverty line, most of whom reside in the City of Rochester. Further, in 2000, the racial make-up
of the county was 79.14% Caucasian, 13.75% African American, 0.27% Native American, 2.44% Asian, .03% Pacific Islander, 2.44% from other races, and 1.94% from two or more races.

In terms of the schools, three of the county high schools have received national recognition as being some of the best high schools in the country (US News and World Report, 2009). Further, a majority of the suburban area schools have received high recommendations by Great Schools, an organization that ranks schools across the country (Great Schools, 2010). In contrast, several schools in the urban school district are performing below state standards (New York State Department of Education, 2009). Table 1 depicts some of the facts about the area school districts in which participants in my study work.

Table 1: Facts about the Area School Districts (gender was not listed).
### Average Teacher Salary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>$58,238</th>
<th>$60,423</th>
<th>$47,632</th>
<th>$45,239</th>
<th>$43,589</th>
<th>$52,148</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial Demographics in Percentages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Study Participants

As mentioned above, the study involved eight secondary school teachers from schools in Monroe County, New York. Participant and school names have been changed for confidentiality. Eight participants volunteered for the study and were selected through a process of convenience, that is, through relationships with me and other study participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2001). Although only eight volunteered, the number was a large enough number to explore the research questions and small enough to build a community of learners (Lenz, 2007).

The group included a mixture of suburban and urban teachers who varied along the lines of sex, age and race. There were three males and five females in the group. The age range of the participants was 34 to 53. Participants were compensated by being awarded professional development continuing educational units (CEUs) by the Center for Professional Development and Educational Reform at the Margaret Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development. These CEUs are necessary to maintain teacher certification, thus providing a benefit to the participants. Table 2 depicts the demographics of the study participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race (self-identified)</th>
<th>Highest Educational Degree</th>
<th>Years Of Teaching</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirk</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The demographics of the participants and their districts mirror the national demographics discussed earlier. Like the national demographics, the salaries of teachers (average for the district) are near the national average salary of Americans. Also, the schools’ racial make-up is similar to the national racial make-up (with the exception of District D). The
racial make-up for the participants in this study is close to the national data (roughly 75% of both populations were Caucasian, and 25% were African-American). This same information is also similar in comparing the participants to the Monroe County, New York demographics (with the exception of District D in terms of racial make-up).

Researcher Positionality

In addition to the above attributes of my study, I believe that it is also necessary to briefly discuss my positionality as the researcher and PD facilitator. Specifically, as a former high school English teacher in the southeast, I recognized how homophobia influenced my classroom and school. Moreover, in graduate school while working with schools and teachers in upstate New York, I was aware of the problem of homophobia and its prevalence in those schools and classrooms. Although I was aware of the challenge of homophobia, conducting this study illuminated to me the extent to which heterosexism pervades these participants’ constructions of non-heterosexual identities. On some level, I expected to hear teachers discuss the negative impacts of homophobia in their schools, but I was not expecting the extent to which heterocentricity surfaced in their own lives. For example, as discussed in chapter four, on some level, homophobia exists in these participants’ own lives. Specifically, for most of the participants, it was acceptable to use homophobic language, but not to use racist language (as indicated by their use of homophobia and lack of use of racist language in the PD sessions). Thus, heterosexism dictates the ways through which these participants discussed homophobia. As the researcher, I was not expecting this finding to emerge from the data analysis.

Because these participants volunteered for the study, I was surprised at the level of covert heterocentricity within their own language choices. Finally, in discussing my
positionality and bias, because these participants were volunteers who were interested in the topic, I was not expecting some of the participants to believe that homophobia was not a significant problem in schools (see the pre-PD continuum of participants’ beliefs in chapter four). On some level, I expected that all of these participants believed that homophobia was a significant problem and each had a desire to change schools’ atmospheres. The results from this study suggest otherwise. Further, in examining my own possible biases, I did examine the data for participants whose beliefs about homophobia may have shifted toward the right side of the continuum, indicating a decrease in one’s belief that homophobia was not a problem in schools.

Additionally, it is important to mention my role as the “intervener” in this study. As the facilitator, the purpose of this project, on some level, was to construct an intervention study. In doing so, it was necessary to examine how a professional development program may influence the problem of homophobia in educational environments. Thus, as the intervener, it does impact my positionality. This is important to mention because traditionally, the intervener controls the intervention. However, I attempted to lessen my control through constructing a collaborative model of professional development, which gave a majority of the control to the participants. For example, they chose the topics (during the first meeting) that we studied and used their own curriculum in the latter part of the study. My control over the study was further equalized with the participants because of the types of interviews I conducted (unstructured individual interviews and unstructured focus group interviews, which allowed for the participants to maintain a majority of the directional control of the interview). Additionally, as the intervener in the study, it was necessary to be aware of my own biases and objectivity.
As discussed above, these were addressed through thorough examinations of my beliefs about homophobia in schools and a thorough examination of the data analysis.

Finally in discussing my positionality, it is important to mention that I am an advocate for creating safe places for GLBT students. As an advocate and conducting this study, it is important for me to remain as objective as possible while conducting the study. As discussed above, I believe that any subjectivity (although qualitative research can never be completely void of researcher subjectivity) was minimized because of the methodology of the study, the recognition of research biases, and the thoroughness of the data analysis.

**Conclusion**

In exploring homophobia in schools, I constructed a collaborative PD program situated within a larger qualitative study. The PD program provided an avenue to explore homophobia with eight teachers with diverse backgrounds and teaching experiences. The collaborative PD involved a shared relationship in the choosing of texts and topics discussed. I chose to use a qualitative research approach whose data collection methods included: unstructured formal interviews, focus groups (as part of the PD program), participant reflective journals, field notes, and a research journal. Moreover, each method of data collection was linked to the two theoretical frameworks used in this study, queer theory and multiculturalism. In Chapter 4, I present my findings related to teachers’ perceptions of homophobia in their classrooms and schools. Chapter 5 explores how teachers defined and discussed homophobia through actions and language, and Chapter 6 analyzes how the PD program functioned and how participants grappled with issues related to homophobia in it.
Chapter 4: Teachers’ Perceptions of Homophobia in Their Schools and Classrooms

In this chapter, I present the findings and analysis that emerged from the data examining teachers’ perceptions of homophobia in their schools and classrooms. First, I will briefly discuss the ranges of teachers’ beliefs about homophobia prior to the professional development. Afterward, I will discuss the participants’ perceptions of homophobia in their classrooms and schools.

*Pre-PD Perceptions*

In exploring teachers’ perceptions of homophobia, it is necessary to discuss how teachers perceived homophobia prior to the PD program. By discussing their beliefs before the PD, I am able to examine how the PD became a catalyst for reflective practices, which is a vital attribute of collaborative professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Through discussing these findings, it allows me to examine whether the PD impacted teachers’ beliefs about homophobia in their schools. These perceptions are based on the individual interviews that were conducted before the PD began. The individual interviews revealed a continuum of perceptions about homophobia among the group of teachers. For example, Kirk, the gay straight alliance (GSA) advisor in his school, believed homophobia is a problem in his school. He stated in his individual interview (2008), “many people do not realize the extent of hate that gay and lesbian students face daily in schools. As the GSA advisor, students tell me often of some verbal thing that someone said to them or about them.” In this statement, Kirk’s perception concerning homophobia is that it happens daily to many of the GLBT students in his school. However, unlike Kirk, Michelle stated in her individual interview (2008), “I
thought that we had already addressed this issue.” This statement suggests that Michelle perceived that the problem of homophobia no longer existed in schools.

These findings suggest that prior to the professional development program, Kirk’s and Michelle’s perceptions of homophobia were distant opposites. However, most of the participants’ perceptions were somewhere between Kirk’s and Michelle’s perceptions, a majority of them in the middle. Figure 1 depicts the rough representation of where I placed them on a continuum.

Figure 1: Continuum of Participants’ Perceptions of Homophobia Prior to PDP

Participants perceive that homophobia:

is a problem is not a problem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kirk</th>
<th>Brian</th>
<th>Matt</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Sally</th>
<th>Sue</th>
<th>Michelle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The continuum represents the range of perceptions of homophobia, with a majority of the participants in the middle. I reached these conclusions based on pre-PD interviews. Specifically, I examined how each participant answered the question, “Do you believe homophobia is a problem?” Because each interview began with this question, it allowed me to plot the participants’ answers on the continuum as each answer related to the others. I used Kirk’s and Michelle’s answers as the linear opposites, because they contradicted each other’s beliefs about the problematic nature of homophobia in schools.
In addition to Kirk and Michelle’s statements above, I considered the following quotations when plotting the participants.

Brian stated, “Do I think homophobia is a problem? Yes. Is it a problem in every school? I would say it depends on the district. I think homophobia is less of a problem in northeast as it would be in the bible belt” (individual interview, Jan. 15, 2008). I chose to place Brian closer to Kirk because he states that it is a problem but it is not a problem everywhere. His statements are more closely related to Kirk’s side of the continuum.

Further, Matt stated, “I see and hear homophobia happening in different schools that I have taught in over the years. But, I think that it depends on the school. I would assume that it happens more in certain districts and schools than in others” (individual interview, Jan., 17, 2008). Brian and Matt’s statements suggest that homophobia is not a wide-spread problem, but rather homophobia is dependent on the community in which the school is located. Thus, I placed Matt on the opposite side of Brian, yet closer to Kirk (rather than Michelle) because he acknowledges that homophobia is a problem.

In referencing the continuum of participants’ perceptions of the problem of homophobia, I placed Sally and Sue closer to the middle of the range of beliefs. Sally stated, “Do I think that homophobia is a problem? I think that it exists in the schools, but I think that there is much less of it than years ago, say when we were in school” (individual interview, Jan. 13, 2008). This statement suggests that Sally believes that homophobia has decreased over the years, which implies a closer relation to Michelle’s beliefs than Kirk’s.

Sue stated, “I think all prejudices are in schools. I think that homophobia is one of the last forms of prejudices to be dealt with, and I think that schools have done an okay
job at dealing with it” (individual interview, Jan. 16, 2008). Both of these statements acknowledge the problem of homophobia within some schools, but these statements lack the sense of urgency that Kirk’s statement implies above. Thus, I placed Sue next to Sally on the continuum.

In Chapter 6, I discuss how their perceptions may have changed as a result of this professional development. After briefly discussing their pre-professional development perceptions of homophobia, I will next discuss their perceptions more specifically by examining how they perceive homophobia as it relates to tolerance, affection and masculinity.

*Teachers’ Perceptions of Homophobia*

When exploring the participants’ perceptions of homophobia in their schools, I discuss how they perceive homophobia among the faculty and staff, as well as among the student body. The data in this study mirror national data (GLSEN, 2007) that suggest that many faculty and staff members in secondary schools are homophobic to varying extents. Three major themes emerged in analyzing the data on teachers’ perceptions of homophobia: a false tolerance, an accepted affection, and an accepted masculinity.

*False Tolerance*

Colleary & Kluth (2002) define tolerance as places where there is a genuine mutual respect for differences among individuals. According to multiculturalism, tolerance is important in schools because it causes individuals to begin to move toward a mutual respect for all students (Banks, 2007). Thus, tolerance is just a step toward acceptance. Further, multiculturalism argues that an authentic tolerance should protect all students from harassment, including harassment that is a result of differences in sexual
identity (Banks, 2007; Eaton, 2005). According to GLSEN (2008), creating tolerant schools and classrooms is a vital aspect in addressing homophobia.

My findings indicate a false tolerance exists in these participants’ classrooms and schools. Participants shared the belief that a false sense of tolerance is projected by their districts to their communities. For example, Sally, a music teacher, identifies a degree of hypocrisy within her district:

People may not like homosexuals, but we still pride ourselves as being an open school and as soon as someone comes out, it’s like the red state blue state thing. We pride ourselves on this tolerance and when it comes right down to it, we don’t have an authentic tolerance. (individual interview, Jan. 13, 2008)

Also Matt, an English teacher, made the following statement:

It’s funny how we can pretend that everything is okay. We say we can be open and accepting, but it’s far from the truth. I was afraid to come out because I knew what would happen. I see it all the time. The bad thing is, it is just as bad among the faculty as it is with the students. (individual interview, Jan. 17, 2008)

Similarly, Michelle, an art teacher and doctoral student, commented:

I think that we want people to believe that we are a progressive school, but the evidence does not support that. It’s a line that we are giving. Yes, we have a gay and lesbian club at school, but you allow students to comment negatively. You don’t give them the same amount of room as you do other clubs, and you don’t publicize it in the school newspaper. When you look
In all of these quotations, these participants discuss a level of false tolerance within their schools. Specifically, Sally feels that the tolerance in her school is not authentic. In fact, she believes that when individuals come out, the school becomes divided much like a political debate concerning homosexuality. Further, Matt was afraid to come out because he believed that his building was only pretending to be open and accepting of different sexualities. Because of this false tolerance, Matt was forced to remain closeted and to project a heterosexual identity to his school community. It is also important that Matt argues that this intolerance is equally shared among the faculty and students.

Michelle’s statement also suggests a false tolerance and a level of hypocrisy. By allowing students to comment negatively on the gay and lesbian club, the school supports a false tolerance. For Michelle, this hypocrisy influences the ways the school population treats GLBT students. Like Sally and Matt, Michelle thinks that her school district wants the community to believe that it is progressive and tolerant; however, she sees no evidence to support the school’s claim. Michelle also makes the argument, “it’s a line that we are giving.” This statement suggests that her school does not have an authentic tolerance toward gay and lesbian students.

In addition to these participants’ beliefs about tolerance, Brian wrote in his reflective journal,

we teach tolerance every day and have for years. I should say we are required to teach tolerance. We want everyone to think that we are
accepting of others’ lifestyles. But, our school district just recently started domestic partnerships. Yet, as a district we have been preaching how tolerant we are for years.

For Brian, the principles taught within the classrooms of his school did not align with the belief systems of the district. His statements suggest that there is a false tolerance within his district concerning what is taught in the classroom and the reality of the district.

Also, Kirk stated,

My school tells everyone that we are tolerant because we have the suburban-urban program. They believe that having that program creates tolerance, but there is still prejudices there. It’s the same for gay and lesbian kids. We say we have had a GSA for 11 years, but we don’t invest in the club. We don’t engage in teaching students about difference. It’s a club that fills a space in the school community. Yeah, we have a GSA, but no activities around the lives of GLBT students.

(PD session #3, Mar. 02, 2008)

Kirk implies a level of false tolerance in the ways the school address racial identity and sexual identity. His statements suggest that his school wants everyone to believe that it is tolerant and supportive of GLBT students, but there are no actions to support that claim. In Chapter 5, I discuss the connection of racism and homophobia for these participants.

Like the participants above, Beth also believed that there was a false tolerance in her building,
I think it is all part of the publicity of schools. Tolerance is a big thing in society. So schools compete with each other and say, ‘we are tolerant and supportive.’ In my school, they do that, but there is still so much prejudice for anyone who is different. It becomes a publicity competition for school districts. We are a better district than they are.

(PD session #3, Mar. 02, 2008)

Here, Beth implies that school districts are only embracing tolerance because the larger society seems to embrace tolerance, but it is all a false tolerance because the reality is that schools are not tolerant of difference.

In terms of these participants’ schools, there is a false tolerance that indicates that these schools are engaging in oppressive education. Oppressive education involves how schools become places where “racism, sexism, and other "isms" find life” (Center for Anti-Oppressive Education, 2010). Although these schools project tolerant attitudes, these participants believe that this is not the reality. To that end, Eaton (2005) argues that the schools are participating in an oppressive covert heterocentricty. A covert heterocentricty is a projection of a tolerant atmosphere, but secretly continuing to marginalize non-heterosexual identities.

According to multiculturalism, classrooms are places where students can learn acceptable behaviors concerning difference through the actions of others and through authentic tolerance (Eaton, 2005). Because these schools have a false tolerance, they are allowing heteronormativity to continue to influence their environments.

As research suggests (Canton & Pilkerton, 2002; Jung and Smith, 1993), covert heterocentricty exists in institutions and continues to be a system of prejudice
that marginalizes individuals. The data in this study documents that covert heterocentricity exists within these participants’ schools. This false tolerance is likely to negate any positive support for GLBT students (Eaton, 2005).

Moreover, these statements imply a regulatory practice that governs the notions surrounding sexual identity within these school communities (Butler, 1990). It is the regulation of the dominant culture that dictates the level of tolerance within the communities. Matt’s situation exemplifies how power of the community determines normative sexual identities. Matt was afraid to come out in his school because he was aware of the possible ramifications, which could emerge because of the school’s false tolerance. Further, many of the participants discuss the concept of difference as it relates to how the dominant culture treats other identities. This treatment illustrates the existence of regulatory practices within these schools (Nowlan, 2008). These power regimes control how other identities are treated within the community (Foucault, 1978).

Although there is a false tolerance in these participants’ schools toward homosexuality, my research suggests that there is an authentic tolerance toward sexual diversity, but one restricted to girls. In the next section, I discuss another key theme, of one type of romantic affection between same-sex students that is more accepted.

**Accepted Affection**

By accepted affection, I mean a romantic affection among same-sex couples that is accepted and at times encouraged by the school population. Participants in the study discussed their perceptions of how while students and faculty did not accept homosexual male affection, they did accept lesbian affection. For example, Sue discussed same sex
affection in her school, “you never see any ‘boy on boy’ affection, but ‘girl on girl’ affection happens all the time in the hallways” (individual interview, Jan. 16, 2008). Sue believed that “girl on girl” sexuality was more accepted within her school. In fact, she noted few homophobic remarks directed toward perceived lesbian couples: “the vast majority of homophobia is directed toward boy-on-boy relationships” (individual interview, Jan. 16, 2008). Sue perceived male homosexuality to be less accepted in her school building.

Matt also discussed this notion of “girl-on-girl” versus “boy-on-boy” homophobia: “male homosexuality is incredibly taboo in my school. But, I have noticed that students and faculty seem to be more tolerant of lesbianism.” As an example, he explained, “we were reading a text that implies a gay male relationship. The students went crazy. I remember them saying things like, ‘gross’, ‘sick’, and so forth. I quickly addressed it and moved on. But, I don’t remember them acting that way towards an out lesbian couple that we had in our school” (individual interview, Jan. 17, 2008).

Like Matt and Sue, Kirk also noted that “girl-on-girl” affection seemed more accepted in his high school. He stated,

I do notice that lesbians get encouragement from some of the males in our school. I am not sure why that is. Well, I am sure it is some society thing. But, it doesn’t seem as taboo to see girls holding hands or being affectionate in the hall. I see it all the time, and I rarely hear any negative comments. (PD session #1, Jan. 24, 2008)

In these statements, Kirk suggests that there lesbian affection is more accepted within his high school than gay male affection. He connects how accepting his
school community is toward same-sex affection to a broader social acceptance of same-sex affection.

Beth agreed with Kirk, “lesbian affection does seem more accepted in my school too. I think part of that is because of TV and popular culture. It is almost kinda cool to be a lesbian” (PD session #1, Jan. 24, 2008). Sally added to the discussion by stating, “I agree. I see girls showing affection it seems like all the time in the hallway, and I don’t remember any other them being picked on” (PD session #1, Jan. 24, 2008). In this statement, Sally confirms Beth and Kirk’s comments.

As Glasgow (2002) argues, schools are reflections of the larger community in which they are situated. Thus, because lesbian sexuality is far more accepted in general society (Eaton, 2005), schools are more tolerant of “girl on girl” sexual actions. Matt and Sue noticed differences between the ways individuals in the schools react to male homosexual affection and lesbian affection. This difference in tolerance mirrors national data that suggests that gay men receive more harassment than lesbians (Fine & Kerns, 1994). Male homosexuality in these participants’ schools is more taboo because socially constructed concepts of appropriate male behavior are more defined within society (Hirt, Schellenberg & Sears, 1999; Martín, 1990). Specifically, socially constructed appropriate male behavior proscribes two males showing romantic affection. Conversely, in these schools, lesbian affection is more accepted because socially constructed female roles are less narrowly defined in terms of appropriate sexual behavior (McCreary, 1994).

Moreover, As Glasgow (2002) argues, schools are reflections of the larger community in which they are situated. Thus, because lesbian sexuality is far more
accepted in general society (Eaton, 2005), schools are more tolerant of “girl on girl” sexual actions.

Because of the acceptance of “girl on girl” affection over “boy on boy” affection, these schools are perpetuating a hegemonic force concerning appropriate sexual displays of affection. In discussing hegemony, Cheng (1999) argues a community determines what identities and behaviors are acceptable based upon their threat to the patriarchal structure of society. He argues that alternatives are allowed but not completely embraced because of the notions of hegemonic masculinity. Specifically, hegemonic masculinity proposes a culturally normative male behavior which men are encouraged to reach. This male behavior guarantees the dominant position of some men over others. Hegemonic masculinity posits that men must reach the ideal level of masculinity to be accepted within the community, in turn, continuing the patriarchal dominance that exists. Thus, in these participants’ schools there is a sense of acceptance of lesbian affection because such affection does not disrupt the hegemonic masculinity that exists within these schools. Conversely, the acceptance of “boy-on-boy” affections contradicts the rules of becoming a dominant male in society. These schools reject male homosexual affection because it threatens the perpetuation of an ideal male behavior (Sheff, 2005). In further discussing the notions of hegemonic masculinity, I will next discuss how the participants perceived an accepted masculinity existed within their schools.

*An Accepted Masculinity*

An accepted masculinity is one where biological males displayed to their communities an appropriate masculine attributes, the opposite of effeminate males. Participants discussed their beliefs that a majority of homophobia acts were directed
toward effeminate males. By effeminate males, I mean biological males who do not display socially constructed appropriate masculine attributes (Nowlan, 2008). In examining an accepted masculinity, the data analysis revealed that each of these participants’ communities harassed male students who were effeminate based on their society’s normative definitions of masculine identity. In these cases, the harassment involved abuse that is traditionally directed toward gay males. My analysis suggests that faculty and students’ homophobia is based on an appropriate level masculinity, which is determined by the social constructions of their community.

Most of the participants believe that non-masculine males attract a large amount of homophobia within their school communities. For example, Betty wrote in her reflective journal, “I have this one student who is in your face flamboyant. He has worn a boa to class before. A big purple boa to class. Everyone picks on this kid. You hear the words faggot, and see pushing, and shoving.” In Betty’s statement there is an implication that the boy receives harassment because he is effeminate.

Moreover, Brian stated,

I see so many feminine guys, and I think wow are they going to have a rough life. There is one particular student that I am thinking of. He is so effeminate. And, he is not just that way in my class. I see him in the lunch room and he acts the same way. He gets a lot of crap from others” (individual interview, Jan. 15, 2008).

Here, Brian recognizes how his community treats individuals who do not adhere to the constructed normalized definitions of masculinity. Through his statement “wow are
they going to have a rough life,” Brian acknowledges his awareness of how socially constructed gender roles influence students in his community (Leitch, et al., 2007).

Other participants also believe that a great deal of homophobia was directed to non-masculine males. For example, Matt recalled,

I remember having a student a few years ago. He was very feminine. The way he walked, talked, everything about him. They were always calling him faggot, sissy, and stuff. (individual interview, Jan. 17, 2008)

Matt’s perception is that this male student was harassed because he had feminine traits. Again, this community has constructed definitions equating sexual identity with gender identity. Specifically, the community attacks this student with language that is traditionally used to harass gay men.

Additionally, Sally commented in a PD session,

As I think about it, the guys who are more feminine are the ones that get picked on the most. I don’t know why though. But, yeah, the ones that act more feminine are the ones that I see being harassed the most.

There was one kid in my class a few years ago. He was super feminine, and everyone seemed to pick on him. (PD session #4, Apr. 07, 2008)

Sally recognizes that feminine males in her school receive the most harassment. Later in this PD session, she discussed further the types of harassment that this student faced, “I heard the typical language, but there were a few times I had to break up physical confrontations. It’s sad. But, now as I think about it, it was because he was not masculine. He was in your face with his sexuality.”
In this statement, Sally equates the student’s sexuality with his level of masculinity. Additionally, Beth commented,

As I think about it, it’s the gay males that wear their sexuality on their sleeve. I say that because you can look at them and you believe that they are gay. It’s the ones that are incredible flamboyant and effeminate that get most of the harassment. And the sad part is, the kid may just be effeminate and not really be gay. But, he is being picked on anyway.

(individual interview, Jan. 18, 2008).

In this statement, Beth makes two interesting comments about gay males: a perceived sexuality and a treatment of a perceived sexuality. For Beth, there are two types of gay males. The first type of gay male is the type of student who receives the harassment. His sexuality is clearly displayed for his community, through his lack of masculinity.

Secondly, it is important that Beth’s last statement, “and the sad part is, the kid may just be effeminate and not really be gay. But, he is being picked on anyway” suggests that homophobia is not about an “innate” sexual identity, but rather a perceived identity (McCreary, 1994). Yet, the perceived identity is the sexual identity that is being addressed through homophobic actions. The effeminate males, students whom others believe are homosexual, are the ones who receive most of the harassment.

Further, Sue stated,

I had a kid a few years ago, well several years ago, and he was a nice kid. He was on the lacrosse team. What I would call masculine. I
would not think that he was gay. But, my daughter knew him and saw him out at a gay club a couple years ago. It turns out that he is gay. But, I don’t remember anyone picking on him or anything. (PD session #4, Apr. 07, 2008)

In this statement, although he is gay, Sue suggests that the student was not harassed because of his performed masculinity (Butler, 1990). Sue implies that his display of traditional masculine attributes shielded him from harassment (Deaux & Kite, 1997). Thus, in these school communities, homophobia becomes an act that is framed around a socially constructed definition of a masculine identity. Therefore, homophobia becomes a result of normative power relations that control perceived identities (Butler, 1990).

In addition these statements, Kirk stated,

As the sponsor of the GSA, I hear stories about how some of our GLBT students were picked on during the week. As I think about it now, it is the ones that I would call less masculine. They are the ones that as a part of the gay community, I would call nellie. (PD session #4, Apr. 07, 2008)

In his statement, Kirk, recalls how students in his school’s gay straight alliance (GSA) would complain about harassment. He would describe these students who received the harrassment as “nellie.” “Nellie” is a term used by the gay community that means extremely effeminate (Dilallo & Krumholtz, 1994).

In examining these statements, Leitch et al. (2001) posit, these school community have constructed an acceptable definition of what it means to be masculine. This level of
masculinity is premised on the notions of a hegemonic masculinity. For example, in Betty’s community, individuals have learned through socialization in their communities, what are appropriate masculine attributes. Thus, if a boy wears a boa to class, he becomes marginalized and harassed because he is perceived as rejecting the community’s constructed categories of femininity and masculinity. Moreover, the boy with the boa is the antithesis of the dominant masculine male who should have the power to subordinate others (Chenz, 1999). Further, hegemonic masculinity exists within these schools because of the treatment of the non-masculine identities. Hegemonic masculinity posits that males should be able to dominate others, specifically perceived weaker males and females (Schippers, 2007). Thus, the harassment that these non-masculine males are receiving is a result of individuals needing to fulfill the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Further in considering Sue’s statement, she suggests that because the lacrosse player was masculine he avoided harassment. Thus, his masculinity shielded him from harassment because he was not a perceived threat to the hegemonic power structures of his school community. As Sheff (2005) states, “men who deviate from the norms of masculinity transgress hegemonic expectations” (p. 12). Therefore, those males who are less masculine in these participants’ schools are the ones who defy the rules of hegemony, thus becoming the targets of heteronormativity.

Also, the harassment of the students becomes a way for this society to perpetuate heteronormativity and appropriate gender roles (Horne, 2006; Whitley, 1998). It is also important to note that when the boy wearing the boa is pushed, shoved and called a faggot by other students, members of this community are equating sexuality with gender. The community has determined that because this student is effeminate he must be gay
(McCreary, 1994). Thereby, these school communities base sexual orientation on a displayed gender. Specifically, effeminate males receive harassment because their displays of gender do not adhere to the normative scripts of gender identity (Butler, 1990). Therefore, this harassment is predicated on a socially perceived gender identity, not necessarily a sexual orientation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how these participants perceive homophobia within their classrooms and schools. The pre PD interviews revealed that a majority of their perceptions were in the middle of the continuum, meaning a majority of these participants did not believe that homophobia was a huge problem in schools. In further examining their perceptions of homophobia, the findings suggest that these participants perceived a false tolerance in their schools concerning homosexuality. For many of the participants, their schools proclaimed to be tolerant, but there was no evidence to support the school’s notion. Also, the participants believed that a majority of homophobia was directed toward non-masculine males. Thus, there seemed to be greater acceptance of lesbianism than male homosexuality. These perceptions suggest a level of hegemonic masculinity that functions within these participants’ schools. In further exploring homophobia in these participants’ schools, I discuss how the participants defined homophobia in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Teachers’ Definitions of Homophobia

After examining how the participants perceived homophobia in their schools and classrooms, I will next discuss how they define homophobia. In discussing homophobia in their schools and classrooms, the participants consistently defined homophobia through physical actions that took place within their school buildings and through the use of language in their schools. In other words, these participants were able to identify homophobia through faculty and students’ actions and language use.

Participants’ Define Homophobia Through Behaviors

In examining homophobia, the participants consistently defined homophobia through physical actions that took place within their school buildings and through the use of language in their schools. In other words, these participants were able to identify homophobia through faculty and students’ actions and language. In examining how participants defined homophobia, the first category that emerged from the data analysis involved homophobic actions. In the PD sessions, interviews and reflective journals, the participants identified homophobia through actions in which faculty and students participated.

For example, Sally witnessed a morning announcement video created by students for the school. Typically the morning announcement video in her school models a morning news show. On one day, the morning announcements portrayed a male student giving the weather forecast. In the video, the student “pretended to be the weather fairy with a lisp” (PD session #2, Feb. 09, 2008). In Sally’s view, this depiction of a gay
person by the “weather fairy” is homophobic, as the student reinforces the stereotype that homosexual men are fairies and have lisps.

The depiction of a gay person becomes an interpretation of his learned behavior of what masculine and non-masculine traits are (and what heterosexual and homosexual traits are). By “pretending” to have this attribute, the student “acts” like a gay male. His depiction constructs his beliefs about sexual identity (Leitch et al., 2001). Sally is seeing the student’s action through the same gender belief system through which the student is operating (Deaux & Kite, 1997).

In addition to Sally, Matt discussed how his class was winding down and a group of students began laughing and getting out of hand. One male student stood, dropped his wrists (in a stereotypical gay manner), and walked down the aisle shaking his hips back and forth saying ‘look at me, I am a little faggot’ (PD session #4, Apr. 07, 2008). According to Matt, there was a self-identified gay student who is out and a little flamboyant in the class. In his discussion, Matt identifies the actions of the male student as homophobic.

Moreover, in his reflective journal, Brian writes, “I saw a student in class walk over to another student that I assume is gay. He has not told me that he is a gay. But, I think he is. The first kid drops his wrist and speaks in a very high pitched voice to kid sitting down. That’s my chair. Your chair is in the back by your boyfriend. He then laughed at the gay student and then started pushing him out of the chair. Like the Sally and Matt, Brian also identified this action as an example of homophobia.

Another example of how participants defined homophobia through action was evident as Sue describes a high school senior making a homophobic remark. Sue had
asked one of her students to work with an openly self-identified gay student. The heterosexual student stood and removed his John Deere hat. He looked at the teacher and stated, “I’m not working with that fucking faggot.” According to the Sue, the heterosexual male was “acting out his homophobia” and his distaste for homosexuality in front of the teacher and the class. Sue’s example illustrates how homophobia becomes a way for individuals to reinforce socially constructed and perceived sexual identities. The heterosexual male stood (an act of power and dominance), removed his hat, and spoke. By these actions, the heterosexual male was displaying his learned and perceived masculine heterosexual identity in front of the teacher and the class (Leitch et al. 2001). In doing so, the student was reinforcing for the teacher and his classmates his learned depiction of what a “real man” acts likes and rejects any anti-normal non-masculine identity roles (Whitney, 1998). Further, the student was wearing a John Deere hat; in doing so, his hat becomes part of his masculinity and sexuality (Deaux & Kite, 1997). In western culture, John Deere is an archetype of masculinity. John Deere is a company known in the USA for agricultural machinery and is culturally connected to masculinity. Thus, the hat that the student is wearing reinforces his own perceived masculinity and sexuality as a display for his community (McCreary, 1994).

In all of these examples, there is a performance of masculinity which is a result of the hegemonic masculinity that exists within these schools. As discussed in Chapter 4, males within society must display appropriate dominant attributes to be accepted and not be labeled as deviants, as a result of patriarchal authority (Chenz, 1999). For example, the male student who depicted the “weather fairy with a lisp” was asserting his masculinity by performing in a manner that was derogatory of non-masculine identities.
The male who dropped his wrists and performed in front of his classmates was also asserting his masculinity by engaging in homosexual stereotypes. He also forcefully attempted to push the other student out of the chair, by doing so, attempting to prove his dominance over the perceived weaker student. Likewise, the student in the John Deere hat asserted his dominance over the self-identified GLBT student to continue to maintain his perceived dominant power over others within his school community (Sheff, 2005). Thus, all of these males engaged in performances that reinforced their own perceived masculine identities.

In these school communities, hegemonic masculinity plays a tremendous role in the ways that the students exert their own power over others who are perceived to be weaker (Sheff, 2005). To add to this, these males were also creating dramatic performances that illustrate their distaste for homosexuality. In these examples, the students are “acting out their homophobia” in order to be perceived by their classmates as straight masculine males (Nowlan, 2008). Thus, these incidents do not only reinforce hegemonic masculinity, but they also reveal the how heteronormativity is perpetuated within schools. Specifically, heteronormativity is reproduced in these schools through the dramatic performances of a heterosexuality identity (Nowlan, 2008).

In the above examples, these participants defined homophobia through specific actions that took place within their school buildings, actions that are manifestations of prejudices (Eaton, 2005). Thus, the actions of the students revealed prejudice toward GLBT individuals. Participants also identified homophobia through the use of language. By this, I mean the participants labeled specific uses of language as instances of homophobia.
Participants Define Homophobia as Language

In this section, I consider how all of the participants defined homophobia through the use of language and their discussions of terms such as “fag”, “dyke”, “gay”, and “queer.” According to Eaton (2005), language use is also a symptom of homophobia within classrooms and schools.

“Fag” and “Dyke”; “Gay” and “Queer”

When asked to discuss examples of homophobia most participants mentioned the use of “fag” but propose that this word can mean other things non-related to sexuality. For example, they believed that some students may call someone else a “fag” and not be referring to his or her sexuality, but rather are making a statement similar to “You’re an idiot” or “you’re stupid.”

Also, most teachers reported that they did not address the use of the word ‘gay’ because of the uncertainty about its meaning. For example, most teachers stated that they hear the phrase “that’s so gay” quite often in their classrooms and hallways and never reprimand the students. For the participants, these phrases have become pop culture phrases that have different contextual meanings.

For example, Sue stated, “I hear that all the time, and a majority of the time, the student is only saying it to mean ‘that’s dumb’ or something like that. He or she is usually not referring to someone’s sexuality.” In this statement, Sue has conceptualized a meaning for “gay” that is rarely linked to homophobic language. In doing so, she has contextualized the use of “gay” to have meanings other than hate language.
Through the discussions with the teachers, many of the teachers believe that the word “fag” has changed over time and that using the word is not a definitive homophobic act. For example, Sally stated,

you hear ‘fag’ from kids, but they are not usually talking about someone who is gay. They are just using it as a derogatory term. The word has changed over the years. They only recognize it as a way to ‘be mean’ to another person. (PD session #3, Mar. 02, 2008).

Brian also stated, “fag has become so neutral” (PD session #3, Mar. 02, 2008).

Additionally, Betty stated in PD session #3 (2008),

when most students call someone gay or fag, they are usually saying ‘you’re an idiot’ or ‘you’re stupid’. They are rarely referring to someone’s sexuality. The word has become a way for kids to just be mean.

Matt responded to Betty by stating, “I agree. Most kids use faggot or dyke when they are really talking about a kid’s sexuality.” After the PD session #3, Brian wrote in his reflective journal,

words have power and the kids use the ones that they believe can cause the most damage, I think. They hear gay on TV., in the halls, everywhere and for many of them it means stupid or dumb. I agree with Matt. Faggot and Dyke are the words that kids use when they are talking about one’s sexual orientation.

According to the participants, the use of the word ‘dyke’ is not as fluid as the use of ‘fag’. When a student calls someone a ‘dyke’, he or she is referencing the female’s sexuality in
a negative manner. In the same PD session, Sally agreed with Matt’s statement above by stating, “dyke is the only real slur for a lesbian.”

Similarly, when participants hear the word “queer,” there is a definite perception of homophobia. Sally stated, “queer was something that we used in the eighties, then it had a very different meaning. We used it to mean different or strange. Now, the kids use it as a homosexual slur” (PD session #3, Mar. 02, 2008). Further, Michelle expressed her concern about the use of queer, “my son plays on an athletic team, and at practice, I have heard the coach and other players say, ‘stop playing like a queer’” (PD session #3, Mar. 02, 2008).

For these participants, the definition of “queer” has evolved from meaning different to becoming a derogatory term for homosexuals. In this regard, the use of “queer” becomes an exhibition of power for the coach and other players on the athletic team. It becomes a way to separate the athletic performance of the players. “Stop playing like a queer” reinforces the stereotype that “queers,” or homosexuals, are not athletic or that the player is not participating in the game at the appropriate “masculine” level.

In exploring the use of language in these participants’ schools, it is important to consider how their community defines homophobic language. Because of their perception of fluidity within language, they are able to label a word as homophobic or not homophobic based on its usage. For example, the participants can label the use of “fag” as not being a homophobic statement in all situations because it has a neutral quality. Likewise, for these participants the use of “gay” and “that’s so gay” are also seen as non-homophobic in most situations because of its contextual and cultural use. The participants are reporting the meanings of these words and recognizing fluidity among the uses of the
words. In other words, ‘gay’ and ‘fag’ do not have a fixed homophobic definition. Conversely, the word “dyke,” for these participants, has a definite fixed homophobic definition.

In determining what language is homophobic, these teachers have constructed a binary opposition4 concerning homophobic language. As Nowlan (2008) argues, society constructs binary oppositions to define something, and in doing so, it creates a hierarchy that establishes acceptance. Specifically, the word “fag” has many different modern meanings including a derogatory slur for homosexuals, and “dyke” maintains a homophobic meaning in this context. Thus, teachers are more willing to accept the use of “fag” in the school over the use of “dyke” because “fag” is on the positive side of their constructed binary. In other words, it is more acceptable to call a student “a fag” because there is a level of uncertainty in the meaning and use of the word. Again, they feel no uncertainty about the derogatory use of “dyke.”

Thus, these participants are able to define and discuss homophobia based on the cultural use of words. Further, by being able to place a word on the positive side of the binary, participants are suggesting that the word is an acceptable use of hate language. In constructing a binary opposition of “fag versus dyke,” these teachers suggest that it is okay in some instances to call a student a “fag,” but it is never appropriate to call a

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4 In using the term “binary oppositions,” I align this study with a non-traditional definition of binary oppositions. Specifically, by binary oppositions, I propose (as do post-structural theorists) that the dichotomy of the organizational aspects of binary oppositions are what controls the construction of one’s belief system. For example, the male-female dichotomy dictates that male behaviors/attributes are placed on the left of the binary and female behaviors/attributes are placed on the right of the binary. In doing so, beliefs about males and females are all conceptualized based on the dichotomy. This male-female dichotomy allows western civilization to categorize and place hierarchical value within their conceptualizations of their world. Thus, the dichotomy becomes the opposition not the behaviors/attributes.

In discussing this research study, I have used a homophobic-non-homophobic dichotomy to explore how teachers construct meaning concerning homophobia in their classrooms and schools. In doing so, this non-traditional dichotomy becomes the organizational foundation for these teachers’ conceptualization of homophobic language and behaviors that exist within their schools. Thus, this dichotomy dictates how these teachers conceptualize the problem of homophobia.
student a “dyke.” This contextual use of language, for these participants, influences their perceptions of homophobia in their classrooms and schools. They may hear a student call someone a “fag” and will not address it as a homophobic remark, but they will address the use of “dyke” as a homophobia. Thus, their perception of the existence of homophobia is lessened through their construction of this binary opposition because they do not view all hate language with the same severity. Moreover, as I discuss later, it is through this binary construction that heteronormativity is perpetuated.

Further, like “fag” and “dyke,” these participants have constructed a binary opposition involving “gay” versus “queer.” In doing so, the participants constructed a binary of “non-homophobic versus homophobic” language use. Thus, “fag” and “gay” are words that can be placed in the positive, or non-homophobic side of the binary, whereas, “dyke” and “queer” are words that can only be placed on the negative, or homophobic side of the binary. In doing so, this binary becomes a method of how these teachers construct their understandings of homophobia and homophobic language in their classrooms and schools.

Binary oppositions affect how these participants interpret language as being homophobic or non-homophobic, with society, these teachers must place things into binary oppositions in order to construct a definition. This is problematic because binaries are laden with notions of power (Derrida, 1978; Nowlan, 2008). To allow binaries to exist means allowing one side of the binary to remain dominant over the other. Therefore, allowing teachers to continue to define homophobia in terms of binary oppositions, allows teachers the opportunity to not view all hate language as inappropriate. In doing so, teachers affirm some hate language and reject other hate language based on social
constructions. It becomes what Rich (2003) defines as socially covert heterocentricity. Because these teachers have constructed these binaries based on socialized meanings of words, they are engaging in heterocentricity within their schools. Phrases such as “that’s so gay” are only okay, as long as they are allowed to be okay. By allowing these phrases to be used in classrooms and schools, teachers are, knowingly or unknowingly, engaging in heterocentricity (Rich, 2003). Thus, they are inadvertently engaging in homophobic practices. By this I mean, by allowing these phrases to be repeated, and in many cases deemed as acceptable speech, these teachers are allowing homophobia to continue, without being labeled as overtly homophobic. Although “fag” has different possible definitions, the word still maintains a derogatory heritage for homosexuals. It is a word that contains a deep rooted hostility towards gay men. Although the word may have different meanings in the teenage community, the word still has a more definitive use for the adult population at large. Therefore, these teachers are inadvertently perpetuating homophobia.

In addition to defining homophobia through constructing binary oppositions of hate language, these participants also discussed homophobia through other binaries. My analysis also revealed two binary oppositions: homophobia versus racism, and normal versus different. It is through these binaries that the participants discussed homophobia.

Homophobia versus Racism

In this study, participants consistently compared homophobia with racism through the use of “faggot” with “the N word” (as many of the teachers said it). In the discussions about the use of hate language in their classrooms, they expressed how students using the
word “faggot” were disciplined quite differently by teachers and administrators, if at all, than students using “the N word.” For example, Matt stated,

you will hear all kinds of things in the classroom. For example, someone will use the word faggot and the funny thing is, teachers do not call them out on that. When a teacher hears someone call someone else a faggot nothing is done, but if they heard ‘the N word’ it is different. (PD session #5, May 01, 2008).

In Matt’s school, homophobic language is addressed very differently than racist language, if at all. Thus, this statement suggests that homophobia is the positive side of this constructed binary, homophobia versus racism. Therefore, this statement supports the notion that homophobia is an accepted form of discrimination within schools (Eaton, 2007).

During his individual interview, Kirk made the following statement comparing racism to homophobia:

I was at the middle school going to a staff development, and I heard the word fag 6 times in the hallway. If you walked down the hallway and heard ‘nigger’ 6 times. You would say something. Someone would say that there is radically something wrong in this building. Someone would say, that there is a toxic racism in this building, but teachers are not addressing fag.

In the above statement, this school allowed students to use homophobic language. Kirk suggests that if the word “nigger” was stated the same number of times, there would be different result. This statement suggests an accepted form of discrimination within this
school building. Like, Matt, Kirk grapples with why homophobia is accepted and racism is not.

Kirk continues the comparison by stating,

Here is how we moved on racism. You pass a law that many people are angry about, through generations, you have people who stop using the word in public, although they may think it in their heart. Then, the next generation, because the words have stopped being used, sometimes their hearts have warmed up. I think it is so critical that ‘the fag,’ ‘the gay,’ which doesn’t seem like a big deal if you don’t happen to be gay or lesbian.

For Kirk and other teachers racism and racist language is something that a majority of faculty and staff do not tolerate in their schools, but homophobia is tolerated. These teachers question why different forms of discrimination are handled differently.

In addition to the above statement, Betty’s wrote in her reflective journal after PD session #5 (2008),

In some ways, we do avoid addressing homophobia. We avoid calling a kid out on his hate language. I have done this. I have yelled at a kid for calling some the N word and gave him detention. I am ashamed to say that there are times that I have let students get away with calling someone a faggot.

Like Betty, Beth stated,

I have never really thought about it before. But, now after being forced to think about it, I have done that several times. I have gotten angry
when a kid says the N word, and that same anger did not happen when I have heard homophobic language. (PD session #5, May 01, 2008)

For Betty and Beth, the PD session raised their awareness of the different ways that they address homophobia and racism. For both of these participants, it was far worse for students to use the N word than to use a homophobic slur.

When examining the homophobia versus racism binary, it is important to examine the participants’ own use of hate language. When discussing homophobia, each participant used the following words occasionally: “fag”, “faggot”, “dyke”, “queer”, and “gay.” However, when the discussions surrounding racism emerged, only one teacher said “nigger,” all of the other participants stated, “the N word.” This was the case for all of the individual interviews, reflective journals, and professional development meetings. These word choices suggests, within the participants’ own lives, a socially constructed binary opposition concerning the use of language as it relates to homophobia and racism; these teachers used homophobic language but did not use racist language. This suggests that these teachers are not only grappling and exploring homophobia in their schools through this socially constructed binary, but also this binary exists within in their own personal use of hate language. On some level, for these participants, it is okay to say “faggot” but not “nigger.”

Thus, being able to use the term “faggot” could indicate that these participants are engaging in an inadvertent level of homophobia. Earlier, I discuss how these teachers were inadvertently engaging in homophobia by allowing “fag” and “gay” to be used in their rooms without reprimanding the students. In those discussions, the teachers stated that they knew that “faggot” was term with a fixed homophobic definition. Thus, when a
student used the term, the teachers knew it was meant as a homophobic slur. Although they recognize the word as being a homophobic slur, these teachers are able to say “faggot” in these PD sessions, some of them repetitively. Therefore, there is a level of inadvertent homophobia within this group of teachers’ language choices, which leads to a type of covert heterocentricity (Eaton, 2005; Rich, 2003).

In this section, I have discussed how the participants explored how homophobia was accepted in their schools but racism was not tolerated. In doing so, these participants have constructed a binary opposition, homophobia versus racism. Another important binary opposition that the participants constructed when grappling with homophobia in their schools was normal versus different. This binary is important to explore because it reveals teachers’ own biases when discussing GLBT students in their schools and classrooms.

**Normal versus Different**

A dominant culture determines the accepted, or ‘normal,’ category through the binary structures in society. In order to understand a particular concept, that concept must be compared to an ‘other,’ its opposite (Eaton, 2005). Thus, as queer theory suggests, society, through binaries, creates ways to identify unacceptable sexual identities by comparing them to the “normal” heterosexual identity. One way that the participants in this study discussed the existence of homophobia in their classrooms and schools was by discussing GLBT students through a “normal versus different” socially constructed binary.

Teachers consistently made comments such as Betty’s, “I have a gay student and he is just different than the other students. He is more quiet and stays to himself. I never
have any problems with him.” For Betty, the gay student is anti-normal because of his behaviors, which she equates with his sexuality. It is her labeling of him as being different as a result of his sexuality that is important. Research (Ziekowitz, 2002) suggests, society marginalizes individuals whom it determines to be anti-normal. As research (Gamson, 2002; Eaton, 2005) posits, Betty labels this student as different based on her own constructions of normal versus anti-normal sexuality.

Likewise, Brian labels gay and lesbian students as being different. He wrote in his reflective journal, “gay and lesbian kids are different. They go through different emotional things like coming out to parents, teachers, and friends. Those are things that straight kids do not have to go through.” In this statement, Brian begins with a decree that GLBT students are different. This difference is not based on a physical or emotional aspect, but rather the difference is premised on the students’ sexual identity. Thus, the students’ sexual difference causes the students to “go through” different emotional things than their straight counterparts. Therefore, like Betty, Brian views GLBT students through the same socially constructed sexual identity binary.

Finally, Michelle also discussed homophobia through comparing normal and different in her school. She stated in her individual interview, “people act differently toward gay and lesbian students than other students because they believe that gay and lesbian students are different.” For Michelle, the socially constructed binary discussed above drives the actions of the students within her school community. The school community treats GLBT students differently because there is a belief that they are different, and the difference is premised on sexual identity. Therefore, if heterosexuality is the socially acceptable identity within these schools, hegemony has “othered,” these
students, by defining them as an opposition to heterosexuality (Eaton, 2005). Further, it is also important to note that the participants were able to identity something as “normal” and “different” because of their communities’ process of reiteration (Butler, 1990). It is through the repetition of acts, that the “inoculation of a norm” (Butler, 1990) exists. Thus, because of the performative aspect of identity, these participants were able to label something as “normal” or “different.” It is through this naming process that heterocentricity continues to exist within these participants’ schools and classrooms.

Conclusion

This study revealed participants were able to define homophobia through specific actions and by the contextual use of language. Further, participants discussed issues surrounding homophobia by constructing binary oppositions. In doing so, the participants constantly constructed binary oppositions to define and discuss homophobia in their classrooms and schools. Therefore, binary oppositions became the process through which they developed their definitions and understandings about homophobia and homophobic actions in their schools. Next, in Chapter 6, I discuss my own personal reflections concerning the professional development and findings from the PD sessions. I also discuss how this professional development became a catalyst for change in these participants’ constructions of homophobia. Specifically, the data analysis revealed that this professional development created for these teachers an increased awareness about homophobia in schools, created an increased questioning concerning how homophobia functions within schools and how it can be addressed, and created reflective processes that considers how change can occur in their schools and classrooms.
Chapter 6: Findings from the Professional Development

According to Glasgow (2002), teachers need formal instruction on how to address homophobia in their classrooms. However, to date, there is no research literature exploring professional development examining homophobia. In this chapter, I discuss the findings from the PD program that I developed for this study. In discussing these findings, I first discuss my personal reflections on the professional development sessions by analyzing my research journal and research field notes, followed by a discussion of the findings that emerged from the data analysis from the participants’ data.

My Personal Reflections

In discussing my personal reflections and the evaluation of the PD program, I explore the texts used in the sessions and the structure of the sessions. I evaluated the professional development program based on the evaluation standards of the National Staff Development Council (2009) and how some scholars (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 1995; Loucks-Horsley, 1998) define effective professional development.

Texts

One of the attributes of an effective professional develop involves the ability for teachers to make personal connections to texts used (Darling-Hammond, 1995). In choosing the texts for Sessions 2 through 5, I aimed to create a collaborative atmosphere by choosing texts based on the participants’ choices of topics. To that end, I chose texts that would engage teachers in discussions of homophobia from both academic and practical aspects. As discussed in Chapter 3, the following texts were used in Session 2: Lawrence King Shooting Video, “California Middle School Student Murdered in School Because of His Sexual Orientation” (GLSEN, 2008), Documentary on Gay High School

In using these texts, I believe that a majority of the teachers engaged with the practical texts, but did not engage with the academic texts. For example, I wrote in my research journal after Session 3, “the teachers were really excited about the New York State data. They seemed to realize the problem is not just a national problem. It is something that is happening right here at home.” Conversely, I wrote in my research journal after Session 5, “the session today did not last as long as the previous sessions. The teachers seemed less invested in reading this text than they did the others. We quickly became side tracked from the text.”

The first statement references a non-academic text that explores the rates of homophobia on the national and state levels. The second statement references the only academic reading that was used in the PD. The difference in these statements suggests that I believed that these teachers were more concerned with non-academic information that discussed homophobia than published academic research, which supports Darling-Hammond’s (1995) claims about which texts should be used in professional development programs. She argues that when teachers can connect to a text they are more apt to engage reflectively with it, thus, creating a more effective PD program. Moreover, it is also interesting that despite all of the participants having a Master’s degree and two completing doctorates, the teachers were not engaged with the theoretical text used in
session 5. This suggests that the participants were more connected to the factual readings and videos.

Further in exploring texts, I asked the teachers to bring texts (lesson plans, or other artifacts from their classrooms) to discuss during Sessions 6 through 8. As a group, we explored how the texts could become catalysts to help teachers address homophobia in their classrooms and schools. The texts ranged from exploring how to discuss homophobia in Williams’ *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to discussing the biographical information of musical composers. I believe this was an effective way to engage teachers’ and allow them to make connections to the texts involved in the professional development. After Session 7, I wrote in my research journal, “Sue talked about how excited she was about possibly using GLBT themed art and photographs as writing prompts, and the potential the reflective writing process could have on homophobia in her classroom and school.” This statement suggests that I believed that Sue became connected with the photographs that Betty brought during Session 7. Sue’s excitement was a result of her connection to the photographs and her desire to address homophobia. Sue’s connections to the art provided an avenue for constructing an effective professional development session (Darling-Hammond, 1995). Moreover, Darling-Hammond (1995) postulates that texts should focus on a community’s commitment to change which may involve specific teacher’s pedagogical practices.

**PD Structure**

After examining the texts of the PD sessions, I discuss my reflections of the structure of the PD. Although I originally thought that 9 sessions would be appropriate, I found that this length of time may have been overwhelming for some of the teachers.
involved. I wrote in my research journal after PD session 3, “Sally and Brian were late tonight. They told the group how long the day had been for them both. Michelle and Beth verbally agreed to their statements. The others nodded their heads, affirming their statements. Matt suggested that we all go have a beer to unwind when we were done.” Moreover, after session 7, I wrote in my field notes, “there were only 4 teachers this evening.” The sessions took place during a weeknight, and many of the teachers were exhausted from working that day. From reviewing my research journal, I discovered that I had written three other entries (PD sessions # 5, 7 and 9) that attested to the lethargic nature of the teachers.

In discussing time, Gusky (1998) posits that professional development programmers should consider the busy schedules of teachers and educators. In discussing the reality of teachers’ schedules, it is important to mention the on-line dialogue group that I created for the program. In the beginning of the PD program, I informed the group that I had created an on-line discussion group through Yahoo.com. In hopes of continuing our discussions, they were instructed to use the group as a discussion mechanism. I reminded them of the discussion board at the end of each session. However, no one posted anything on the discussion board. Because I told the participants that I would not read the discussion until after the PD program had ended, I did not know that it was not being used. Both the statements written in my research journal and the fact that teachers did not engage in the on-line dialogue may suggest that perhaps I was simply asking too much of them in this PD program.
Collaboration

As Darling-Hammond (1995) argues, collaboration is a vitally important aspect of effective professional development. Thus, in analyzing the structure of the PD, I examined the collaborative nature of the professional development. The data in my research journal and field notes suggests that this professional development was truly collaborative. For example, I wrote in my research journal after Session 3, “the teachers were all engaged in the discussion today. Everyone had something powerful to say about the documentary about gay athletes.” There were other instances that I noted the collaboration of the group. After PD session 7, I wrote in my research journal, “the teachers all contributed to the discussion of using films to discuss the background information of GLBT authors, musical composers, etc.” Both of these journal entries suggest that I believed that this professional development was a collaborative venture.

After discussing my personal perceptions of the professional development sessions, I will next discuss some brief findings that emerged from the participants’ data concerning their biases and beliefs. In discussing how the participants’ biases and beliefs about homophobia may have changed as a result of this PD program, it is necessary to briefly revisit the continuum discussed at the beginning of chapter four. The pre-professional development continuum presents Kirk and Michelle as linear opposites in their beliefs about homophobia being a problem in schools. In exploring how the participants’ beliefs about homophobia may have changed as a result of the PD, I believe it is important to discuss how Michelle’s thoughts about homophobia changed. In her initial interview, which took place before the professional development sessions, she stated, “I thought that we had already addressed this issue.” This statement implies that
she believed that homophobia was no longer an issue that needed to be addressed, suggesting that homophobia was no longer a problem in schools. Conversely, throughout the PD, she made statements such as, “it concerns me because it seems that there is a strong resistance in our schools; a social resistance for accepting students for whomever they are. How do we change that?” and “homophobia is a problem that affects everyone in the school, not just GLBT students.”

Michelle also discussed in the last meeting, the second focus group interview, how she believes that schools need to change and that change can only occur with administrative support. Thus, it is apparent that through this PD training, her beliefs about homophobia changed significantly. At the beginning of the PD, she believed that this problem had already been addressed, and in the last meeting discusses how change can occur in schools concerning homophobia. These statements reveal a shift in her thoughts about the existence and treatment of homophobia in schools and the effects of homophobia on the school atmosphere. Therefore, in revisiting the continuum, I would now place Michelle closer to the middle, as opposed to the far right.

In regards to the other participants, Sally stated in her initial interview, “I think that it exists in the schools, but I think that there is much less of it than years ago.” At the end of the PD, she stated, “things have to change.” In addition to Sally, Sue wrote in her final reflective journal concerning homophobia, “it is horrible that so many kids have to endure this. Schools must be changed into safe places for everyone.” Both Sally and Sue’s statements suggest that the PD had influenced their constructions of the problem of homophobia and how it impacts school environments. These statements suggest a movement to the left side of the continuum, closer to Kirk’s position. After examining the
other participants, the data does not suggest that any of the participants moved toward the right side of the continuum.

In addition to these findings of the participants’ biases and beliefs, it is also necessary to discuss the findings that emerged from the analysis as they relate to the PD program. The data in this study suggest three major findings exploring professional development that addresses homophobia: an increased awareness, an increased questioning, and considering change. In the following sections, I discuss these three findings and examine how these three findings relate to constructing a professional development exploring homophobia.

*Increased Awareness*

One category that emerged from the data analysis was an increased awareness of homophobia among the participants involved in this study. These following statements and others throughout the data, suggest that many teachers, prior to this study, were not aware of the devastating effects that homophobia had in school environments. For these participants, discovering how homophobia had influenced the lives of GLBT students in New York state schools was troubling. After reading research literature examining New York State in a professional development session, Michelle made the following statement:

*Didn’t we all have to take those classes about being socially aware? Teachers are supposed to be the leaders of social change in social responsibility for the next generation, and if teachers are behaving this way, then we are a long ways away, and it is going to trickle down into the next generation. It bothers me extremely as a teacher.*
Michelle’s statement suggests four distinct concepts concerning homophobia in schools. First, she assumes that all teachers have been educated, through teacher education programs, about topics concerning social justice and being socially aware. Secondly, she suggests that because of their education programs, teachers are “supposed to be the leaders of social change.” In this statement she argues that teacher education programs are creating teachers who will be proponents of social change and social awareness. Third, Michelle’s statement argues that if teachers are homophobic, then they are not the “leaders” that teacher education programs have taught them to be; thus, teachers will continue to perpetuate homophobia in their classrooms and schools into the next generation of students. Finally, Michelle becomes reflective by relating the notions of other teachers’ homophobia to her own personal feelings of teaching.

Further, in the statement, Michelle questions the homophobia of New York State teachers. In her statements she suggests that homophobia is a social construction that can be addressed through teacher education programs. However, as research suggests, many colleges of education are not addressing topics such as homophobia and sexuality in their pre-service teacher education program (Letts, 2000). Further, many state education departments do not require advanced degrees for certification. Therefore, many veteran teachers are not acquiring the information needed to address homophobia. Moreover, Michelle believes that teachers control the perpetuation of homophobia in schools and society. As Crozier (2009) suggests, teachers can create a more tolerant school because they are responsible for social change. Yet, Michelle’s statement also implies a level of naivety because she was unaware that approximately 30 percent of New York
State students heard homophobic remarks from teachers (GLSEN, 2005). Moreover, in her initial interview, which took place before the professional development sessions, she stated, “I thought that we had already addressed this issue.” These statements suggest that Michelle’s level of awareness concerning homophobia was raised as a result of this professional development. These statements imply a need to conduct professional development programs that address homophobia.

In addition to Michelle, other participants also became more aware of the impact of homophobia in schools as a result of this professional development. Sally stated in a professional development session, “I thought we had dealt with this issue a long time ago. So it concerns me that it has gotten worse.” This statement implies she believed that the problem of homophobia was previously addressed.

Finally, Brian wrote in his reflective journal, “There will be children who come from gay and lesbian parents. I think it is something that we have to be aware of. It is something that I am now more aware of.” In these statements, Brian acknowledges, as Glasgow (2002), did how a social community impacts the school community. Because GLBT individuals are raising children, those children will become part of the school community. Thus, he argues that the changes occurring in society concerning GLBT parenting and families will impact the school community; thus schools need to be aware of this change. Brian’s statement implies that the professional development has raised his awareness concerning children who come from gay and lesbian parents and how
homophobia may impact their education. His statements also imply a level of necessity in understanding homophobia and the influence of homophobia in school settings.

As a result of this professional development, participants became more aware of the problem of homophobia. As research (Darling-Hammonds, 2005; NCSD, 2007) suggests, an effective professional development is one in which teachers and staff are made aware of a problem within their schools and districts in a collaborative model. For many educators, a number of challenges in schools and districts are never discussed openly, thus, they are unaware of the influences of those challenges (Crozier, 2009). Thus, it is important to raise awareness of the problem of homophobia among teachers and educators.

*Increased Questioning*

In addition to an increased awareness, the data analysis also revealed an increased questioning among the teachers as a result of participating in this study. By increased questioning, I mean a method through which teachers began to grapple with the issues surrounding homophobia by inquiring about the social aspects of homophobia and heternormativity (Crozier, 2009).

Specifically, in one professional development meeting, the participants viewed a video clip of the Lawrence King, the eighth grade student who was recently shot in his classroom by a classmate for being gay. On Valentine’s Day 2008, Lawrence asked a fellow classmate if he would be his valentine. The student returned to school the next day with a gun and shot Lawrence.
Lawrence’s body was kept alive on life-support for organ donation (GLSEN, 2008).

After viewing the video, Betty wrote in her reflective journal, “Not being gay or having lived through this type of bullying it's hard for me to relate but, if kids can't feel safe or accepted in school, where can they?”

In this quotation, she questions how homophobia has impacted the school environment. She acknowledges her own straight privilege. By straight privilege, I mean the advantages of being able to avoid harassment by being perceived as a heterosexual in her community (McIntosh, 2003). By acknowledging her straight privilege, she suggests the safety embedded within being a member of the dominant culture. In doing so, she implies the existence of a regime of power that is socially situated within the parameters of sexual identity (Butler, 1995).

Through this acknowledgment, she questions the safety of schools and the ability for all students to feel accepted in classrooms. Further, it is through her questioning that she connects sexuality and bullying. Thus, as research (Jones & Jones, 2007; Crozier, 2009) suggests, school wide programs attempting to create empathy toward students who are bullied in schools can help prevent bullying.

Thus, in addressing bullying, schools can also address homophobia, a type of bullying. In connecting these two problems together, schools may find it easier to address the community concerns that Glasgow (2002) and other school personnel had to face. Moreover, Betty’s statements imply that one of the roles of schools is to provide safety for all students.
Also, Brian asked, after viewing the Lawrence King video clip, “Why are kids afraid to report harassment to any adult?” He also wrote in a reflective journal, “What a waste of a life. Would sensitivity training have helped the kid who did this? If more people were out, therefore there were more images of gay people—would that kid still have done it?” In these statements, Brian begins by questioning the culture of the school. His first question explores the level of fear that GLBT students face. He implies that the student was afraid to report the harassment to an adult. Further, Brian’s questions concerning reporting the harassment to an adult implies that adults would intervene and stop the harassment. But, as studies (GLSEN, 2007) suggests, GLBT students are afraid to report the harassment. When they do report the abuse, some experience what Jamie experienced, “Jamie’s pleas for help were brushed off by school officials with comments such as, ‘Boys will be boys’ and ‘If you are going to be gay, you have to learn to expect such abuse’” (Friend, 1997, p. 2). Another more recent example took place in up-state New York. A GLBT student is suing his high school because he experienced harassment such as being spat upon, verbal assaults, and physical assaults. In some cases staff and faculty members engaged in the harassment in front of other students. The principal at the time, the present superintendent, was cited as telling the GLBT student to “tone it down.” (Reynolds, 2009).

Also, in this statement, Brian questions why the student did not seek help from an adult. This suggests his belief that adults are willing to intervene. However, studies argue (GLSEN 2007) teachers are not intervening in a majority of the homophobic actions that happen in schools.
Further, Brian questions the role of positive gay role models for students. In doing so, he questions the influence of positive images of GLBT individuals and their impact on homophobia. This question examines school climates and the ability to provide positive GLBT role models for students. However, as Matt, another participant in this study stated, homophobia can hinder faculty and staff from coming out in their schools, as well as students. In exploring the notions of positive role models, Bedford (2002) suggests that gay and lesbian teachers should come out to their secondary students and use their coming out as a pedagogical tool to help students think critically about the lives of gays and lesbians. However, it is a process that is dependent on the school climate and tolerance level of the school.

Sally later wrote in her reflective journal concerning Lawrence’s murder,

Why didn't I even hear about this murder in California? That's a big deal.
It should have been on the national news -- was I just missing it? Also, shouldn't this be done? These hate crimes? I think of this kind of prejudice as being around in our parents' days (like Civil Rights) shouldn't everyone who grows up after that not be prejudiced? What kind of parents teaches their children that it's okay to bully ANYONE, let alone someone because they're gay? Also, did this student tell teachers? -- Though it did say it started as bullying, so someone must have known. No one did anything about it?

This statement suggests a raised awareness and a raised questioning concerning homophobia. She questions the media, the community’s general prejudices, the roles of parents in perpetuating homophobia, and the roles of teachers in addressing homophobia.
All of these questions point to the socialization of communities and how heteronormativity is premised in society’s constructions of sexual identity (Butler, 1990). It is also interesting to note, Sally’s own naivety concerning homophobia. To her, hate crimes and prejudice ended after the Civil Rights Movement. This statement suggests that, prior to this professional development; she was unaware of the impact of homophobic acts. This statement also connects homophobia with racial discrimination, as discussed in chapter four. Also as Brian does, Sally questions the student’s role in informing his teachers. This statement implies that Sally believes that students should be able to tell teachers when they are being bullied. Yet, as research (GLSEN, 2007) posits, students are afraid to tell teachers, and when they do very few teachers intervene.

Finally, Matt wrote in his reflective journal after discussing Lawrence King, “I wonder if this kid tried to reach out for others for help? Did anyone ignore him? I can’t believe that this happened. How horrible. What would I do if this happened in my class? How would I handle it?” In his reflection, Matt questions, as the other participants did, whether King reached out for help, and if so, why no one helped him. Also, he connects to the murder personally by asking how he would have reacted to this incident. In his questioning, he becomes reflective, and begins to examine his own classroom practices. Thus, this professional development created an atmosphere for reflection and provided avenues for teachers to examine their pedagogy (Darling-Hammonds, 1995).

In the above statements, the participants in this study began to raise questions concerning homophobia in their schools and communities because of their participation within this study. In doing so, the participants grappled with some of the issues surrounding homophobia. The professional development became a catalyst that caused
the teachers to begin to question why educators and, in some cases society, continue to allow this problem to exist. Research (Darling-Hammonds, 2007) argues that teachers will not become involved in addressing challenges in their schools until they are aware of its influence. Thus, homophobia will continue to exist in schools until teachers are made aware of the impact that it has on the educational environment. Because of a raised awareness concerning the problem of homophobia, teachers began to raise questions about homophobia. In doing so, teachers began to consider the process of change concerning homophobia and making schools safer for GLBT students.

_Considering Change_

In addition to the previously mentioned findings, the data analysis revealed that participants involved in this professional development began to consider how change could occur in educational environments. Brian wrote in his reflective journal, “As teachers what can we do to change our buildings?” In this statement, Brian connects personally with the process of change. He questions his own involvement in creating safe places for GLBT students. Further, Matt wrote in his journal, “I really don’t think this is that important to others as it is to me. Until it happens in their schools, someone getting shot, things will not change. There is still such a stigma attached to being gay. And how do you change that?” As Brian does, Matt makes a personal connection to the process of change. He claims that other teachers do not realize the importance of creating safe places for GLBT students. Further, he considers how a personal tragedy in one’s own school may or may not impact teachers’ dedication to creating change. This statement supports research that suggests teachers are avoiding the problem of homophobia because they do not believe that it is a problem in their classrooms. He also acknowledges
society’s prejudice toward non-heterosexual identities, and how society’s definition of appropriate sexual identities perpetuates heteronormativity (Butler, 1990). In doing so, he questions the ability to break free from the society’s confining ideology concerning sexual identity. In essence, he questions the ability to break free from society’s constructed binary oppositions of sexuality.

Also, as cited in Chapter 5, Kirk made the following statement about change:

Here is how we moved on racism. You pass a law that many people are angry about, through generations, you have people who stop using the word in public, although they may think it in their heart. Then, the next generation, because the words have stopped being used, sometimes their hearts have warmed up. I think it is so critical that ‘the fag,’ ‘the gay,’ which doesn’t seem like a big deal if you don’t happen to be gay or lesbian, but the language drives the thoughts. Chomsky. If we get the kid to stop using the word nigger, Jew, chink or whatever the word is, if we get them to stop, we have already won 90 percent of the battle because they know that they can’t say that word in public without being told ‘we don’t use that word around here.’ If you can do that for a long period of time, then you can start changing the thought process. I think addressing those words is critical.

In this statement, Kirk examines how homophobia will decrease and how change can occur in schools over time. Through comparing racism and homophobia, Kirk explained how society addressed racism and considered how homophobia may go through the same process of change. In his statement, Kirk considers how
individuals’ views of homosexuality may change within society and school environments through the construction of language. In doing so, he suggests, as others (Gere, et al, 1992; Gallego and Hollinsworth, 2000) that language is a social construction created by the community to which one belongs. Thus, as Butler (1990) suggests, language allows society to label something as anti-normal by comparing it to the accepted norm. In this case, according to Kirk, hate language becomes a way for society to identify something by comparing it to the dominant culture. Thus, hate language only exists because it is a way to define a “deviant culture.” For example, calling someone a “fag” becomes a method for the dominant culture to continue its own heteronormativity because (as Kirk states) the words only have an effect if one “happens” to be gay or lesbian. Likewise, using all forms of hate language allows the dominant discourse to remain dominant (Foucault, 1978). Thus, Kirk implies, that in order to address homophobia, teachers must attack homophobic language in the same manner that they attacked racist language. In doing so, this action breaks the dichotomy and the power relationships that exist between language and the dominant culture. In other words, it becomes socially taboo to use the language as a form of identification.

It is also important to note that Kirk argues that change begins with the passing of a law that causes discomfort among the dominant culture. Thus, he is suggesting that change in homophobic attitudes must occur from the “top-down.” Later in this chapter, I discuss this concept further as it applies to change occurring and beginning with school administrators.
Michelle considered change in her statement, “it concerns me because it seems that there is a strong resistance in our schools; a social resistance for accepting students for whomever they are. How do we change that?” Specifically, she is questioning how change can take place in an environment that is resisting tolerance and acceptance. In this statement, Michelle questions how schools can promote tolerance and protect all students from harassment, especially harassment that is a result of differences in sexual identity. In doing so, Michelle also acknowledges the power of the dominant culture to continue the oppression of the “other”. Thus, questioning how we can destroy a concept that is rooted so deeply in the society.

In exploring this concept of changing a repressive social system, Brian wrote in his reflective journal,

There is such a stigma attached to being gay. What we do now in schools will not have an effect until years from now. Whose minds need to be changed are the kids, the parents have made up their minds and the people that we have an effect on are the kids. I just don’t think that it will change for years. How do you change an entire community?

In these statements, Brian begins to question the role of institutional power and dominant culture within educational settings (Gamson, 2000). These statements suggest that he believes that there is little hope in changing adults, but if schools begin to influence students, change may occur. Like Michelle, Brian is questioning how the socialized constructions of sexual identity may be changed over time. Thus, these participants questioned the role of sexuality and how such a role influences categories of knowledge and how such knowledge impacts the
construction of hierarchies within society (Seidman, 1996). Thus, they are beginning to question the reality of heterosexism. Moreover, like Kirk, Brian states that it will take years for change to occur.

Administrative Change

In addition to considering how change can occur in a broader society based notion, the participants also discussed how change can occur within their own school community. When considering change in school communities, the participants consistently discussed the role of administrators in addressing homophobia. The participants all believe that one of the most important attributes in addressing the problem of homophobia is to have a supportive administration. Specifically, the administration must acknowledge that homophobia exists within the school on some level and must be dedicated to changing. Michelle, in a professional development session, stated the following, “a good administrator will set the tone for the faculty and the faculty will set the tone for the students. Change can’t be done effectively and school wide without the administration.” In these statements, Michelle argues that change needs to occur through a “top-down” process. However, as Eaton (2005) discovered the administration can be the largest hindrance to tolerance and creating safe places by not addressing the issue or even acknowledging that homophobia exists in the school.

For Beth, the administrative support for her school dictates the school climate, “if the principal is not supportive then the faculty will not be held responsible and nothing will change.” Again, Beth suggests the notion of change
occurring in a “top-down” process. Betty made the following statement in her individual interview concerning administration and sexuality,

In my school, administrators do not want to deal with homophobia. They know it’s a problem, but it’s all about pretending it’s not there or a quick note and then we move on. For example, there were a few girls who decided that they would service a young guy behind a tree. They cut the tree down. Cut the tree down. Why don’t you just talk to these kids about how to respect themselves, and how to behave? They are young and naïve. They want an older boy paying them some attention, and they think that this is a great way. So they cut the tree down. I am like, well that will teach them, instead of really sitting kids down and talking to them. I think the same thing happens with homophobia. Let’s cut the tree down and pretend that the problem has gone away.

In this quotation, Betty acknowledges that her administration does not want to admit that homophobia is a problem in her school, or they are not willing to fully address it. It is important to note that she compares the problem of homophobia with a problem concerning students’ sexual encounters. Further, she implies that school administrators are hesitant to address any challenge within the schools surrounding sexuality or sexual identity. As Eaton (2005) posits, it is the administration that has the most intolerance toward issues surrounding sexuality. However, as scholars (Glasgow, 2002; King & Brindley, 2002) discuss, it is difficult for many school administrators to address challenges concerning sexuality because of powerful forces outside of their school community.
In her statement, Betty compares homophobia to another problem that she believed her administration refuses to address. To her, it is easier for her administrator to pretend that students are not sexually active or that the problem will go away on its own if the stimulus causing the problem is removed. Further, Betty’s statements imply that open discussions surrounding sexuality are the appropriate way to address these issues. She believes that talking about sexuality, specifically homophobia, is important. As research (Glasgow, 2002) argues conversations in schools are viable methods for addressing this problem. Finally, in discussing administrative support, Matt wrote in his reflective journal:

Principals have to be involved in a positive way. They must be the leader that will help faculty address this problem. But, I am not sure that many are willing to really tackle the problem unless something bad happens in their schools. It will never get the same attention as test scores do.

In his journal entry, Matt posits that administrators must help faculty address the problem, but most will remain silent until forced to take action. Further, it is important to note the comparison that he makes between homophobia and test scores. Currently, public education is under a great deal of pressure because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. This is a national attempt intended to raise students’ test scores. Matt’s comparison implies that until there is a national attempt to address homophobia, administrators are not going to address the problem. This comparison also suggests a “top-down” process in addressing homophobia.
Although these participants suggest a “top-down” process in addressing homophobia in schools, research (Fullan, 2004) argues that this process is not as effective as many believe. In fact, Fullan suggests that a mixture of “top-down” and “bottom-up” is the most effective way to change school climates. Specifically, there must be a blend of support for change from both the administration and the faculty. All involved must be motivated and dedicated to change. Fullan (2004) argues that if either the top or the bottom cannot find meaning in the change, then change will not take place.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the major findings of this research project in regards to a professional development that examines homophobia in school environments. In attempting to address homophobia in school environments, the data in this project suggests that this professional development raised the awareness of the participants. As the data suggests, some of the teachers in this study were unaware of the problem of homophobia and how it influenced GLBT students’ education. The data also showed how unaware teachers were concerning the impact of homophobia in New York State schools. Additionally, the data in this project suggests that after raising awareness, teachers raised questions concerning homophobia. By raising questions about homophobia, teachers were able to begin to consider how to change their classrooms and schools into places where GLBT students can feel safe. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications of this study and how this study can impact the ways that PD can be used to disrupt homophobia in schools.
Chapter 7: Implications of the Study

This study has demonstrated a number of important aspects to consider when exploring the problem of homophobia with teachers in secondary educational settings: teachers’ perceptions of homophobia, teachers’ treatment of other forms of discrimination, and teachers’ beliefs about administrative support in addressing homophobia. This study revealed that the participants have the following perceptions concerning homophobia in their schools: a false tolerance, an accepted affection, and an accepted hegemonic masculinity. In exploring their perceptions prior and during this PD, the participants constantly constructed binary oppositions to define and discuss homophobia in their classrooms and schools: “girl-on-girl” versus “boy-on-boy”, masculine versus feminine, normal versus different, and others. As discussed later, these binaries can be broken through reflective practices.

In addition to examining these teachers’ perceptions of homophobia, it is also important to consider how other discriminatory practices are handled within classrooms and schools. Specifically, when examining homophobia in schools, these teachers discussed how racism was treated differently than other forms of discrimination. Therefore, this study suggests that homophobia is treated less importantly than racism. For these teachers in their schools, homophobic acts do not receive the same severe punishment as racist acts.

Lastly, it is important to discuss administrative support when exploring homophobia with teachers in secondary classrooms and schools. According to the teachers in this study, administrator support is vital in addressing homophobia in school buildings and across school districts. However, these participants believe that gaining
administrative support can be difficult because many administrators do not want to acknowledge the influence of homophobia in their school buildings.

Discussion/Implications

One implication for this study is premised on the constructions of binary oppositions. The findings of this study suggest that the participants constantly constructed binary opposition to define and discuss homophobia in their classrooms and schools. For example, teachers were able to determine if the language used in schools was homophobic or non-homophobic. The participants constructed a binary of “non-homophbic versus homophobic” language use. “Fag” and “gay” are words that can be placed in the positive, or “non-homophobic” side of the binary, whereas, “dyke” and “queer” are words that can only be placed on the negative, or “homophobic” side of the binary. Because of this process, this binary becomes an epistemological method of how these teachers construct their understandings of homophobia and homophobic language in their classrooms and schools. In other words, for these participants, language is homophobic if it has a fixed definition.

In addition to using binary constructions of language to discuss homophobia, participants also explored homophobia through a binary of accepted affections. The participants in this study discussed how they believe that, “girl on girl” affection is more acceptable and tolerated in their schools than “boy on boy” affection. In exploring their perceptions of homophobia, this constructed binary allowed the teachers to label tolerable sexual identities. The participants in this study also discussed their perceptions of homophobia through a “masculine versus feminine” binary. Specifically, the teachers
believed that students who displayed socially constructed masculine attributes received far less, if any, harassment as compared to effeminate males.

Therefore, one implication of this study is the necessity to disrupt the use of binary oppositions in defining and discussing homophobia. For example, these teachers believe that the use of the word “fag” is not as detrimental as the use of the “dyke.” Because of their construction of this binary, the word “fag” becomes an innocuous term. Thus, in order to disrupt the notions of defining homophobic language through binary oppositions, teachers need to critically examine how binaries function in society. In doing so, teachers may be able to “break free” from the confining nature of binaries.

Furthermore, by critically examining and “breaking away” from the notions of binaries, teachers will be able to conceptualize that all hate language needs to be treated in the same severe manner (Crozier, 2009). It will no longer be acceptable to address the use of “nigger” and not address the use of “faggot.” Moreover, through critical analysis and equalization of language, teachers will be able to view the broader notions of homophobia.

The second implication of this study is connected to the idea of binaries and power relations, but it involves how teachers view sexuality in their classrooms and schools. In all of the discussions surrounding homophobia, these teachers focused on the “gay kid.” For example, for these teachers, defining homophobia involved discussing how the “gay kid” was treated, was dressed, or what language was used toward him or her. In doing so, their discussions did not focus on the idea of “straightness” or what does it mean to be straight in my school? Thus, another implication of this study is the necessity for teachers to begin to discuss how heterosexism and heterocentricity is
reproduced in their schools through the ways that teachers define and discuss homophobia. Specifically, teachers need to critically examine how “queerness” is being identified in their environments. How are they defining “queerness?” What actions and language are they pointing to that define homophobia for them? When examining how their definitions and discussions of “queerness” or homosexuality revolve around the “gay kid,” teachers may be able to view how their own perceptions of homophobia in their schools are indeed embedded within heterosexism and hegemony.

Through examining the notions of how teachers mark “queerness” in their schools, teachers will be able to explore the assumptions of how power functions in society and in schools. It is imperative that teachers and administrators begin to recognize that power extends beyond dialogue, and exists within institutional structures. The notions of hegemony exist in their own definitions and discussions of homophobia. Thus, it may be beneficial for teachers to examine how “straightness,” rather than “queerness” operates within school environments; thus, examining how heterosexuality is reproduced within the school.

In terms of the PD program, there are some implications to consider. In structuring a PD program, the findings in this suggests that time and texts are important things to consider. Specifically, the teachers seemed more connected to the factual texts rather than the academic texts, even though two teachers were completing their doctorates.

The teachers participating in this professional development, raised awareness concerning homophobia in their schools and classrooms caused them to begin to raise questions about homophobia. Through the process of
questioning, the teachers began to consider the process of change or the effects of change as it relates to homophobia. Although these teachers did not discuss any finalized notions concerning homophobia and change, the data from this study suggests that this professional development influenced the ways that teachers explored homophobia in their schools and classrooms.

The findings in this research project suggest that the teachers’ awareness of homophobia in schools grew as a result of this professional development. In Chapter 4, I discuss how teachers’ perceived homophobia prior to the PD program. As discussed in Chapter 6, many of the participants’ noted that their perceptions of homophobia had changed as a result of the PD program. Therefore, one implication of this study suggests that when exploring homophobia with teachers it is important to discuss the impact of homophobia on classrooms and schools. The teachers in this study were unaware of the influence of homophobia nationally and in New York State schools. Therefore, it may be beneficial for a professional development to explore national and local impacts of homophobia on educational environments. Given the implications of what texts to use in a PD program, it may also benefit teachers to have recently graduated students from their own districts discuss homophobia. Teachers need to be aware of how homophobia is influencing their students.

Secondly, because of their raised awareness, teachers in this study began to raise questions concerning homophobia as a result of this project. Therefore, another implication of this study involves questioning. In this study, teachers began to question why homophobia still exists and why homophobia is treated differently than other forms
of discrimination. Thus, a professional development exploring homophobia should allow teachers to examine why homophobia still exists within their classrooms and schools. This would be an appropriate time to begin to discuss with teachers the nature of heteronormativity, as discussed as one implication above.

Also, participants in this study began considering the process of change concerning homophobia. In exploring the process of change, another implication of this study involves the necessity of administrative support in process of change within school buildings. All of the teachers in this study believe that administrators must admit that homophobia is a problem in their schools and must be dedicated to addressing it. However, for some teachers, gaining administrative support is problematic because many administrators do not want to acknowledge or address the issue. Therefore, a professional development should explore how teachers can begin to lead discussions with school administrators concerning administrators’ involvement in initiating change. In doing so, change may occur through a collaborative process.

Contributions to Present Literature/Research

This research study provides several necessary additions to the current literature addressing homophobia in schools. The first significant contribution addresses the purposes and structure of professional development. To date, there is no published literature that discusses how a PD exploring homophobia should be structured. Therefore, this study provides a model for possible PD constructions. Further, the teachers in this study were unaware of the influence of homophobia in classrooms and schools. This study informs professional developers of the appropriate point at which to begin designing professional development that addresses this problem. In doing so, it is
necessary to illuminate to teachers the reality of homophobia and how homophobia influences the educational environment. Further, it provides developers the scaffolding necessary to design PD addressing homophobia. Secondly, I posit that this study adds to current literature through examining how teachers grapple with addressing homophobia. Presently, there is little research literature exploring how teachers conceptualize how homophobia functions within their schools. The majority of the literature discusses why teachers should address homophobia. This study provides an understanding of how these teachers conceptualize non-heterosexual identities through binary oppositions, and how such oppositions perpetuate hierarchy and intolerance. Thus, this research provides a framework for discussing homophobia in schools and classrooms and how homophobia and heterocentricity should be addressed. Specifically, teachers must break free from the confining nature of binary oppositions and view their classrooms and schools from a lens that dismantles the hierarchies that exists within schools.

Limitations/Directions for Future Research/Limitations

As the research states, homophobia is a problem in secondary education, and we must devise methods to address this problem so that, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students have safe learning environments. Although this study does provide significant contributions to the literature addressing homophobia in schools, there are some limitations to the study. One limitation of the study involves the participants. The participants were chosen through a convenience sampling. In this regard, it did provide pre-established relationships. Because sexuality is a sensitive subject to discuss, it is important to recognize that the pre-established relationships among the participants and the researcher may have impacted the level of comfort of the participants to discuss non-
heterosexual identities, which could have impacted the data that was obtained. In discussing the participants, it is necessary to also note that prior to this study, I was acquainted with three of the participants. The remaining five participants were acquainted with those three. This is important to mention because all of the participants volunteered for the study. Because of their desire to participate in the study, some of their perceptions and biases about homophobia may have been less than participants who would have been acquired through a more random sampling. For example, one participant was the GSA sponsor in his high school. Therefore, because of the sampling, the results may under-report the problem of homophobia in schools. In discussing the idea of under-reporting, it may be necessary to implement a future PD program addressing homophobia, in which attendance is mandatory. Secondly, as discussed below the scope of the study was limited to only secondary teachers. This may narrow the transferability of the study to only secondary settings.

Because of the study’s limitations, it does provide some insights for future research. This research project involved interested secondary teachers from a range of academic disciplines, but it only addresses teachers’ experiences and their attitudes toward homophobia. Because schools are communities, it may be important to explore administrators’ views of homophobia through similar research questions. Further, all of the participants in this study discussed how important they believe administrator support is in decreasing the influence of homophobia in schools and creating change in educational settings. Thus it may be beneficial to examine how administrators grapple with the issues surrounding homophobia in their schools. Also, because schools are
communities, it may be beneficial to explore students’ views of homophobia in their schools.

Finally, because this study examined how teachers participating in discussions surrounding homophobia in their classrooms and schools grappled with the issues, it may be beneficial to conduct a second research project that explores how these teachers utilized the information gained through this project in their own classrooms and schools. In doing so, it would examine how the professional development impacted these teachers’ pedagogical practices and their post PD perceptions concerning homophobia.
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Appendix 1: Transcription Symbols

As discussed in Chapter 3, I formatted my transcription in paragraph form, with each speaker beginning a new paragraph. Below, I list the transcription symbols that I used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hpb</td>
<td>Homophobia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mas</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tchr</td>
<td>Teacher(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sch</td>
<td>School(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dist</td>
<td>District(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>Administrator(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gl</td>
<td>Gay and Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fem</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std</td>
<td>Student(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xxx</td>
<td>Could not understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sss</td>
<td>Could not identify speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Speaking to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@</td>
<td>At</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Texts Used in the Professional Development Program

ESPN. Documentary on Gay High School Athletes: The Corey Johnson Story Retrieved October 6, 2008 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpXh8CYOOb8

This documentary discusses the life of Corey Johnson, a high school football player. Corey was “outed” by a friend in his school, and immediately encounters a great deal of homophobia from his team mates and the school community. I chose to use this film because it discusses how homophobia impacts the lives of students and their parents.


This research brief discusses the rates of homophobia in New York State public schools. I chose to use this article because it illustrates the problem of homophobia within the participants’ own state.


This research brief discusses the results of GLSEN’s National School Climate Survey. The survey discusses how homophobia impacts public schools across the United States. I chose to use this survey because it discusses homophobia from a national perspective.


This article explores the murder of Lawrence King, a middle school student in Oxnard, CA. The student was shot by his classmate as a result of homophobia. I chose to use this article because it illustrates the importance of addressing homophobia.

Lawrence King Shooting Video, California Middle School Student Murdered in School Because of His Sexual Orientation. Retrieved October, from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sd54SnjrTMs

This video depicts the life of Lawrence King.


In sessions 6 through 8, participants were asked to bring texts or topics to the PD session. The participants brought the following topics, no specific texts were brought:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant (Content Area)</th>
<th>Topic to Discuss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beth (History)</td>
<td>teaches the Holocaust each year. She wanted to discuss teaching strategies to incorporate homophobia into her lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty (Art)</td>
<td>brought photographs of oppressed individuals. We discussed how the photographs could become catalysts to discuss homophobia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian (Music)</td>
<td>did not bring a topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirk (Physics)</td>
<td>did not bring a topic to the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt (English)</td>
<td>wanted to discuss A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle (Art)</td>
<td>brought in paintings by da Vinci, Warhol, and Blaine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally (Music)</td>
<td>did not bring a topic to the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue (English)</td>
<td>wanted to explore how to implement the “Day Of Silence” at her school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Codes

In coding my data, I used the following codes. The definitions used were developed from contextual meanings.

Actions: doing something
Affection: showing attention to another student in a romantic manner
Appearance: the way that someone looks
Aware: acknowledging something
Change: doing something different
Comparison: when the participants compared two or more concepts/things
Different: one who is the opposite of normal
Emotions: anger, fear, etc. that were discussed by the participants
Faculty: the teachers and staff of a school building
Feminine: one who has feminine attributes/effeminate
GSA: gay straight alliances
Gay: homosexuals
Harassment: being picked on, bullied, name-calling
Homophobia: harassment toward GLBT students
Identity: how one defines him or herself (gay identity, straight identity, etc.)
Intervention: the act of attempting to stop harassment, mostly faculty
Intolerant: not tolerant
Language: the words we use to speak
Lesbians: females who identify as being sexually attracted to other females
Masculine: one who has masculine attributes
Normal: part of the mainstream group
Other: the different person
Outness: whether one is “out” or not
Perceptions: beliefs about something
Politics: the political aspects surrounding schools (the politics of school)
Popularity: students who are accepted
Questioning: seeking answers, (not pertaining to sexuality)
Racism: oppression of non-Caucasians
Reflecting/self-reflecting: thinking metacognitively
Resistance: attempting to stop change/movement within schools
Safe: the place or act of providing a “judgment-free”/no violence or bullying
Self-esteem: the way individuals feel about themselves
Self-Perceptions: how one thinks of him or herself
Silence: not making noise
Straight: Not GLBT
Stereotypes: beliefs about GLBT students which may or may not be true
Students: the students in a school building
Support: any measure that helps students emotionally or academically, could also refer to the environment.
Tolerance: the act of being tolerant or promoting tolerance, tolerant