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Identity Negotiation: An Intergenerational Examination of Lesbian and Gay Band Directors

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of lesbian and gay band directors at varying stages of career development to discern how they have negotiated identity within their personal and professional lives. Ten band directors (8 males and 2 females) residing in Texas ($n = 8$), Florida ($n = 1$), and Illinois ($n = 1$) provided data through individual interviews, a focus group interview, and optional journaling. Findings were grouped into two broad themes: Negotiating Disclosure and Negotiating Success. Results indicated that most chose to disclose their sexual orientation to immediate colleagues (i.e., other band directors) but were much more guarded around students and students' parents. Participants perceived that openness with colleagues had enriched working relationships but were concerned that disclosure with students and students' parents could have negative ramifications. These decisions were based more on fear of parental responses rather than student attitudes. The men in this study were particularly concerned that any misperceptions might lead to unfounded assumptions of child abuse. Recognizing that potential prejudice might be dissipated through professional credibility and respect, participants placed high value on informal mentoring and support received from other lesbian and gay directors.

Introduction

In a documentary examining the experiences of lesbian and gay educators in the UK, a special education teacher recounted that when a student asked why he was unmarried, he replied, "Well, because I'm gay. I don't want to get married to a woman." Later, when challenged by his principal who asked, "Why do they need to know about your private life?," he explained, "Well, it's not my private life. It's my identity. It's who I am. It's who I am in my house, it's who I am at the coffee shop, it's who I am at the supermarket; it's my life. It's who I am at work." (Wakefield & Ashby, 2008). The consequences of this exchange resulted in a lawsuit that was settled out of court. Although many lesbian and gay teachers may wish to assert themselves similarly, research has shown that many fear acknowledging their sexual orientation in school settings could result in discrimination or even job loss (Blount, 2005; DeJean, 2004; Ferfolja, 2005; Graves, 2009; Harbeck, 1997; Jackson, 2006; Jennings, 1983; Kissen, 1996; Sanlo, 1999; Sumara, 2007; Woog, 1995). In contrast, educators have noted that heterosexual teachers rarely need to consider complications associated with casual references to their family lives (Bergonzi, 2009; McKenzie-Bassant, 2007; Resenbrink, 1996; Sanlo, 1999).

Group comparisons like these feature prominently in social identity theory (Harwood, Gile, & Palomares, 2005; Tafjel & Turner, 1986; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987), a psychological model that acknowledges the significance of group identification, as well as individual self-categorization. Tenets of social identity theory include varying means with which individuals seek positive self-esteem, including assimilation into more favored groups (social mobility), redefining values within one's own group (social creativity), or challenging dominant norms through political action (social competition). Cox and Gallois (1996) argued that these tenets provide a useful model to describe the social and political forces that shape lesbian and gay identity. They proposed that individuals uncomfortable with their homosexual orientation may strive to deny being gay in order to assimilate with a dominant heterosexual culture, while

people who embrace their sexual orientation may redefine social norms and even challenge heteronormative assumptions through political action.

Since the advent of social justice movements in the 1960s, many groups, including lesbians and gays, have redefined their marginalized status in positive terms. However, in an extensive review examining disadvantaged groups' perceptions of dominant norms, Jost, Banaji, and Nosek (2004) cited numerous studies documenting unconscious adherence and even preference toward the status quo. In explicit measures of group preference, people in disadvantaged groups usually favored members of their own tribe, but implicit measures frequently revealed favoritism toward dominant groups. The prevalence of these findings has supported hypotheses related to system justification theory whereby individuals are motivated to view the dominant culture as good, just, and desirable.

Despite a propensity to define one's environment in positive terms, many lesbian and gay teachers have described homophobic school atmospheres that have cultivated a culture of fear (Blount, 2005; DeJean, 2004; Ferfolja, 2005; Graves, 2009; Harbeck, 1997; Jackson, 2006; Jennings, 1983; Kissen, 1996; Sanlo, 1999; Sumara, 2007; Woog, 1995). Pressure to conform to heteronormative ideals has not only discouraged many lesbian and gay teachers from disclosing their orientation but has even led some to discriminate against other lesbian and gay colleagues based on heterosexist ideals of conformity (Mayo, 2008; Sullivan, 1993).

While pressure to conform to heterosexual orientation may be potent, compliance with gender roles may be even more powerful. Researchers documenting lesbian and gay teachers' perceptions have shown that men may be especially aware of hegemonic gender roles. Gay men whose natural behaviors reflect stereotypically masculine identity have perceived that their ability to mirror hegemonic norms facilitates easier communication with colleagues; whereas, those whose gender expressions are more stereotypically feminine have perceived the need to suppress and monitor behaviors for purposes of assimilation (Jackson, 2006; Mayo, 2007, 2008). Similarly, Jackson (2006) reported that teachers whose lives reflected hegemonic family structures (e.g., long-term relationships, children, etc.) perceived that commonality facilitated greater ease in communicating with heterosexual colleagues.

Although perceived pressure to conform to dominant norms has led some lesbian and gay teachers to conceal their sexual orientation, research has demonstrated that closeted behaviors may exert significant costs, including psychological stress (Sanlo, 1999; Sullivan, 1993; Takatori, 2007) physical illness (Kissen, 1996), and diminished job satisfaction (Juul, 1995). Likewise, teachers afraid of interacting too closely with colleagues outside school settings have reported that co-workers mistakenly perceived them as unfriendly and aloof, when in reality, they were simply terrified (McKenzie-Bassant, 2007; Sanlo, 1999; Sullivan, 1993). Ironically, some studies have shown that attempts to conceal orientation have not reduced homophobic slurs and taunts (Ferfolja, 2005; Kissen, 1996). As a result, some educators have abandoned teaching careers in search of alternate careers (Sumara, 2007).

Jackson (2006) observed that teachers who remained in the field were more likely to discard some or all closeted behaviors as they progressed through their careers. Those who have come

out to students have reported that curricular topics relevant to classroom learning have provided a useful vehicle to begin discussion (Jackson, 2006, Mayo, 2007; Rofes, 2000). Although Dejean (2004, 2007) found that teachers who came out to students reported mixed student and community reactions, others have reported primarily positive responses (Gust, 2007; Mayo, 2007; Rofes, 2000; Takatori, 2007). Teachers have credited positive media imagery with providing national support for coming out (Jackson, 2006) but have also acknowledged that support from school administrators may be crucial (DeJean, 2007; Jackson, 2006; Juul, 1995; Kissen, 1996; Resenbrink, 1996; Sanlo, 1999; Takatori, 2007).

Although the studies above have reported lived experiences among lesbian and gay educators, very few have examined the experiences of lesbian and gay teachers in music settings. In light of the bond many students have with secondary music ensemble directors, the marked absence of research in this area is particularly noteworthy. This study seeks to add to the research base by examining the experiences and perceptions of lesbian and gay band directors at varying stages of career development. Research questions addressed included the following:

> 1. What decisions have lesbian and gay band directors made about disclosing their sexual orientation to colleagues?
>   a. How have these decisions impacted interactions?
> 2. What decisions have lesbian and gay band directors made about disclosing their sexual orientation to students' parents?
>   a. How have these decisions impacted interactions?
> 3. What decisions have lesbian and gay band directors made about disclosing their sexual orientation to students?
>   a. How have these decisions impacted interactions?

Method

Procedures

In order to capture the lived experiences of lesbian and gay band directors, I chose to utilize research techniques associated with phenomenology as outlined by Colaizzi (1978). Rooted in the writings of Husserl, phenomenology seeks to move beyond mere description to capture the collective essence of participants' experience (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). As part of this process, I sought to bracket or suspend my own experiences and biases in order to capture the authentic experiences of the participants. I recognized that having taught nine years in elementary public schools and six years in higher education as an openly gay educator with strong administrative and family support, my experiences may not mirror those of the participants in this study. Likewise, I recognized that because many people are able to discern my orientation through visual and aural cues, those who do not exhibit similar stereotypical behaviors may have had experiences that were vastly different from my own.

Sample

Ten band directors (8 males and 2 females) whose teaching experience ranged from 2 to 50 years (M = 21.6, SD = 16.18) agreed to participate in this study through semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview, and optional journaling. Eight teachers lived in Texas, one resided in Florida, and another lived in Illinois. In order to locate band directors with a wide range of teaching experience, I used snowball sampling procedures, beginning with an experienced private instructor who identified key informants at varying stages of career development. To ensure confidentiality, I conducted all interviews outside participants' school settings and used private e-mail accounts for electronic communication. I conducted six interviews in teachers' homes, one interview in my university office, and three interviews via SKYPE for directors who lived in locations further than three hours driving distance from my home. Face-to-face interviews were recorded using a Sony digital voice recorder (ICD-P320), and SKYPE interviews were recorded using Audio Hijack Pro software via a MacBook Pro laptop computer. During individual interviews, questions derived from previous qualitative studies examining experiences of lesbian and gay educators in other fields (Dejean, 2004; Ferfolja, 2005, Jackson, 2006; Mayo, 2007, 2008) focused on teachers' decisions about disclosing their sexual orientation with colleagues, students' parents, and students. Interviews ranged in length from 40 minutes 18 seconds to 2 hours 9 minutes 42 seconds for a total of 13 hours 23 minutes 18 seconds (M = 1 hour 20 minutes 20 seconds, SD = 29 minutes 45 seconds). After transcribing and coding all individual interviews to identify emerging themes, I invited directors to participate in a focus group interview held at my university. Individuals who could not travel with ease were invited to participate via telephone or SKYPE. The focus group interview lasted 1 hours 23 minutes 12 seconds. Pseudonyms were provided to ensure ethical standards of privacy.

Participant Profiles

Arnie was in his early 70s and had taught 50 years in elementary, middle school, high school, and university settings. Considered by many to be the grandfather of the competitive Texas band tradition, at the time of this study he had devoted the last 10 years exclusively to clinic presentations throughout the state. Born in a small west Texas ranching community, Arnie maintained a southern drawl and personal communication that combined deadpan affect with high camp.

Jenn was in her early 60s and had taught 40 years in middle school, high school, and university settings throughout Texas. At the end of her public school teaching career, she was hired as a mentor to work with young band directors during their beginning years of service. At the time of this study, she was teaching at a local university, where her energetic, positive outlook served well to prepare pre-service teachers for challenges encountered in the profession.

Leanne was in her late 50s and had taught 28 years in middle school and high school settings. After graduating from college, she married a man whom she divorced 12 years later in acknowledgement of her lesbian identity. Residing in Texas at the time of this study, Leanne described herself as a nurturer whose skills of observation facilitated positive communication with students.

Robert was in his late 40s and had taught 26 years in middle school and high school settings in Texas. The only person of color in this study, Robert had grown up in a conservative Hispanic family and did not come out to anyone until he was 30 years old. Robert was a friendly man but admitted that his imposing physique sometimes intimidated younger students, especially as he grew older.

George was in his late 40s and had taught 24 years in middle school and high school settings throughout Texas. Although always cautious, he was more open about his sexual orientation in professional settings than other participants. Not only did he display pictures of his partner in his office, but he also made casual references to his spouse in the same manner that his heterosexual colleagues might exercise. George 's teaching philosophy embedded concepts of mediation and mutual agreement that engendered a learning environment built on mutual respect.

Tim was in his early 50s and had taught exclusively in Florida middle schools for 23 years. Having received a graduate degree in woodwind performance, he maintained a busy performing schedule outside his regular teaching hours. Tim was an extremely charismatic individual whose commitment to healthy living manifested in regular exercise and body building. When he began teaching, Tim was deeply concerned about job security and lied about his sexual orientation, even claiming to be married to a woman. As time passed, he eventually came out to colleagues and brought his partner to faculty functions.

Matt was in his early 40s and had taught for 12 years in Texas middle schools before leaving the profession to pursue doctoral studies in flute performance. Self-identifying as a bear (large, bearded men in the gay community), Matt was friendly yet circumspect with strangers. Like Robert, Matt did not acknowledge his sexual orientation until he had been teaching for several years but later invited family members to a wedding with his partner.

Steve was in his early 30s and had taught for 6 years in middle school and high school settings in Pennsylvania and Illinois. He grew up in an extremely conservative Christian household and maintained a strong religious identity. Like Tim, Steve could be described as charismatic and self-identified as a "people-pleaser."

Alan was in his mid-20s and had taught for 3 years in a Texas middle school. Like Tim, he possessed a variety of musical skills including brass performance, composition, and arranging. At the time of this study, Alan was still trying to discern how he should negotiate personal identity in professional settings.

Charlie, the youngest member of the study, was in his mid-20s and had taught for 2 years in a Texas middle school. He was a friendly, accessible individual deeply committed to a successful teaching career.

Data Analysis

Following analysis procedures outlined by Colaizzi (1978), I read through transcripts to identify and extract significant statements. From these, I formulated meanings and clustered these meanings into themes. Trustworthiness achieved through triangulation of data sources (i.e., individual interviews, a focus group interview, and journaling) was further aided by member checks and follow-up e-mail communications to ensure accuracy.

Findings

Results from this study yielded two broad theme clusters: Negotiating Disclosure and Negotiating Success. Codes subsumed underneath Negotiating Disclosure included Closet, Boundaries, and Community Trust. Codes subsumed underneath Negotiating Success included Supporting Other Lesbian and Gay Teachers, Defining Strengths, and Social Progress (See Table 1).

Negotiating Disclosure

Eight participants began teaching prior to 2003. During these years, homosexual behavior was a punishable offense with the possibility of incurring fines or even imprisonment, depending on one's location. Although these antiquated laws were rarely executed, their presence on the books presented a silent source of intimidation that pervaded society.

Closet.

Everyone interviewed said they eventually shared their orientation with colleagues; however, six of the ten participants reported that during the initial stages of career development, they led closeted lives in which they did not disclose their orientation to anyone in a professional setting. Most avoided conversations regarding any aspects of their personal lives, and Tim even feigned heterosexual marriage during the first few years of his career. Regardless of the extremes to which participants took, they all reported significant tolls associated with hiding. Recounting lies told, Tim reported, "I felt like I was taking a little bit away from my soul every time I misled somebody" (interview, January 21, 2010). Likewise, Jenn described her first two years of closeted teaching as "living in a tomb" (interview, January 10, 2010). Similarly, recounting his first closeted years teaching in a primarily conservative, Hispanic environment, Robert offered, "I stayed in the closet, led a double life. It was horrible. It was miserable." (interview, February 1, 2010). As the oldest participant, Arnie was keenly aware of anti-gay attitudes among conservatives; thus, he took great pains to compartmentalize his professional and personal life. His careful discretion and professional achievements earned him job protection; however, floating rumors within a conservative network of band directors excluded him from membership in some professional fraternities. This kind of indignity led Arnie to relate, "If I didn't have to work and had money, I would [only be around gay people]. I have straight friends, but I wouldn't care to have them necessarily. I would rather have an entire group of gay people. I would never, (pause) I wouldn't even know a straight person" (interview, May 3, 2010).

Boundaries.

Arnie reported that despite his caution, people could usually discern his orientation; therefore, he established strict boundaries between himself and his students to protect his job security. Everyone interviewed conceded that established boundaries were especially crucial in interactions with parents and students, regardless of sexual orientation. However, they also acknowledged that their heterosexual colleagues were privileged to integrate personal and professional activities without fear of retribution. The extent to which participants opened boundaries among students and parents to match their heterosexual colleagues' openness varied. Participants conceded that lesbian directors had more leeway to share their lives openly than gay men who may be more vulnerable to erroneous accusations of pedophilia. Although the motivation to establish strict boundaries was grounded in avoiding false allegations of child abuse, teachers acknowledged that these very boundaries helped establish the impartiality required of head directors who must make important decisions. Leanne acknowledged that as a head director, impartiality was crucial:

> You can't get as emotionally involved with people because you have too many decisions to make. You're choosing the people for the wind ensemble, the top group, where parents are calling and they want to take their kids on vacation and you've got to go to contest. I mean you have to make some very hard decisions. . . . You have to be consistent and fair. (interview, January 10, 2010)

Although participants reported benefits associated with compartmentalization, several comments reflected self-effacing adherence to heterosexist ideals. In describing her reactions to the debate over whether homosexuality might be a choice, Jenn offered:

> Homosexuality is sort of like having tuberculosis. (mockingly) 'Yes, I choose to have tuberculosis. I can't wait to have it,' you know? I mean who would choose to be gay? It would be so much easier to be straight." (interview, January 10, 2010)

Likewise, many directors frequently referred to student questions about their family status as "inappropriate" or "none of anyone's business." In contrast, during the focus group interview Matt questioned other directors' use of the word "inappropriate":

> I wouldn't say that it's appropriate to divulge to students, but I wouldn't say it's inappropriate either. I have a niece who's four years old, and she sees me and my partner all the time, and she knows that we're committed to each other. She was a flower girl at our commitment ceremony. She's totally cool with all of that. She understands that we love each other and we're together. So it's not something that a twelve-year-old can't handle. I think it isn't necessarily something that you have to bring into the classroom. But I don't think it's something to hide necessarily either. (interview, May 3, 2010)

Community trust.

Although directors were careful not to openly reveal their sexual orientation to students and their parents, they recognized that most parents (and many students) had probably discerned their sexuality through nonverbal behaviors and life patterns that failed to mirror heterosexual norms. As Tim explained,

> Any parent who hasn't figured it out by the time their kid is in eighth grade just isn't paying attention. Because, they just, you have to know! [My partner] comes to the concerts and helps me set up, and you know, I'm a 51-year-old (pause) I mean I'm certainly not (pause) do I seem odd? I mean I'm not single. They wouldn't expect that. (interview, January 21, 2010)

Everyone agreed that professional credibility and personal trust were vital prerequisites to garnering community support for life patterns that varied from dominant norms. Younger teachers in the study were especially aware of the need to establish credibility. Steve shared,

> [Beginning teachers] can be damn good at what they do, but they need some time to build and prove that, so they have some "money in the bank," so that [if] somebody goes to challenge them, their reputation as an outstanding teacher is really going to help hold up their credibility as a person and as an individual. (interview, February 2, 2010)

Participants reported that when students and their parents' recognized teachers' commitment to their well-being, they were frequently very supportive. Jenn shared that when her partner's daughter was unexpectedly killed in a car accident, parents rallied around her with condolences. Likewise, after several years of successful teaching, a parent told George that the community was aware that he was gay but did not care. He explained, "It really was a paradigm shift. That was such a wonderful revelation summed up so perfectly from somebody that I knew and trusted" (interview, January 27, 2010). Not long afterward, George decided to acknowledge his partner at a public concert:

> There was a time when coincidentally we had a concert that just happened to land on my partner's and my anniversary. And at this concert, my whole family was in the audience. At that point in my time, I just sort of felt like that whole place was essentially my family. You know, all these people had known me for so long and knew what I was about. And so I [introduced my parents and my partner], and people applauded. The only thing I ever heard from any parent afterwards was how nice that was and how special that was, and how neat that they could be there. Except for my supervisor who expressed being very uncomfortable and really wanted to know that I wasn't ever going to do that again. And I said, "No, I'm not. It's really unlikely that all of those things are ever going to happen on the same event again." In other words, "No, I'm not, but not because it's making you uncomfortable." (interview, January 27, 2010)

George's teaching philosophy was based on the idea that in order to provide students with a meaningful music education, he had to let them know that he was more concerned about their general welfare than their musical prowess. Every teacher interviewed seemed to share the same philosophy, which engendered respect, devotion, and musical success.

Negotiating Success

In order to develop professional and personal credibility, band directors must learn and utilize a variety of skills beyond musical and instructional expertise. These competencies include management skills for classroom discipline, fundraising, travel, and community outreach. Most teachers grapple with these issues, but lesbian and gay teachers must also navigate through possible complications associated with community perceptions of their sexual orientation.

    Supporting other lesbian and gay band directors.

Participants interviewed indicated that mentoring and support from other lesbian and gay band directors proved highly beneficial to their career success. Alan and Charlie, the two youngest members of this study, indicated that conversations with lesbian and gay colleagues had been very helpful in navigating the beginning years of teaching. Regarding an incident with a particularly bold student, Alan related:

> A kid asked me flat out, "Everyone says that you're gay. Are you gay?" And I had no idea what to say. (laughs) . . . I said, "No!" And I just kind of went, "Go away!" (laughs) And so I freaked out. And I called all these people that I knew. [George and I] went to dinner, and I told him about it, and he just said, "You know, just crack a joke or something. Just make it not a big deal, and it won't be a big deal." George has been really good about that sort of thing. (interview, January 17, 2010)

Alan also shared that Leanne's mentorship had provided crucial guidance,

> Leanne has been . . . to say "invaluable" is a complete understatement. Like, I don't know how I would have survived my first two years of teaching without her. Being able to talk to Leanne and George and people my age about [gay issues] is a really, really cool thing for me. And I don't think that people have that everywhere, and I think that scares people. (interview, January 25, 2010)

Informal sharing not only served as a direct source of help, but also served as a valuable tool for indirect learning. Charlie offered,

> I've heard about some situations that friends of mine have been in, and you know, thank God they happened to them first, so it gives me time to think about what I would do in that situation. That's very selfish of me, but I'm going to take that opportunity. (interview, January 29, 2010)

Older teachers interviewed indicated that Arnie had served as a powerful mentor during their beginning years in the profession. George related,

> [Arnie] was the very perfect model. Now that's of course as somebody who's coming from [a very] "old school" way of looking at that, you know, generations ago. But he was

just the perfect model of "Yes, I know you know. Everybody knows. It's not anything I'm hiding. But it doesn't have anything to do with what we're doing in this time window that we're in a rehearsal." And so that just really kind of set that image in my mind of, "It's not anything I'm retreating from or apologizing for or guarding as a secret, or the least bit insecure about in my mind. But it's not part of our relationship in this environment. Or it's not part of our relationship at all." (interview, January 27, 2010)

Although the veteran teachers mentored younger colleagues, they also provided moral support for each other. For a few years, Leanne and George worked together as assistant directors at the same high school. Leanne explained,

> I've never been in a situation to mentor anyone, or been mentored by anyone. But I was certainly befriended by George, who made my time at [that school] so much fun and so much better! So you know, there's equal mentoring too. It's not like somebody's telling somebody how to do it. [It's nice] just to have a friend. (interview, January 25, 2010)

Defining strengths.

Although being gay provided additional challenges, some teachers indicated that their experiences as members of a marginalized group in society may have strengthened their ability to relate to students with compassion and openness. Having grown up as a small, effeminate boy in a rural ranching community that celebrated hyper-masculinity, Arnie said his grandmother's loving acceptance stood in stark contrast to the negative feedback he received from his father, uncles, and other community members. Later as a teacher, his grandmother's compassion influenced his decision to honor all students' integrity. He shared,

> I'm not going to make anybody feel bad about who they are. I'm talking about being anything you are. So you're not going to practice as much as I want to. OK. Then practice as much as you want to. Now if somebody beats you, you have to take the fact that they did more practice than you did, but I'm not going to be on your back all the time about practicing. (interview January 24, 2010)

Likewise, Alan explained that having grown up in a rural community in which diversity was not always celebrated, it may have been easier to accept the status quo had he not been gay. He felt that acknowledging his sexual orientation allowed him to consider alternative ideas that enriched his musicianship and intellectual development. Rather than emulate the impersonal, competitive drive he had observed among many male directors, Alan sought to establish a nurturing, personal connection with students modeled by many female directors. He shared,

> You have to treat kids like they're individuals, and not just as a trumpet. They're not a horn; they're not a percussionist; they're a child. And they need that support because they may not get it anywhere else. And so I guess that's what I mean by being a different kind of teacher. (interview, January 17, 2010)

Social progress.

Teachers in this study learned from and supported each other, but they also indicated that social progress toward lesbian and gay acceptance had provided encouragement as well. Participants credited positive media images in television programs like *Will and Grace*, *Ellen*, and more recently, *Modern Family*, with fostering understanding and comfort with lesbian and gay people. Teachers also recognized that as more and more lesbian and gay people have come out to their families, the topic of homosexuality, once scandalous and titillating, has become blasé and of little consequence. That is not to say that in isolated cases, teachers have not encountered problems with homophobia. Robert recounted one semester in which a parent tried to generate controversy; however, he found that every administrator in his school supported him without reservation. Likewise, directors reported that some lesbian and gay students had come out in high school and that in some communities, these students were admired and supported for their courage.

Although participants appreciated political work that had generated increased support for lesbians and gays, none were directly involved in local politics. Partly due to time commitments associated with developing and maintaining thriving band programs, but mostly due to concerns about possible conservative backlash, they chose to let individuals outside the education profession lead the way in active political pursuits.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of lesbian and gay band directors at varying stages of career development to discern how they have negotiated identity within their personal and professional lives. Results gleaned from interviews with 10 directors indicated that most had chosen to disclose their sexual orientation to immediate colleagues (i.e., other band directors) but were much more guarded around students and students' parents. Participants perceived that openness with colleagues had enriched working relationships, but feared that disclosure with students and students' parents could facilitate discrimination. These decisions were based more on fear of parental responses rather than student attitudes. The men in this study were particularly fearful that any misperceptions might lead to unfounded assumptions of child abuse.

The wariness with which directors approached disclosure is consistent with previous research examining the experiences of lesbian and gay educators in other disciplines (Blount, 2005; DeJean, 2004; Ferfolja, 2005; Graves, 2009; Harbeck, 1997; Jackson, 2006; Jennings, 1983; Kissen, 1996; Sanlo, 1999; Sumara, 2007; Woog, 1995). Although many teachers receive valuable training necessary to develop effective instructional skills, discussion surrounding lesbian and gay issues in education is often sorely lacking (Mayo, 2008; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007; Stiegler, 2008; Sumara, 2007), leaving lesbian and gay pre-service teachers to fend for themselves as they negotiate personal decisions related to openness and disclosure. Participants in this study indicated that informal mentoring, modeling and support received from other lesbian and gay band directors proved to be a valuable component of their career development. Likewise, teachers who described closeted living in the same dismal terms noted

in other studies (Juuls, 2005; Kissen, 1996; Sanlo, 1999; Sullivan, 1993; Takatori, 2007) found that positive mentorship helped negotiate disclosure and success.

All participants acknowledged that before taking any risks associated with disclosure, lesbian and gay teachers needed to establish trust and professional credibility within the community. They believed that clear boundaries between themselves, students, and students' parents were vital to ensure that community members could develop professional respect, irrespective of personal beliefs about sexual orientation. Although they acknowledged heterosexual privileges among their straight colleagues who more freely integrated personal and professional relationships, participants redefined these self-imposed restrictions in positive terms. They judged that regardless of sexual orientation, good teachers must maintain impartiality to avoid accusations of favoritism regarding ensemble placement, distribution of solo parts, and leadership awards. They also maintained that strict boundaries, established cordially, helped establish neutrality deemed useful in professional settings. Likewise, consistent with other studies (DeJean, 2007; Mayo, 2007; Resenbrink, 1996), directors identified ways that past experiences had improved their teaching skills. Painful earlier experiences associated with marginalized social status resulted in later teaching philosophies built on creating safe environments in which all individuals were valued, regardless of any factors that might separate them from socially dominant norms.

Interpreted through the lens of social identity theory (Harwood, Gile, & Palomares, 2005; Tafjel & Turner, 1986; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987), informal mentoring and support between directors could be understood as a means of facilitating social creativity in which perceived limitations and past injustices were redefined as tools to strengthen teaching. Rather than viewing self-imposed social boundaries between teachers and community members as closeted behavior typical of social mobility strategies (i.e., assimilating into the dominant heterosexual culture), teachers in this study chose to reinterpret boundaries positively as a means of ensuring impartiality and fair treatment. Once credibility was attained, directors began peeking through the boundaries to challenge dominant norms via social competition. One could even argue that the "don't ask, don't tell" philosophy adopted by many lesbian and gay teachers in this study served as a passive political act in and of itself. Most participants understood that what they did not say often revealed as much about their sexual orientation as what they did say. Tacit referrals to spouses or the continual use of gender-neutral pronouns often set people apart from the dominant culture. The mere decision not to lie could be interpreted as a powerful, yet quiet, form of social competition that helped pave a path toward equality younger teachers may now pursue.

While all young teachers need to establish professional credibility, expertise may be especially important for lesbian and gay educators who might encounter prejudicial attitudes that could threaten their job security. Mentorship obtained from veteran lesbian and gay teachers could be a crucial step toward professional success. Although university teacher training programs may not have time to address the unique needs of every marginalized group in the depth they deserve, professors may want to consider encouraging students to seek mentorship after graduation from successful educators whose personal journeys might mirror their own.

Due to geographical limitations, individuals in large metropolitan areas may have a distinct advantage finding appropriate mentors over teachers working in rural areas; however, the Internet provides a valuable resource for world-wide communication. While organizations like the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) have provided resources for lesbian and gay teachers since 1990 (GLSEN, 2010), until recently, professional organizations in music education have remained silent. The publication of Louis Bergonzi's article, "Sexual Orientation and Music Education: Continuing a Tradition" (2009) broke this silence and created a firestorm of controversy that could ultimately facilitate productive communication. Participants in this study suggested that continuing articles, online support, and published information made available at state and national conferences could be extremely helpful for young teachers trying to discern how best to negotiate personal identity in the work place.

The qualitative nature of this study limits generalizations that can be made to the teaching community at large. Further research in qualitative and quantitative paradigms is needed to provide more comprehensive understanding. This study included eight men and only two women in the band directing genre. Future studies examining women's experiences more fully would be useful as well as studies examining experiences of lesbian and gay teachers in orchestra, choir, and elementary general music settings. Furthermore, studies examining heterosexual teachers' beliefs regarding lesbian and gay issues might help facilitate positive discussion that would help strengthen positive working environments for all teachers who share common goals related to students' development and success.

Table 1
Theme Clusters and Associated Meanings

Negotiating Disclosure:
 Closet

 Boundaries
  Compartmentalization
  Heterosexual Privilege
  Fear of Falsely Alleged Abuse
  Internalized Homophobia
 Community Trust
  Professional Credibility
  Student Welfare
Negotiating Success:

 Supporting Other Gay Band Directors
  Intergenerational Mentoring
 Defining Strengths
  Compassion
  Open Mind

Social Progress
   Media Images
   Open Family Members
   Political Activism

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