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The experience of Catholic gay and lesbian Catholic secondary school teachers within Northern California : a participatory action research study

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THE EXPERIENCE OF CATHOLIC, GAY AND LESBIAN, CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS WITHIN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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Dissertation Abstract

THE EXPERIENCE OF CATHOLIC, GAY AND LESBIAN, CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS WITHIN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

This study explored and documented the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian, Catholic secondary school teachers in northern California. This study explored and recommended ideas for future practice and research in relationship to gay and lesbian issues in Catholic secondary education. The participants identified as Catholic and gay or lesbian, lived in Northern California and were employed in a Catholic secondary school at the time the research was conducted. Participants represented schools sponsored by religious congregations or by the diocese in which they are located. Participants included four women and four men. The research method was participatory action research, in which each participant was interviewed twice and then five of the eight participants engaged in a voluntary group dialogue. The participants responded to research questions that explored Catholic identity, homosexual identity, the impact of those dual identities on a career in Catholic secondary education and how they balanced the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality with their lived experience. The findings revealed that the participants experience in Catholic education has been largely positive, despite the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality. The five themes that emerged in the course of the study were supported by the participants' testimonies as documented in the dialogue transcripts: (a) Catholic identity, (b) prayer/sacramental life, (c) mentoring gay and lesbian students, (d) silence/ invisibility, and (e) fear. The participants expressed a strong desire for the Church hierarchy to take

seriously their experiences as gay and lesbian Catholics and to find ways of including the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics in the formal and informal curricula in Catholic secondary schools. The participants expressed a love for their Catholic faith and a strong desire to pass on their faith to their students who they believe to be losing interest in, if not hostile towards, the Catholic Church. The participants believe that their experiences balancing a Catholic and homosexual identity can help all Catholic students develop faith when doubt is pervasive.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

James B. Everitt	April 2, 2010
Candidate	Date

Dissertation Committee

Brother Raymond Vercruysse	April 2, 2010
Dr. Gini Shimabukuro	April 2, 2010
Dr. Brian Gerrard	April 2, 2010

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Community, from those who love you. In you God's love is revealed. You are always our children" (United States Catholic Conference, 1997, p. 6).

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The issue of homosexuality has dominated many arenas of public discourse since 1986. Related magisterial statements distributed from Rome and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), as well as the general progress of the gay and lesbian community in the civil arena, have spurred renewed attention in the reality of homosexual Catholics (Brandt, 2005, p. v). McGinley (2006) declared, "Yes, gay Catholics do exist and are increasingly visible at the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially in the American context" (p. 9). A diversity of approaches are taken by Catholic gay and lesbian educators to managing a homosexual identity within Catholic schools. Some choose to openly communicate their sexual orientation to administrators and colleagues; others prefer such communication solely with colleagues; and, some homosexual educators choose not to disclose this information. Few are completely open in this regard with administrators, colleagues, parents, and students (Griffin, 1992).

The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF; 1986) issued a pastoral letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church, expressing the expectation that homosexual individuals be treated with dignity. The letter asserted, "The teachings of the Church make it clear that the fundamental human rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any forms of injustice, oppression, or violence against them" (¶ 10). While this appears to champion the cause of gay and lesbian populations, a significant body of teaching renders membership in the Catholic

Church difficult for homosexual individuals. McGinley (2006) wrote, “Of all the issues polarizing American society at this point in time, homosexuality is one of the most divisive” (p. 9). While a few studies documented the experience of gay and lesbian public-school teachers (DeJean, 2004; Harbeck, 1992; Jackson, 2007; Jennings, 1994; Kissen, 1996), none have addressed Catholic gay and lesbian educators within Catholic secondary schools. This current study investigated the experiences of this population through a sample teaching within northern California Catholic secondary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools. The approach of participatory action research (PAR), as described by Maguire (1987), provided the methodological framework for this exploration. The study investigated the connection between the experience of the sample as Catholic educators and their identities as homosexual individuals. Four Catholic, lesbian educators and four Catholic, gay educators were interviewed. The process invited the participants to consider questions related to their own experiences as Catholic educators and to develop actions in response to concerns identified during the process. The development of an action plan is an integral feature of PAR, which advocates the involvement of the participants in the entire process including the action phase. The participants of the current study identified an action that might improve the experience of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools.

Background and Need

Freire (1992) articulated the central problem of study in the current research. He described the following moment of understanding he experienced in relation to the reality of those struggling to maintain their dignity within a dehumanizing and oppressive system:

> On the way back to the hotel, sitting next to the educator, who was driving, I continued silently to think about the meetings, of the basic need individuals exposed to such situations have—until they accept themselves as individuals and as a class, until they commit themselves, until they struggle—their need to deny the humiliating truth, a truth that humiliates them precisely because they introject the dominant ideology that sketches them as incompetent and guilty, the authors of their own failures. And yet the actual "why" of those failures is to be found in the perversity of the system. (p. 45)

The gay and lesbian community within the state of California has achieved great success in the realms of social acceptance and civil rights. On February 4, 2004, the mayor of San Francisco issued marriage licenses to same-sex couples for the first time in the history of the state. Although the licenses were eventually revoked, this act placed the debate over same-sex marriage at the center of national attention. Scholars have seized the opportunity to study the connection between law and politics within the context of same-sex marriage. Anderson (2007) cited more than 10 publications on the topic since the 2004 decision to acknowledge such marriages within California. In a study conducted by the Human Rights Campaign of state legislative acts championing gay rights, the Campaign highlighted California for seven new acts representing proequality legislation. The California State Assembly passed a marriage equality bill twice since 2005; however, the governor vetoed the law upon both instances.

On May 15, 2008, the California Supreme Court overturned the state ban on same-sex marriage. The Court ruled that "the California legislative and initiative

measures limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples violate the state constitutional rights of same-sex couples and may not be used to preclude same-sex couples from marrying" (as cited in Judicial Council of California, 2008, pp. 1–2). On November 4, 2008, an amendment to the California constitution eliminated marriage rights for homosexual residents of California. Proposition 8 defined *marriage* as between one man and one woman. Many gay and lesbian Catholics were shocked and surprised by the strong participation of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the United States Catholic Conference in the movement to amend the California constitution (Nevius, 2008). The Catholic Church maintains a clear position on the issue of homosexuality. The debate over Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage has re-awakened questions of membership in the Catholic Church for gay and lesbians, particularly those serving in a Catholic school. According to Thornberry (2005b), the Vatican is considering a policy change that would exclude gay men from the Roman Catholic priesthood.

After many years of service to the gay and lesbian community within the Catholic Church through their association with New Ways Ministry, a Catholic nun and a Catholic priest were ordered by the Vatican to end their outreach. During April of 2005, Cardinal Josef Ratzinger was elected as Pope. The director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force remarked, "Today, the princes of the Roman Catholic Church elected as Pope a man whose record has been one of unrelenting, venomous hatred for gay people" (as cited in Thornberry, 2005a, ¶ 1). Recent advances within the social arena have highlighted this fierce opposition to homosexuality. According to the Sacred CDF (1992), "There are areas in which it is not unjust discrimination to take sexual orientation into

account, for example, in the placement of children for adoptions or foster care, in employment of teachers or athletic coaches, and in military recruitment" (p. 1).

Within Oakland, California, a gay man who married his partner of 11 years lost his contract to teach in a Catholic school (Marech, 2004). In support of a 2008 ballot initiative to amend the California constitution, the California Catholic Bishops (2008) encouraged Catholics to demonstrate opposition to same-sex marriage by asking them to vote in support of Proposition 8, stating, "And finally, we strongly encourage Catholics to provide both the financial support and the volunteer efforts needed for the passage of Proposition 8. And—please exercise your citizenship and vote in November" (p. 1). During November of 2006, the USCCB, National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) Committee on Marriage and Family (2006), issued its second pastoral letter in 10 years on the topic of homosexuality, affirming the related teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, stating, "To offer guidance in the face of pervasive confusion, the Catholic Bishops of the United States find it timely to provide basic guidelines for pastoral ministry to persons with a homosexual inclination or tendency" (p. 1). While the document did not address the specific issue of homosexual educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools, it clarified the concerns of the Church surrounding the presence of openly gay men and women within faith communities, further stating,

> For some persons, revealing their homosexual tendencies to certain close friends, family members, a spiritual director, confessor, or members of a Church support group may provide some spiritual and emotional help and aid them in their growth in the Christian life. In the context of parish life, however, general public self-disclosures are not helpful and should not be encouraged. (p. 17)

During September of 2003, the legislative arm of the USCCB announced its support of a proposed constitutional amendment seeking to ban gay marriage (*Promote,*

Preserve, 2003). The bishops wrote, "Marriage is a faithful, exclusive and lifelong union between one man and one woman, joined as husband and wife in an intimate partnership of life and love" (p. 3). Drawing upon Church teaching regarding the centrality of procreation in marriage, the bishops strongly opposed any type of marriage between individuals of the same sex. They explained, "What are called 'homosexual unions,' because they do not express full human complementarity and because they are inherently nonprocreative, cannot be given the status of marriage" (p. 1).

Coleman (2001) argued that it is inappropriate for gay and lesbian Catholic educators to disclose their sexual orientation within a school setting. In fact, he asserted that a homosexual individual inclined toward such public disclosure is not psychologically well. He stated, "I would suggest that a homosexual teacher who has a personal or psychological need to announce his/her sexual orientation to students should for this very reason not be teaching in a Catholic school at all" (p. 13). In response to his article, Whitehead and Whitehead (2001) drew a different conclusion on the role of openly gay and lesbian Catholic educators stating,

> To acknowledge oneself within the faith community as lesbian or gay can be a generative act. From the witness of mature lesbian and gay persons, Catholic school students-indeed the whole faith community-will learn the patterns of psychological growth and spiritual maturity that can support homosexual holiness. Closeted lives, however holy, provide no wider lessons in religious maturing. (p. 19)

The conflict between Whitehead and Whitehead (2001) and Coleman (2001) illustrates a common disagreement among those within the Roman Catholic Church regarding the role of Catholic gay and lesbian teachers. The actual experiences of these educators are not documented. A literature search of online databases, popular magazines, and Catholic newspapers from November 2005 to January 2009 yielded a

small sample of articles describing their experiences and only a single study on the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within an elementary-school setting. Liuzzi (2001) argued that the silence surrounding homosexuality within the Catholic Church has had a negative impact on the spiritual lives of gay and lesbian Catholics. He maintained,

> My deepest sorrow and regret is to have discovered how many homosexual Catholics have quietly drifted away from the Church. It is interesting to know some of those who have so distanced themselves. Many do not trace their alienation or hurt to a particular event or person. No, many speak of being alienated gradually by silence. No one speaks about homosexuality. The silence is especially felt when, as young persons, they begin to feel in themselves differences that are frightening and impossible to explain. (p. 4)

The dearth of literature on this issue highlights the degree to which Catholic gay and lesbian educators are silent and invisible within Catholic secondary schools. Understanding the experiences of this population is important if the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding the pastoral care of homosexual individuals is to be found credible. It is necessary to explore the experience of Catholic gay and lesbian educators as homosexual people to progress as a civil society.

Theoretical Framework

The interest of the researcher in this current study is rooted in the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary education. As a gay male with a 15-year background in Catholic education, he has faced the oppression and injustice within the Catholic school system. However, his career in Catholic education has been overwhelmingly positive and surprisingly successful, given the overwhelmingly negative tone of discourse related to issues of homosexuality delivered by the Catholic Church. Catholic doctrine related to homosexual *orientation* is relatively

neutral; however, the Church position on homosexual *activity* is unambiguously clear. Such activity is not an acceptable option for those desiring to remain in communion with the Roman Catholic Church (Sacred CDF, 1975).

The struggle for many Catholic gay men and lesbian women is the distinction between *orientation* and an *act* "in the eyes" of the Church. While the distinction is clear when presented as a philosophical idea, reality is much different. The often conflicting literature distributed by the Church can also contribute to the confusion. For example, according to the Sacred CDF (1975), "The distinction between being homosexual and doing homosexual genital actions, while not always clear and convincing, is a helpful and important one when dealing with the complex issue of homosexuality, particularly in the educational and pastoral arena" (p. 56). Sullivan (1997) suggested that the Church actually espoused two different directions regarding homosexual *being* and homosexual *doing.* He summarized, "A deeper respect for and understanding of homosexual persons, and a sterner rejection of almost anything those persons might do" (p. 180).

According to the Sacred CDF (1991),

> Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. . . . Under no circumstances can they be approved. (p. 566)

This unyielding position on homosexual activity has created significant tension for those who identify as Catholic as well as gay or lesbian, wish to work within Catholic schools, and who are in committed relationships. The opening paragraph of the quoted document acknowledged that homosexuality has become a matter of public debate. However, Shannon (1988) articulated what some homosexuals believe to be an intentional obstacle to real debate on the issue of homosexuality, maintaining, "The letter speaks of the

debate, though it refuses to become party to it. In fact, one gets the impression that it is not entering the debate but seeking to close it" (p. 26). Catholic theologian James Alison contended that the Roman Catholic Church has not only silenced the debate on homosexuality, but has effectively ended related conversation entirely. Alison (as cited in Stevenson, 2006) stated,

> One of the ironies of the current teaching of the Vatican congregations concerning homosexuality is that it effectively makes it impossible for Catholic authorities to teach the Catholic faith to gay and lesbian people. This is because current teaching talks only about a "they" who are described as objectively disordered. By definition, an objectively disordered "they" cannot be engaged in meaningful conversation as a "you" and therefore cannot become an "I" or a "we" as part of the fruit of that conversation. (p. ix)

Although several models of gay and lesbian identity development exist (Cass, 1984; Gierson & Smith, 2005; Troiden, 1989), the current study relies upon a stage theory of sexual-orientation identity development to situate the experiences of the participants. The stage model developed by D'Augelli (1994) is based upon a life-span theory of human development, recognizing that human beings develop over the course of their lifetimes. The model allowed participants in the current study an opportunity to recognize themselves in various stages of homosexual identity development in relationship to their experiences within Catholic education.

Research Questions

This research explored four essential questions addressing the connection between a homosexual Catholic identity and the experience of teaching within Catholic secondary education. The following research questions provided the framework for the dialogue with the participants throughout the course of the study:

1. How does a homosexual identity affect what it means to be a Catholic, gay or lesbian, secondary-school educator?

2. How does identity as a Catholic gay or lesbian educator impact the experience of teaching within Catholic secondary-school education?

3. How does a homosexual orientation impact a career within Catholic secondary-school education?

4. How do Catholic gay and lesbian educators balance a homosexual identity with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality?

Limitations

The size of the population sample in this study could be viewed as a limitation of the research. However, the purpose of PAR is to gain the perspective of the participants through a series of dialogue sessions that invite the researcher into the lived experience of the participants. A large, random sample is not the aim of PAR. The experiences of the participants of the current study cannot be generalized to a larger population of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools or to other locations within the United States that are outside the northern California region. The unique political and social environment of the San Francisco Bay Area also renders it difficult to draw conclusions regarding a similar population in another city or state.

The process by which the dialogue questions were generated could also be considered a limitation. In the interest of time and the availability of participants for an extended period of time, the researcher developed a series of questions to guide the first dialogue. The questions were based upon the study interest in the relationship between homosexual identity and Catholic identity and experiences of gay and lesbian

public-school teachers documented in existing literature. Although the questions for the first dialogue sessions were predetermined, the participants contributed additional questions during the dialogue and discussed issues of interest. The prepared dialogue protocol did not prevent the generation of new questions during the sessions.

Participant fear is another limitation in the current study. While the process itself was a positive experience, anxiety over job loss prevented some of the participants from candid contributions related to their experiences within their current job settings. Consequently, fear of being targeted in a "witch hunt" impacted the quality of the dialogue data. Arguably, the self-identification of the researcher as a gay Catholic man could also have impacted the quality of the data collected or the interpretation of the results. However, as noted earlier, PAR demands engagement with the participants and becoming co-researchers with those involved in the study. Maguire (1987) wrote of her own experience as a feminist researcher, stating,

> From the outset I admit that I was never a detached social scientist. The process of doing participatory research was emotionally engaging and exhausting. I spent time with the project women and their children; I got involved in their lives. (p. 7)

Significance

The current study introduces a new field of inquiry within Catholic education and contributes to a growing body of literature on the connection between faith and homosexuality. The experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools was never previously documented. This record of the experiences of this population will diminish the silence and sense of invisibility these individuals currently describe. In addition to initiating a new field of inquiry, this research provides a source of reflection for Catholic secondary-school administrators and

access by Church authorities and policy makers to a group of educators whose “voices” had not previously been heard. Finally, this study provides an opportunity for the participants to “name” their experiences, critically reflect on their meanings, and determine their own social-justice action. It is hoped that the study will also provide a “springboard” for this population of educators in terms of a new way of being.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this research and defined for purposes of the study:

"Coming out" is "the process in which a gay person acknowledges his or her homosexuality to himself or herself and to the public" (Pekman, 1997, p. 19).

"Commitment ceremony" is a ritual that some gay and lesbian persons plan as an alternative to a marriage ceremony which is illegal in most states, including California.

An *educator* is "a certificated person who works with school children [*sic*] or adolescents in a teaching, counseling, or other educationally supportive capacity" (Pekman, 1997, p. 19).

Gender identity is "used to describe an individual's internal sense of self as male, female, or an identity between or outside these two categories" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p. 29).

Homosexuals are "individuals who engage in homosexuality or experience homosexual desire. Homosexuals are divided by sex and by terminology into 'gay men' and 'lesbians,' and distinguished from 'bisexual,' 'transgendered,' and 'transsexual' persons" (Fone, 2000, p. 4).

Homosexuality refers to "sexual attraction or orientation toward persons of the same sex and/or sexual acts between persons of the same sex" (Sacred CDF, 1991, p. 882).

"In the closet" is a slang phrase for "hiding one's sexual orientation [from] others and the public" (Pekman, 1997, p. 20).

"Out" describes an individual who is "honest and open about [his or her] homosexuality" (Pekman, 1997, p. 21).

Oppression is "an unjust or cruel exercise of power which unfairly demeans, limits, discriminates or unfairly hinders a select group of people" (Pekman, 1997, p. 21).

Participatory action research (PAR) is a method of social science research that aims to engage participants in the process of research as a means of social transformation. According to Maguire (1987), PAR helps "to develop critical consciousness of both the researcher and participants, to improve the lives of those involved in the research process, and to transform fundamental societal structures and relationships" (p. 3)

Proposition 8 is an amendment to the Constitution of the State of California that defined marriage as between one man and one woman.

Sexual identity refers to

> a substructure of sexual functioning that has been defined in a few different ways but with significant conceptual overlap. It appears to entail one's biological sex (as male or female), gender identity (one's psychological sense of being male or female), sex role (degree to which one adheres to social expectations (for one's own sex), sexual orientation (the direction and persistence of one's experiences of sexual attraction), and intention or valuative framework (what one intends to do with the desires one has in light of one's beliefs and values). (Yarhouse, Tan, & Pawlowski, 2005, p. 3)

Sexual orientation is "an unchangeable psychosexual organization that may be congenital and inherited, rather than a 'sexual preference,' which . . . suggests that homosexual behavior may be a matter of choice" (Fone, 2000, p. 4).

The *Stonewall riots* occurred on June 27, 1969 when the New York City police invaded the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. Rather than quietly tolerating the invasion, as they had on previous occasions, the gay patrons

fought back. Three days of riots followed the invasion. Many gay historians note the events of June 27, 1969 as the birth of the modern gay-rights movement (Fone, 2000).

A thorough hand and computer search of literature on Catholicism, homosexuality, gay and lesbian issues in education yielded one study that documented the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholic elementary school teachers (Litton, 1999). The literature addressed in the following section will provide a framework for understanding the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian Catholic secondary school educators.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Restatement of the Problem

Although few examples exist of positive statements from the USCCB (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997; USCC, 1991) and the Vatican (Sacred CDF, 1986, 1992) on homosexuality, the bulk of related Church teaching creates a confusing environment within which gay and lesbian Catholics are forced to manage conflicting identities. Positive statements regarding the dignity of homosexual individuals in "whom God's love is revealed" (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997, p. 6) are negated by the use of terms such as *objectively disordered* (Sacred CDF, 1986). Public discourse within the state of California reflects renewed attention to the presence of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools. Related literature is void of documented real-life experiences of this population. McGinley (2006) wrote, "Of all the issues polarizing American society at this point in time, homosexuality is one of the most divisive" (p. 9). This current study fills a critical gap.

No literature was found on the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools. The sole exception was a study on this population of educators within elementary schools. Maher and Sever (2007) reported that few studies have focused on the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics in general. Harris (2001), O'Brien (1991), and Toman (1997) found that gay and lesbian Catholics experience many obstacles in negotiating their relationships with the Catholic Church.

Maher and Sever found that “Catholic high schools in the United States were not addressing the topic of homosexuality in any significant and systemic way, with a few exceptions” (p. 81). A national study on Catholic elementary schools found that 33% of the teachers agreed that homosexuals should not be allowed to teach within Catholic schools (Kushner & Helbing, 1995). Because no single study has documented the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools, the literature “speaks to” the larger context in which the current study is grounded.

Overview

To understand the experiences of the population under study, it is important to identify the various factors comprising the environment within which these teachers perform their professional roles. Consequently, the following areas were targeted in this review of related literature: (a) the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, (b) critical responses to Church teaching, (c) the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers within U.S. public schools, (d) a life-span model of identity development for homosexuals, and (e) oppression. Each of these areas will contribute to an understanding of the milieu within which Catholic gays and lesbians carry out their ministry of education within the Roman Catholic Church.

Teachings of the Roman Catholic Church

The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons

The Sacred CDF (1986)—the Roman Curia charged with the promulgation and protection of Catholic dogma and doctrine—clearly outlined the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality. The essential point in the document was the

distinction between "the homosexual condition or tendency and individual homosexual actions" (¶ 3). The Church described homosexual activity as "intrinsically disordered" (¶ 3) and made explicit that, under no circumstances, can a minister of the Church condone homosexual activity. On the other hand, a homosexual person committed to chastity is to be welcomed into the faith community and supported by the sacramental life of the Church (¶ 15).

The basis of Church teaching on the claim that homosexuality is explicitly forbidden is the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and the belief that only within the context of a marriage between a man and a woman can sexual activity be morally good. According to Coleman (1995), "While individual biblical texts must be interpreted carefully and contextually, there is no doubt that both the Old Testament and New Testament prohibit homosexual conduct" (p. 70). The Sacred CDF (1986) claimed that the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church has consistently taught that homosexuality is a disordered condition that is fundamentally ordered toward moral evil and stated,

> As in every moral disorder, homosexual activity prevents one's own fulfillment and happiness by acting contrary to the creative wisdom of God. The Church, in rejecting erroneous opinions regarding homosexuality, does not limit but rather defends personal freedom and dignity realistically and authentically understood. (¶ 7)

The pastoral care of homosexual individuals is the second consideration given in the letter. The Church maintained that homosexual members have a right to full participation in the life of the Church as long as they support the teaching of the Church with regard to the practice of homosexuality. Homosexual individuals are encouraged to "enact the will of God in their life by joining whatever sufferings and difficulties they experience in virtue of their condition to the sacrifice of the Lord's cross" (¶ 12). Homosexual

Christians are called to a life of chastity and frequent celebration of the sacrament of penance. The Sacred CDF postulated that it is only through this type of sacrifice and unity with the cross of Christ that homosexual individuals can find true freedom and integrity surrounding their lives.

The Sacred CDF (1986) encouraged bishops to seriously consider their responsibility for the selection of pastoral ministers, to support programs fostering the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and to make explicit the immorality of homosexual activity. The Sacred CDF further stated,

> The Bishops are asked to exercise special care in the selection of pastoral ministers so that by their own high degree of spiritual and personal maturity and by their fidelity to the Magisterium, they may be of real service to homosexual persons, promoting their health and well-being in the fullest sense. Such ministers will reject theological opinions which dissent from the teaching of the Church and which, therefore, cannot be used as guidelines for pastoral care. (¶ 17)

This same document clarified that any homosexual individual who publicly disagrees with the teaching of the Church is not fit for public ecclesial service. It is also clearly stated that Catholic schools, universities, and parishes may not grant use of their facilities to groups or individuals who "seek to undermine the teaching of the Church, which [*sic*] are ambiguous about it, or which [*sic*] neglect it entirely" (¶ 17). Ten years after its publication, the USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (1997) issued the following statement on the pastoral care of homosexual persons.

Always Our Children

The purpose of *Always Our Children* ([*AOC*] (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997) was to "reach out to parents trying to cope with the discovery of homosexuality in their adolescent or adult child" (¶ 1). The document was

published during 1997, shortly after the 10th anniversary of the Sacred CDF (1986) publication. Although the tone of the document is pastoral in nature and tends to emphasize God's love for the homosexual person, the doctrinal content is consistent with the Sacred CDF. The USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family letter ends with the following personal invitation to homosexual Catholics: "Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian Community, from those who love you. In you God's love is revealed. You are always our children" (p. 6).

AOC affirmed the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity, making it clear that homosexual activity is always immoral. The USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (1997) did, however, clearly articulate that a homosexual orientation is not "sinful," stating, "Generally, homosexual orientation is experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen. By itself, therefore, a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful, for morality presumes the freedom to choose" (p. 3). The following definition of *sexual orientation* provided by the USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, highlighted the distinction between orientation and activity:

> It seems appropriate to understand sexual orientation (heterosexual or homosexual) as a deep-seated dimension of one's personality and to recognize its relative stability in a person. A homosexual orientation produces a stronger emotional and sexual attraction toward individuals of the same sex, rather than toward those of the opposite sex. It does not totally rule out interest in, care for, and attraction toward members of the opposite sex. Having a homosexual orientation does not necessarily mean a person will engage in homosexual activity. (p. 3)

Where *AOC* (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997) seemed to portray a more nuanced position than the Sacred CDF (1986) was in the area of

pastoral care. The overarching hope was the possibility that a child with a homosexual orientation would help a family become more "honest, respectful and supportive" (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997, p. 3). The bishops encouraged families to deal honestly and openly with a gay son or daughter while remaining faithful to the teaching of the Church. The first concern articulated by the bishops was the role of counseling in the care of homosexual individuals. The USCC, Committee on Marriage and Family, suggested the encouragement of counseling only when the respective homosexual individuals expressed an interest in such services. Parents were encouraged to remain open to the possibility that "your son or daughter is struggling to understand and accept a basic homosexual orientation" (p. 3). The Committee made it clear that homosexual individuals must accept or reject any form of counseling that intends to change sexual orientation. The bishops encouraged parents to accept the desire of a son or daughter to acknowledge his or her sexual orientation in a public manner.

The USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (1997) provided practical recommendations for addressing the needs of homosexual individuals within a faith community. Eight recommendations were made to parents and seven to Church ministers; the following most directly address the presence of gay and lesbian teachers within Catholic-school settings:

> To parents:
> 1. Urge your son or daughter to stay joined to the Catholic faith community. If they have left the Church, urge them to return and to be reconciled to the community, especially through the sacrament of penance.
> 2. Put your faith completely in God, who is more powerful, more compassionate, and more forgiving than we are or ever could be.
>
> To church [*sic*] ministers:
> 1. Be available to parents and families who ask for your pastoral help, spiritual guidance, and prayer.

2. Welcome homosexual persons into the faith community, and seek out those on the margins. Avoid stereotyping and condemning. Strive first to listen. Do not presume that all homosexual persons are sexually active.
3. Learn more about homosexuality and church [*sic*] teaching so your preaching, teaching and counseling will be informed and effective.
4. When speaking publicly, use the words "homosexual," "gay," and "lesbian" in honest and accurate ways.
5. Help to establish or promote support groups for parents and family members. (p. 5)

As noted earlier, the bishops concluded by writing, "Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt, or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God's love is revealed. You are always our children" (p. 6).

Gay and lesbian Catholic educators may feel conflicted with regard to Church teaching. Roman bishops have approached the topic of homosexuality using highly philosophical language that can be easily misinterpreted. On the other hand, they have nuanced their approach by emphasizing the love God holds for gays and lesbians and the importance of membership within the Christian community. These approaches are similar while remarkably different. During 2006, the USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (2006) issued a second document on ministry to homosexual individuals that indicated little change for Catholic gay and lesbian educators.

Ministry to Persons With a Homosexual Inclination

The USCCB, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (2006) document addressing the ministry to persons with a homosexual inclination was the second such publication on homosexuality during a period of 10 years. The stated purpose of the document was to "provide basic guidelines for pastoral ministry to persons with a homosexual inclination or tendency" (p. 1). The bishops affirmed the teaching they set

forth in the documents entitled *Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (Sacred CDF, 1986) and *AOC* (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997) by making a clear distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual genital expression.

The difference between the 2006 USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family publication, the 1986 Sacred CDF, and the 1997 USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family documents was the effort on the part of the bishops to place the issue of homosexuality within a larger cultural context. They began with a brief explanation of Catholic teaching on human sexuality and the development of virtue before addressing issues currently of concern to the gay and lesbian community. In addition to topics such as gay marriage and the adoption of children by same-sex couples, the bishops defined discrimination and highlighted the differences between sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and sex. They indicated an awareness of the growing tension between civil progress for gays and lesbians and the Church position on homosexuality. Finally, the bishops provided guidelines for pastoral care.

The introduction of the USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (2006) document on the ministry of persons with a homosexual inclination focused on the general principles of Church teaching on human sexuality, beginning with an explanation of human dignity and the place of sexuality in God's divine plan. The explanation focused on the twofold purpose of sexual activity—"the expression of marital love and the procreation and education of children" (p. 3). The Committee clearly explained that "any sexual act that takes place outside of the bond of marriage does not fulfill the proper ends of human sexuality" (p. 3). According to the bishops, homosexual activity can never be morally acceptable because the act between two persons of the same sex does not have

the potential for the transmission of human life. The bishops considered homosexuality as sinful as adultery, fornication, masturbation, and contraception (p. 4). The placement of homosexuality within this group of sins is the first instance of this in any USCCB document addressing the issue of homosexuality.

Unlike the Sacred CDF (1986) and USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (1997) documents, the USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family 2006 publication explained the philosophical terminology of *objectively disordered.* It stated that homosexuality is objectively disordered in the sense that it "predisposes one toward what is truly not good for the human person" (p. 5). The bishops made it clear that both heterosexual and homosexual individuals are subject to behavior that is objectively disordered due to original and personal sin. The inclination to behave in a manner that is inconsistent with God's plan for human sexuality is what is considered "disordered." The Church described homosexual acts, not homosexual people, as intrinsically disordered (USCC, 1991, ¶ 2357). It is the inclination to engage in same-sex genital activity that is disordered. The bishops explained that the disorder is in the inclination to homosexual activity or any activity not aimed at the "fulfillment of the natural ends of human sexuality" (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 2006, p. 6). They wrote,

> It is crucially important to understand that saying a person has a particular inclination that is disordered is not to say that the person as a whole is disordered. Nor does it mean that one has been rejected by God or the Church. (p. 6)

The USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (2006) introduced an explanation of the theological concept of virtue. The bishops placed the struggle of homosexual individuals to remain chaste in the context of the struggle for holiness and the development of personal virtue. The Sacred CDF (1991) explained, "Chastity means

the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being" (p. 8). The bishops compared the homosexual struggle to remain chaste with the human struggle (i.e., homosexual or heterosexual) to act justly, develop courage, or become temperate. The goal of the homosexual individual is similar to the goals of all people, which is the acquisition of virtue leading to a life that is holy and seeks the will of God. The USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family acknowledged that, within contemporary American culture, the acquisition of virtue is difficult due to the refusal to accept objective truth surrounding morality. The bishops argued that the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, as well as the constant tradition of the Church, rest on an objective moral law that is divinely revealed and "written on the human heart."

Through constant practice and repeated attempts at "doing good," virtue is attainable. According to the USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (2006), "The acquisition of virtues requires a sustained effort and repeated actions. As the ancient philosophers recognized, the more one repeats good actions, the more one's passions become shaped in accord with good action" (p. 8). The opening lines of this document addressing the ministry to individuals with a homosexual inclination relate to the inherent dignity of the human person as a cornerstone of Catholic theology. The Church asserted the dignity of the homosexual individual within each of the reviewed documents on homosexuality (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997, 2006; Sacred CDF, 1986, 1992). The 2006 USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family publication broadened the discussion of human dignity with an explanation of what constitutes just and unjust discrimination. While homosexual individuals are entitled to

the same fundamental human rights as all people, “sexual orientation does not constitute a quality comparable to race, ethnic background, etc., in respect to non-discrimination” (p. 15).

Critical Responses

Psychological Impact

McNeill (1993) articulated the fundamental struggle for dignity that many gay and lesbian Catholics face on a daily basis as a result of the teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality. His work is important not only as a theological reflection on what it means to be Catholic and homosexual, but also as a scholarly response to Roman Catholic doctrine and pastoral practice. McNeill argued that it was no longer possible to offer gay men and lesbian women solely the options of celibacy or conversion therapy to remain in communion with the Roman Catholic Church. According to McNeill, celibacy and conversion therapy are inadequate responses to penitents and clients seeking sound psychological and pastoral care. He claimed that the damage done to gay men and lesbian women is devastating and further maintained,

> The result of adhering to these exclusive goals has been that many Catholic homosexuals, even a majority, find themselves faced with a terrible dilemma: either to continue their relationship with the Church at the price of being cut off from any deep human relationship and deprived of their potentialities for growth and development in the their self-identity—not to mention their agonies of guilt, remorse, self-hatred, and potential emotional breakdown when they fail to achieve the accepted goals—or to seek their personal growth by means of a homosexual relationship, only at the price of cutting themselves off from the Church community and its sacramental life, with all the attendant guilt and emotional stress which [*sic*] such a separation involves. (p. 2)

McNeill (1993) responded to the Church requirement that gay men and lesbian women remain silent on their sexual orientation. He wrote, “Most gay Christians know they are obliged in conscience to reject a self-hating, closeted life-style which the Church

would like to impose on them and which would in all probability lead to serious mental health problems" (p. xvii). McNeill (1993) and McGinley (2006) challenged the Church to rethink its entire theological understanding of homosexuality. Based upon the assumption that heterosexuality is the only viable moral option, McNeill wrote,

> Such an assumption effectively blinds the investigator to any evidence that a homosexual relationship can be a truly constructive and mature expression of human love, in as much as it holds that by definition mature and moral sexual love is heterosexual. (p. 129)

McGinley (2006) maintained that the Church's current position on homosexuality forces the homosexual Catholic to accept life inside the Church as a disembodied person or to leave the Church entirely. He wrote, "The implicit assumption then is that gay and lesbian people are legitimate only outside the Catholic community, or within the community only as disembodied orientations denied realization" (p. 25). McGinley contended that, if homosexual individuals are to take the teaching of the Catholic Church seriously, the Church must reconsider its bifurcated approach to same-sex love. He wrote, "The same church [*sic*] telling gay people they are to be accepted with sensitivity, compassion, and respect, simultaneously tells them their sexual orientation is objectively disordered" (p. 124). The development of a Catholic approach to human sexuality that includes same-sex genital activity would require the Church to rethink its theology of human sexuality. McGinley suggested that the development of a new moral theology is underway within some theological circles, explaining,

> The newer model situates sexuality in a broad social context by shifting the discussion from an emphasis on acts to an emphasis on the meaning of acts and relationships, forming ethical ideals independent of the genders involved. In this paradigm, new values emerge as the basis for developing sexual norms, such as mutuality, hospitality, maturity, and responsibility. (p. 128)

Conscience

Sullivan (as cited in Stahel, 1993) challenged Church teaching on natural law and demanded a thoughtful explanation of why God made men and women homosexual. In an effort to explain why it is so difficult to mature within a culture of silence, Sullivan explained the importance of dealing honestly with gay women and men in the following dialogue excerpt:

> I grew up with nothing. No one taught me anything except that this [homosexuality] couldn't be mentioned. And as a result of the total lack of teaching, gay Catholics and gay people in general are in crisis. No wonder people's lives—many gay lives—are unhappy or distraught or in dysfunction, because there is no guidance at all. Here is a population within the church [*sic*], and outside the church [*sic*], desperately seeking spiritual health and values. And the church [*sic*] refuses to come to our aid, refuses to listen to this call. (p. 11)

Gumbleton (as cited in Beattie & Coray, 2001) argued that the Roman Catholic Church must listen to the experience of homosexual men and women if it truly seeks to articulate a coherent theology of sexuality for homosexual individuals. He posited, "In order to deepen our understanding of homosexual love, we must listen to the experience of homosexual people as they struggle to become fully the person each is called to be" (p. 15). Gumbleton went on to suggest a new moral theology that considers homosexual love within the context of healthy, stable relationships. He maintained that homosexual relationships are far more comprehensive than the sexual act and should not be reduced to such a single dimension. Conscience is a core concept of Catholic theology. The Sacred CDF (1991) defined conscience as that place within the human being where the individual encounters God (p. 438). The development of conscience is at the heart of the human experience. "Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process

of performing, or has already completed" (p. 438). Gumbleton argued that the Church must reinforce the role of conscience in the life of the homosexual individual and reported,

> The Second Vatican Council speaks of this teaching. It describes one's conscience as the divine voice echoing in our own depth, within our own spirit as a law written by God in human hearts. In other words, we have been given this sense of what is good and what is bad. (p. 18)

Gumbleton (1993) illustrated the role of conscience in the life of a practicing Catholic by highlighting the freedom members of the U.S. military have when carrying out the policy of deterrence, despite the authoritative teaching of the Church on the moral evil of nuclear weapons. He pointed out that members of the military are free to act according to their conscience, have never been denied the Eucharist, and are supported by Catholic chaplains. He went on to challenge bishops to exercise the same type of pastoral care toward homosexual women and men and further asserted,

> My expectation is that the Church, especially its bishop leaders, will act the same way toward homosexual people who may from their conscientious discernment determine to live in a way contrary to Church teaching. We will continue to present the teaching clearly. But at the same time we will respect the rights of conscience as every person struggles to find his or her way to God. (p. 20)

Call for a New Theology

Nugent and Gramick (1995) stated that some official Catholic documents have "already argued that stable, faithful, committed but chaste homosexual relationships are not outside valid pastoral possibilities and characterized them as a better moral situation than promiscuity" (p. 143). Despite a strong insistence on the moral certainty surrounding homosexual issues, members of the theological community continue to advocate for a more nuanced approach to Church teaching regarding homosexuality (Alison, 2001; Jordan, 2000; Nugent, 1988). The Sacred CDF (1986) published a document on the

pastoral care of homosexual individuals that was met with great disappointment by theologians. Ware (1988) wrote,

> Like other documents, which reiterate teachings, which are at present under challenge from theologians and non-theologians alike within the Roman Catholic Church, the letter proceeds from certain presuppositions which are themselves outmoded, contradicted by other Vatican documents, or themselves theologically unsound. (p. 28)

Shannon (1988) wrote,

> The sense I get is not that he is welcoming a document that might be helpful in the Church's effort to minister to homosexual persons, but attempting to justify one that might well be harmful to ministries that already exist. (p. 21)

Osiek (1988) highlighted the tension between the Catholic Church as defender of human dignity and the Catholic Church as oppressor. She argued that, while the Church has been the most forceful institutional champion of human rights during the modern era, many individuals find their dignity threatened by particular teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and wrote, "It is as if the Church feels the responsibility to save homosexual persons from themselves and from a pernicious libertine society that will undermine and ultimately destroy their true dignity and rights" (p. 126). Osiek clarified the difference between American law and Roman law and suggested that an appropriate understanding of homosexuality must be developed from both perspectives. The idea of the common good is the unifying concept between these two standards of law. Both homosexual and heterosexual individuals are charged with responsibility for the common good.

From a Roman perspective, human dignity, and therefore the common good, is found in the desire to provide offspring, which can only be accomplished within the context of a heterosexual marriage. According to Osiek (1988), "Sexuality is a function

not of right but of responsibility; in this case, the responsibility to contribute to the common good by providing offspring" (p. 128). An American approach to the common good stems from human rights including sexuality. Osiek further postulated, "Sexuality is a function of the exercise of these rights: the right to communicate and express oneself in love" (p. 128). When human rights are violated, the entire community suffers. Osiek insisted that a clear understanding of the morality of homosexuality could not be achieved from two fundamentally different perspectives, further stating, "Such discrepancies indicate that the whole theory of common good and the role of the individual rights within it need to be reworked under the pressure of a rapidly evolving new world culture" (p. 132).

Political Implications

Jordan (2000) suggested that the Sacred CDF (1986) document on the pastoral care of homosexual individuals addressed the political context within which the issue of homosexuality was gaining significant ground. In an effort to understand the meaning of the document, Jordan wrote, "The answer, I think, is that the *Letter* treats homosexuality as a political problem. It reports increasing demands within and without the Catholic Church for extending equal recognition or civil protections to homosexuals" (¶ 9). The bishops who authored the document strongly criticized Church leaders who have succumbed to the demands of gay activists and allowed such groups to use Church property or participate actively in the life of the local community. Jordan argued that the publication flatly refused to consider any medical or scientific studies that might contradict the self-confirmed authority of the Church on the issue of homosexuality. In an effort to confirm an earlier teaching on homosexuality, the authors affirmed the notion

that homosexuality is objectively disordered and that the tendency toward same-sex affection is a moral evil (Westerfelhaus, 1998, p. 283). Jordan proposed that the Church failed to make a compelling theological judgment on homosexuality, but rather, simply asserted 19th-century medical views with regard to the purposes of procreation.

While Church teaching on homosexuality did not change within the Sacred CDF (1986) document on the pastoral care of homosexual individuals, Jordan (2000) noted that the rhetorical form of the publication was troubling, noting, "But rebuke seems, even to the *Letter* itself, an insufficient response to the ways in which homosexuality has become a political problem. So it moves from scolding to threatening, then from threatening to ordering" (p. 33). In an effort to silence any substantive discussion on homosexuality, the Sacred CDF actually threatened violence against those agitating for a homosexual agenda. Finally, the USCCB ordered Catholic ministers to refuse homosexual Catholics a place at the table. The Sacred CDF wrote,

> In order to reduce their chances of being bashed, homosexual persons are evidently not to organize, not to agitate, and not to contradict the church's [*sic*] official teaching. They must also stop acting out their homosexual propensities. Freely cooperating with the light and strength of divine grace, they should turn away from evil and abstain from "homosexual action." (p. 11)

Westerfelhaus (1998) also noticed the indirect approval of the Church within the document with regard to discrimination and violence against gays and lesbians. Dignity, an organization for gay and lesbian Catholics, was outlawed, and strict orders prohibiting organization use of Catholic resources was promulgated (Jordan, 2000; Westerfelhaus, 1998).

Jordan (2003) responded to a series of documents published by the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality with the claim that the documents were intended to

silence discussion. He opined, “Many of the documents don’t invite counterargument because they really don’t invite discussion. They are efforts to forestall discussion. We reply much better to such arguments not with counterargument but with media analysis, with rhetorical reading” (p. 14). Jordan emphasized that gay and lesbian Catholics would be better served by discussing the lives of official Church leaders and offering provocative analogies than by discussing the theological arguments positioned within Church documents. He suggested that the Catholic gay and lesbian community would waste decades responding to documents intended to silence a discussion on Church distortion of homosexuality. He favored testimony as an alternative, the process by which Church members tell their stories. Jordan wrote,

> If you want to know what the Catholic Church understands about gay life, don’t read the new *Catechism* or recent decrees from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. Look instead at institutional arrangements and practices as they are revealed by testimony. (p. 16)

Jordan (2003) described the real scandal regarding homosexuality as the attempt by the Church to project distortion upon the gay and lesbian community as a tool for avoiding a substantive theological discussion surrounding the lives of gay and lesbian Catholics. He proposed, “For the future only the search for a form of community in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Catholics could discover how to speak their lives in faith more fully” (p. 26). The type of silence that Jordan (2000) viewed the Catholic Church as using to forestall any real discussion of homosexuality and same-sex love is characterized in the letter known as *AOC* (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage an Family, 1997). While the tone of the document seemed compassionate, its impact was no different than that of earlier documents. Jordan wrote, “It serves the agenda of the American Catholic Bishops, who are trying to figure out how

to keep people in the Church at a time when official condemnations of homosexuality are driving many from it" (p. 46). Alison argued, "One of the ironies of the current teaching of the Vatican congregations concerning homosexuality is that it effectively makes it impossible for Catholic authorities to teach the Catholic faith to gay and lesbian people" (as cited in Stevenson, 2006, p. ix).

Pastoral Care

The advice offered to parents and pastoral ministers within *AOC* (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997) reduced the experience of Catholic gays and lesbians to the coming-out process during adolescence or early adulthood. Rather than addressing the many issues that surface over the span of a lifetime, *AOC* presumed that the fundamental difficulty of a gay or lesbian lifestyle was disclosing sexual orientation to parents and friends. Equally disturbing is the presumption by American bishops that the experience of parents of a homosexual child is equivalent to that of a life-threatening diagnosis or death of a child. Jordan (2000) wrote,

> The rhetoric of the letter mixes consolation and counsel. It supposes a Catholic parent will need consolation after discovering that his or her child is homosexual, even when that child is an adult. The Catholic parent "who is trying to cope" may feel "turmoil" in these "difficult circumstances," in a time that may be one of the most challenging of their lives (285b, 287a). "You need not face this painful time alone" (287a). The document presupposes that coming out is a melodrama, that it will strike the Catholic parent in the way that a terminal diagnosis or a death might. (pp. 43–44)

Jordan opined that the authors of *AOC* failed in their effort to provide pastoral support for ministers and the parents of gays and lesbians because the document fundamentally ignored the experience of Catholic gays and lesbians. Jordan suggested that this population of Catholics is only cared for as long as they remain children. He stated, "Our

children remain ‘our children’ only so long as they dwell in the melodrama of coming out – but not when they begin living as lesbian or gay adults” (p. 45).

Jordan (2000) postulated that *AOC* was neither an authoritative statement on homosexuality nor a systematic presentation of the Catholic moral life, but rather, an attempt to console the parents of gay and lesbian children. Far from providing any real advice to parents or pastoral ministers on issues surrounding gay and lesbian Catholics, the document delivered the same message as all previous Church documents on the subject (i.e., stay celibate and stay Catholic). McGinley (2006) wrote, “While most Catholic lesbians and gays still view the document in a mostly positive light, they find the distinction between orientation and activity confusing and problematic” (p. 16). The difficulty gay and lesbian Catholics can encounter negotiating this narrow view of human sexuality remains unaddressed. *AOC* (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997) provided little, if any, real advice for parents or pastoral ministers on the pastoral care of gays and lesbians. According to Jordan, “Practically speaking, how do these prospects differ from those offered by Cardinal Ratzinger in 1986 [Sacred CDF, 1986]? The voice is gentler, more compassionate, even more seductive, but the invitation is about the same” (p. 46).

Gay and Lesbian Public-School Teachers

Discrimination

To understand the experiences of Catholic, gay and lesbian, secondary-school teachers, an understanding of those of gay and lesbian public-school teachers is helpful. Sexual minorities have been estimated as the largest minority population within the

K–12 public-school setting (DeJean, 2004). Unlike other minority groups, homosexuals continue to encounter fierce social intimidation. Discrimination against gay and lesbian Americans is simply a reality. Heterosexism—an ideology "that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community" (Herek & Berrill, 1992, p. 89)—permeates the typical high school (Unks, 1994). The culture of high schools is determined by a narrow set of acceptable behaviors that place students and educators deemed to be "different" in a vulnerable position. It is not unsound to assume that the culture of discrimination that dominates the political landscape of the United States also dominates the culture of U.S. high schools (Griffin, 1992; Unks, 1994). Unks maintained,

> Homosexuals are arguably the most hated group of people in the United States. Picking on persons because of their ethnicity, class, religion, gender, or race is essentially taboo behavior, but adults and children alike are given license to torment or harm people because of their sexuality. In spite of mighty gains by other minorities, homosexuals stand alone, outside, despised, and ripe for discrimination. (p. 322)

During 2006, a California legislator and a protestant minister traveled throughout the state campaigning for a law that would render it illegal for gays and lesbians to teach in California public schools. As reported by Rowe (2006), "Together the men proclaimed that homosexuality was a crime against nature and a threat to Christian values. Furthermore, they said that allowing homosexuals to teach in the classroom would expose young people to the wrong role models" (p. 207). Duke (2007) recently noted that, in his study of 22 articles published in professional educational journals, only 4 included empirical data on the experience of gay and lesbian teachers. However, none of these articles included qualitative research methods. He concluded,

> gay and lesbian educators have been largely excluded from empirical studies in school and classroom settings. . . . Research about gay and lesbian people in public school settings is forbidden, discouraged and taboo. That is to say, empirical research about gay and lesbian educators has been excluded and/or disqualified as beneath hierarchical (and heterosexist) research and disseminations systems in the United States. (pp. 25, 27)

Educator Experiences

All of the articles reviewed by Duke (2007) concluded that public schools are homophobic institutions. Fifteen focused on employment issues and reported that gay and lesbian educators are routinely fired on the basis of sexual orientation alone. Seven (33%) indicated that gay and lesbian educators are routinely "silenced, marginalized, invisible, and afraid" (p. 26). Two (9%) of the articles "noted gay and lesbian teachers over police [*sic*] their interactions with children (and are "over policed" [*sic*] by administrators and colleagues), owing to the erroneous tendency among many Americans to map pedophilia onto homosexuality" (p. 27).

DeJean (2004) investigated the experiences of 10 "out" gay and lesbian K–12 educators teaching within the state of California. He identified the following five emerging themes through the course of his research:

> (1) Being Out Means a Commitment to Radical Honesty, (2) A commitment to Radical Honesty Impacts the Teacher and His or Her Students and Their Classroom Community as a Whole, (3) Identity Shapes Literacy Philosophies and Practices, (4) A School's Leadership and Geographic Location Impacts Gay and Lesbian K-12 Educator's Quest to Participate in Radical Honesty, and (5) A Teacher's Identity Is an Important Aspect of the Creation of a Quality Teacher (pp. 116–132).

DeJean identified a commitment to radical honesty as the primary theme in his study of out K–12 educators (p. 166). Blanton (2005) maintained that lying is the source of illness and that only telling the truth will set people free. He opined,

> Withholding from other people, not telling them what we feel or think, keeps us locked in the jail. The longer we remain in that jail, the quicker we decline. We either escape, or we go dead. The way out is to get good at telling the truth. (p. xxvi)

For the participants in the DeJean study, a commitment to radical honesty equated to discussing their partners in honest ways with students and parents, creating an inclusive classroom environment that revealed the diversity of the students and the teacher. According to Blount (2005), freedom is the result of moving beyond the restrictions of childhood. “Freedom from one’s own mind is [the] freedom to create. But in order to have some say in creating life, you must be willing to tell the truth. Telling the truth frees us from entrapment in the mind” (p. xxxii).

The second theme that emerged in the study conducted by DeJean (2004) was that a commitment to radical honesty impacts the teacher and his or her students and their classroom community as a whole. This related to the impact a commitment to radical honesty has on the classroom environment. Most of the participants in the DeJean study experienced a sense of relief when they “came out” in the classroom. They reported feeling more comfortable with themselves and with their students and reported a deeper sense of trust within the classroom. However, the participants also reported incidents of harassment and false accusations related to their sexual orientation (pp. 119–122). The third theme of the DeJean study relates to the educational philosophy of the educator (i.e., identity shapes literacy philosophies and practices). It refers to the impact of the educator experience on his or her practice within the classroom. Several participants described their experience of school as lonely and exclusionary so, as a result, their classroom practice fostered inclusion. Others indicated that their experience of “feeling fearful, being excluded, or having to actively hide their sexual orientation within the K-12

system" motivated them to expose students to a range of literacies focusing on identity development, awareness, and respect for others and self (pp. 122–125).

The school administration and location played a role in the willingness of the teachers participating in the DeJean (2004) study to contribute with radical honesty. According to DeJean, "School leadership that actively values inclusion, honors diversity, and insists on a culture of respect can create a climate in which gay and lesbian educators are more freely able to teach from their authentic self-hood" (p. 126). In his study, participants also reported that living within an urban, progressive environment enabled them to "come out" within their classrooms and practice radical honesty more readily than their rural or suburban counterparts. The participants reported feeling safer in schools located within areas where students had regular contact with gay and lesbian people and had familiarity with the homosexual culture (pp. 125–128).

The final theme that emerged in the DeJean study focused on the importance of identity in the development of a quality teacher. In addition to the traditional elements of teacher competency, the DeJean participants reported that their identities as gay or lesbian individuals positively impacted their professional competency. The freedom to be honest with students fostered an environment within which the participants could develop stronger relationships with their students. One participant stated, "A quality teacher is someone who is simply authentic within his or her classroom" (p. 130).

Fear

The themes identified in the DeJean (2004) research are consistent with several earlier studies and histories on gay and lesbian public-school teachers (Blount, 2005; Griffin, 1992; Harbeck, 1992; Kissen, 1996; Sanlo, 1999). While the earlier studies

framed the findings differently, gay and lesbian identity, support from colleagues and administrators, the connection between identity and excellent teaching, and geographic location were important factors in describing the teacher experience from the perspective of homosexual educators. Most importantly, however, was the theme of honesty, which DeJean described in the following manner: “Fear was the central emotion the teachers’[sic] experience while teaching within the educational closet; therefore, making a commitment to radical honesty impacted them personally by freeing up energy once consumed in hiding” (p. 65). Kissen (1996) described the difficulty of honest communication within the school setting as relating to personal sexuality. He wrote,

> Along with monitoring their appearance and censoring their behavior, most gay teachers are constantly aware of what they say and to whom. At one end of the spectrum, teachers who are completely closeted at school remain silent about their personal lives, or, if questioned, construct an imaginary heterosexual existence complete with [an] opposite-sex partner or spouse. They are willing to lie about themselves if necessary, in order to preserve their safety. (p. 44)

Blount (2005) described school consequences for creating environments that encourage dishonesty. He wrote,

> School workers learn that to remain above reproach, they must modify any personal behavior, fashion, relationship, or other facet of their lives that might cast doubt on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Consequently, schools tend to be gender-polarized places. (p. 1)

Sanlo (1999) conducted qualitative research on the experiences of gay and lesbian public-school teachers within northern Florida. His study was very similar to the current research. In a description of the process he used to collect data, Sanlo explained the fear the participants experienced and the following precautions:

> Although all 16 teachers said they chose to participate in this study as their contribution to create change for lesbian and gay people in northeast Florida, these five emphatically declared their desire to assist at the great risk of identity discovery. Therefore, the names—and occasionally the gender and

pronouns—used in this study do not belong to the participants. (p. 35)

The experiences of the five participants highlighted the anxiety that gay and lesbian public-school teachers experience within the field of education. Sanlo reported, “They truly and vehemently believed they would lose their jobs as teachers if their identities were discovered, yet they were both willing and eager to tell their stories” (p. 82). He also concluded that, based upon his findings, there is compelling evidence of discrimination against gay and lesbian teachers within public schools in northeast Florida. “The participants reported that such behavior toward lesbian and gay teachers and students makes the schools in northeast Florida unsuitable for teaching and learning” (p. 111).

While the number of empirical studies available on gay and lesbian public-school teachers is limited, the consistency of the reported experiences of this population of teachers within existing studies is notable. Jennings (1994, 2005) made a significant contribution to the topic in two editions of a publication that presented anecdotal support for the claims made by the earlier empirical research. The first edition was published during 1994 and included the stories of gay and lesbian teachers throughout the United States. The collection of stories chronicled the difficulties many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) educators face who teach within the public school system. The second edition was published during 2005. Jennings noted in his preface that a positive change in tone had manifested over the 10 years between publications, stating, “It is still not easy to be an LGBT educator, but a general sense of hope pervades the stories of this book” (p. xiv). Reflecting on a negative experience with a student who engaged in homophobic behavior, a participating teacher wrote, “It took

me a few days to recover. But I did so with full dignity and grace, determined to make changes" (pp. 242–243). Despite the signs of hope in the 2005 Jennings publication, the presence of openly GLBT teachers within American public schools is limited. Kosciw, Diaz, and Greytak (2008) documented the experience of GLBT youth within the public school system. Out of the 6,209 GLBT students surveyed, 63.5% reported they could not identify a single GLBT teacher within their schools (p. 101).

Administrator Role

Kissen (1996) conducted research on private- and public-school gay and lesbian teachers and found that the relationship between teacher and administrator is an important aspect of such study The findings revealed that gay and lesbian teachers are far less vulnerable when the principal or administration takes a personal interest in their success. Kissen pointed out that "a weak or indifferent administration can create an environment where students feel free to target lesbian and gay teachers" (p. 91). She documented several stories of gay and lesbian teachers who were targeted by their school administrators due to their sexual orientation. The accounts are haunting because state and federal laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation were virtually powerless in the professional lives of these educators. In many of the cases, the discrimination was perpetrated by the school principals or other administrators. Kissen described the impact of the discrimination on one of the teachers in the following manner: "Peter's experiences have left scars that may never disappear. He scrupulously guards his identity, and will not be interviewed on tape" (p. 94).

Several participants in the Kissen (1996) research described the importance of the positive role their principals played in creating safe work environments. Kissen

summarized, “Principals and other administrators can be vital allies in a gay teacher’s life. They are the ones with the power to hire, fire, and defend the teachers who work under their supervision” (p. 145). In response to an offensive article within a San Francisco newspaper related to gay men, one of the gay participants revealed his orientation to his principal. The teacher was shocked that his principal was supportive of him and prepared to take active steps to support the gay and lesbian students and faculty at the school. Kissen wrote,

> Terry was so encouraged by his principal’s reaction that he decided to come out to each of his assistant principals, telling them that as a gay man he was concerned about the way lesbian and gay students were treated at school. (p. 146)

The testimony provided strong support for the Kissen claim that “administrators can prevent threatening situations from growing into full-scale attacks simply by speaking out quickly and clearly” (p. 146).

D’Aguelli Identity-Development Model

Traditional approaches to identity development have focused on a linear movement through stages that imply an early adaptation of personal identity. The assumption of such a model is that the developmental “journey” ends at some point with either reaching integration or failure to develop a strong identity (Erikson, 1959, p. 92). According to D’Aguelli (1994), “Conventional wisdom holds that identity is normatively achieved at a certain point in chronological time, usually during late adolescence or early adulthood, and then endures” (p. 312). A number of theorists have challenged this stage-sequential, linear approach to identity development (Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2000). D’Augelli developed a life-span approach

to gay and lesbian identity development to account for the impact of historical context and individual maturation. Floyd and Bakeman (2006) explained,

> The life course perspective has focused attention on both maturational and historical circumstances that influence the process of sexual orientation identity development for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals and cause wide variations in the content, timing, and sequencing of relevant milestone events. (p. 288)

The conventional, linear notion of identity development is problematic with gay and lesbian populations because development of a homosexual identity is complicated with negative social structures, stereotyping, and violence against homosexual individuals. Developing a homosexual identity can be complicated in a society that views heterosexuality as the norm. According to McGinley (2006), "Gay identity is much too complicated, multivalent, and wrapped up in other identity pieces for it to be summarily dismissed as disordered" (p. 120). Goffman (1963) described how diverse individuals who deviate from the social norm negotiate identity development and how they are "disqualified from full social acceptance" because of a socially unacceptable stigma (p. i). Further explaining this phenomenon, Harbeck (1997) wrote,

> As socialized individuals we constantly categorize people by attributes we expect them to exhibit. This social identity allows us to anticipate human interactions without excessive conscious thought and nervous confusion, as we expect and demand very specific behaviors based on these characteristics. (p. 142)

D'Augelli (1994) proposed a life-span model of identity development that considers the development of personal identity over the course of a lifetime. He wrote, "Being lesbian, gay, or bisexual in our culture requires living a life of multiple psychological identities" (p. 313). The process of identity development is impacted by social factors that require flexibility and recognition of the various social circumstances within which homosexuals find themselves. Due to the social factors that complicate the

development of a healthy gay or lesbian identity, “lesbians and gay men develop their identities in a uniquely private way” (p. 314). The formation of such an identity requires the homosexual individual to first resist the inheritance of a heterosexual identity by dealing with the fear and shame that accompany homosexual identity development. According to D’Augelli, “The entire oppressive sequence is driven by a normative heterosexual pattern of identity development that constructs homosexuality as deviant, pathological, and illegal” (p. 317).

D’Augelli (1994) identified six concrete phases characterizing the development of a gay or lesbian identity. This life-span model of identity development “is conceived of as the dynamic process by which an individual emerges from many social exchanges experienced in different contexts over an extended historical period—the years of his or her life” (p. 324) The D’Augelli model considers the actual social, political, and familial contexts within which the participants live. Bilodeau and Renn (2005) commented,

> Though no identity development model can fully address the intersections and complexities of non-heterosexual identity, D’Augelli (1994) offered a life span model of sexual orientation development that takes social contexts into account in ways that the early stage models did not. As well, D’Augelli’s model has the potential to represent a wider range of experiences than the theories relating to specific racial, ethnic, or gender groups. (p. 28)

The six phases are (a) exiting a heterosexual identity, (b) developing a personal gay or lesbian identity, (c) developing a gay or lesbian social identity, (d) becoming a gay or lesbian offspring, (e) developing a gay or lesbian intimacy status, and (f) entering a gay or lesbian community. Bilodeau and Renn explained that the life-span development model more accurately reflects human experience in that the gay or lesbian individual may have a strong affiliation with development in one phase but not in another. The strength of the life-span model, as it relates to identity development, is that it does not

imply that sexual-identity development is linear and aimed at a final stage of human growth.

The first phase in the development of a homosexual identity is often referred to as coming out. This initial stage requires coming to terms with the end of a heterosexual identification and an emotional and physical attraction to the same sex. Exiting a heterosexual identity further involves the disclosure of the homosexual identity. This begins the lifelong process of coming out and sets the individual on a unique journey of self-discovery. D'Augelli (2003) explained,

> I wrote of this "exiting from heterosexuality," the first part of a social process that hinges upon finding other LGB people and developing a feeling of community with people who are often complete strangers. It is an odd process at best, one with few counterparts in human development. It is nearly always a difficult process, as it violates others' assumptions about their friends, families, coworkers, and neighbors. (p. 343)

Similarly, Hooks (2000) insisted that we must "tell the truth to ourselves and to others. Creating a false self to mask fears and insecurities has become so common that many of us forget what we are and what we feel underneath the pretense" (p. 48). The process of exiting the heterosexual identity is also the beginning of finding a place within the gay community where the struggle for human rights becomes a way of life. As Grierson and Smith (2005) reported, "Coming out, the process of accepting, revealing and affirming one's identity as a gay man or lesbian became of great political importance within the gay and lesbian liberation movement and remains so today" (p. 54).

Developing a gay or lesbian identity refers to the homosexual sense of self as a gay man or lesbian woman. The development of personal identity refers to the ability to articulate the meaning of a claim to homosexual orientation. This phase in the process moves the individual to search for community with other gay men and lesbian women.

According to D'Augelli (1994), "To a large degree, they cannot confirm their sexual orientation status without contact with others" (p. 325). An important feature of this phase is the ability of the individual to deconstruct common myths surrounding homosexuals. It is during this phase that individuals begin to deal with internalized homophobia and begin to confront their own stereotypes with regard to the meaning of identifying as a gay or lesbian individual. Interacting with other gay couples, meeting homosexual couples with children, and attending same-sex weddings are examples of activities that help these individuals develop a gay or lesbian identity status (D'Augelli, 1994). Another important aspect is understanding the impact of other sociopolitical factors, such as race, gender, ethnicity, or religious affiliation on the development of a homosexual identity (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006, p. 288).

The third phase in the process of gay and lesbian identity development involves the creation of a community of affirmative support. The creation of a wide range of friends, colleagues, and family members who provide active, positive support is an important feature in the development of a gay or lesbian identity. The assumption during this phase is that the community of support surrounding homosexual individuals interacts with them as gay or lesbian people. This entails family, friends, and colleagues inquiring about relationships, dating, and other activities that clearly identify the individual as a member of the gay and lesbian community (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 326). The development of a strong, supportive social network is crucial for strong gay or lesbian identity development. It is important for gay or lesbian individuals to interact with others who do not expect them to hide their sexual orientation or who do not attempt to minimize the role sexual identity plays in their lives. This phase of the process involves coming to

terms with the reality that friends, family, and colleagues also experience a process of coming out in relationship to the gay or lesbian individual. As D'Augelli explained, "The reality of sexual orientation in others' eyes is a complex process too: members of the individual's social network must come out in the acknowledgment to others about her or his orientation" (p. 326).

The disclosure of homosexual orientation to parents is the fourth phase in the development of a gay or lesbian identity (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 326). The process of becoming a gay son or lesbian daughter is different for each individual; however, it is always a central task in the homosexual identity development. The goal of this phase is to reintegrate into the family of origin when a period of alienation ensues following disclosure. While some individuals do not suffer greatly from disclosure to parents, most have a period of adjustment to the new terms of the parent-child relationship. All related research has suggested a return to the predisclosure state, though possibly only after the passage of time (Cramer & Roach, 1988; D'Augelli, 1994; Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989; Strommen, 1989). The gay or lesbian individual generally assumes responsibility for helping immediate and extended family members make sense of the disclosure. It is important that the gay or lesbian individuals not permit simply a toleration of the new identity but find ways of obtaining a true acceptance of this dimension of their personality. According to D'Augelli, "More and more parents are taking active steps to reintegrate the person and to understand and affirm his or her life" (p. 327).

The next phase of homosexual identity development encompasses the construction of intimate relationships. Gay and lesbian members of society have had few role models to imagine the possibilities for long-term intimate relationships between

individuals of the same sex. Stereotypes of gay men as promiscuous and incapable of tending to long-term relationships are common perspectives of the homosexual "landscape." Lesbian women have also suffered from stereotypes that diminish the possibility of intimate relationships. Positive images of healthy same-sex relationships are difficult to find in popular culture (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 327). D'Augelli wrote,

> It is the case that our social and cultural apparatuses for heterosexual bonding are not available to lesbians and gay men (thus producing fewer examples of committed relationships and/or "marriages," for instance); this is a good example of how social structure reinforces heterosexism. (p. 327)

During this phase in the development of a gay and lesbian identity, the ability to establish intimate relationships is the major focus.

Entering a LGBT community represents a commitment to political and social action. This phase of the process does not manifest for all gay and lesbian individuals due to the preference to maintain privacy with regard to sexual orientation. The gay or lesbian individual who seeks a full integration of sexual orientation is commonly confronted with public engagement surrounding issues of discrimination and bigotry. As the gay or lesbian becomes more aware of personal orientation, a concurrent awareness of the political and social reality of being homosexual also typically emerges. As explained by D'Augelli (1994),

> To be lesbian, gay, or bisexual in the fullest sense—to have a meaningful identity—leads to a consciousness of the history of one's own oppression. It also, generally, leads to an appreciation of how the oppression continues, and a commitment to resisting it. (p. 328)

To become engaged in the gay and lesbian community implies an awareness of, and commitment to, the issues that face homosexuals. This is a phase that continues over the course of a lifetime (p. 328).

Oppression

Paulo Freire

The process of conducting PAR assumes that oppression is real and that the research goal is to create a space within which the participants are able to reflect upon their experiences as a "springboard" for social action. Tierney (1994) wrote, "From this perspective, research is meant to be transformative; we do not merely analyze or study an object to gain greater understanding, but instead struggle to investigate how individuals and groups might be better able to change their situations" (p. 99). To understand the reality of what it means to be a Catholic gay or lesbian educator within a Catholic secondary school, it is important to tell the stories of the participating teachers from their own perspectives. Therefore, the participants of this current study performed this reflection and proceeded to what Freire (1970) described as problem-posing education. He explained,

> Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization. (p. 86)

Freire (1970) spoke of oppression in the language of dehumanization, discussing two alternatives that define the human experience. He argued that human beings have a fundamental choice between actions that either humanize or dehumanize and that dehumanization is a historical reality, as evidenced by the "thirst for justice" that so many individuals struggle to "quench" on a daily basis. Freire posited that humanization is the only real choice because, to bring about justice and promote the fullness of life, is the

vocation of humanity. He wrote, “Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (thought in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human” (p. 44). Put simply, oppression is the result of dehumanization.

When the human psyche is marred by the experience of life and a loss of the dignity that defines what it means to be human, he or she is living in an oppressive environment. According to Freire (2005), “The power of the dominant ideology is always domesticating, and when we are touched and deformed by it we become ambiguous and indecisive” (pp. 10–11). He further explained that human beings do not simply live (Freire, 1992). They exist in a particular time, within a particular culture, and with a particular history. *Existing* implies that they have control over their lives and the ability to make their way in the world. This ability to act is an opportunity to commit to the fight for freedom and a more humanizing way of life (p. 83). Freire asserted,

> We cannot exist without wondering about tomorrow, about what is “going on,” and going on in favor of what, against what, for whom, against whom. We cannot exist without wondering about how to do the concrete or “untested feasible” that requires us to fight for it. (p. 83)

The Freire (1970) research on education toward critical consciousness has been used by many investigators to understand oppression and the work required of individuals or communities to engage in the process of personal or communal liberation. Within Brazil, Freire used literacy education as a tool to teach the poor how to work for change in a system that was keeping them powerless. He wrote, “To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (p. 47).

The core principal in education toward critical consciousness is the process of naming reality, reflecting upon the reality and subsequently acting on behalf of justice. Wink (2005) reported, “Paulo Freire has taught that to teach and learn critically we can follow this straightforward guideline: to name, to reflect critically, to act” (p. 123). PAR stems from the Freire (1970) focus on the role the oppressed play in social and political transformation. It is through a process of reflection on their own experiences that Catholic gay and lesbian educators can create a future exclusive of discrimination and oppression. Freire emphasized that the “road” to liberation is a road to humanization and a return from death. He maintained,

> The oppressed, who have been shaped by the death-affirming climate of oppression, must find through their struggle the way to life-affirming humanization, which does not lie simply in having more to eat (although it does involve having more to eat and cannot fail to include this aspect). The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become human beings. (p. 68)

Education toward critical consciousness is about transformation. Freire clearly articulated that the role of the oppressed is to work toward both self-liberation and that of the oppressor. The work of education toward critical consciousness does not stop with the transfer of power from one group to another group; critical consciousness is the realization of an alternative to oppression and dehumanization. “This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 44).

The role of dialogue in education toward critical consciousness cannot be overlooked. According to Freire (1970), “The teacher is no longer merely

the-one-who-teaches, but is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (p. 80). Freire named this process of moving from passivity in education to claiming one's own knowledge as "conscientization" (p. 67). Wink (2005) described this process in simpler terms, stating,

> Conscientization moves us from the passivity of "Yeah, but we can't do that" to the power of "We gotta do the best we can where we are with what we've got." For example, I see teachers as powerful humans who can make a difference in the lives of students. However, they often feel weak because they see themselves as victims of a system that renders them passive. Conscientization enables students and teacher to have confidence in their own knowledge, ability, and experiences. Often people will say that conscientization is a power we have when we recognize we *know* that we know. (p. 32)

The process of conscientization—recognizing "we know that we know"—unfolds as a result of dialogue and engagement with the world in which we live (p. 32). Wenger (1998) described mutual engagement as a fundamental characteristic of PAR, postulating that "practice does not exist in the abstract. It exists because people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with another" (p. 73). Dialogue as a form of educational research demands that the members of the community engaged in research resist the traditional notions of educational research that place the researcher as an outside observer in unfamiliar territory. Dialogue places the participants in conversation with one another and with the researcher as a form of critical engagement.

Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2003) wrote, "An important emphasis here is that students are encouraged to engage the world within complexity and fullness, in order to reveal the possibilities of new ways of constructing thought and action beyond how it currently exists" (p. 12). Hooks (2000) described education as a process of conversation, explaining, "Conversation is the central location of pedagogy for the democratic educator" (p. 44). This process of inquiry through conversation or dialogue has the

potential to transform a hierarchical approach to educational research into an approach that values the construction of knowledge. This type of inquiry begins by answering a question or posing a problem related to the overarching principle under study (Shor & Freire, 1987). Through dialogue, research participants have the opportunity to engage in critical reflection that challenges their assumptions and biases and forces them to think critically about the world. For Freire (1970), dialogue is essential in understanding oppression and emancipation. He wrote, “Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication” (p. 77).

Kenji Yoshino

Although progress has been made within the arena of gay civil rights, debates over issues such as adoption by gay parents and same-sex marriage highlight that U.S. citizens remain far more comfortable with tolerance than acceptance (Lithwick, 2006). Yoshino (2006) argued that the “new frontier” in civil rights is a concept known as *covering.* Borrowed from Goffman (1963), covering refers to “persons who are ready to admit possession of a stigma [who] may nonetheless make a great effort to keep the stigma from looming large” (p. 18). Griffin (1992) described covering as one of four strategies for managing a homosexual identity within a public-school setting. She further defined the term as an attempt to downplay a homosexual identity, and cited participants in her study who used covering as a strategy for hiding their homosexual identity. She reported, “When covering, the participants were not trying to lead others to believe that they were heterosexual. Instead, they were trying to prevent others from seeing them as gay or lesbian” (p. 176).

Civil Rights

Yoshino (2006) further developed the concept of covering by placing it in relationship with earlier forms of discrimination against sexual minorities. He suggested that gay conversion, the pressure to pass, and a demand for covering represent the evolution of the gay civil-rights discussion. This progression from gay conversion to covering illustrates both the political evolution of discrimination and the process by which gay individuals develop their identity. Unlike earlier descriptions of covering (Goffman, 1963; Griffin, 1992), Yoshino proposed that the demand to cover is the new "battlefield" in the fight for gay and lesbian civil rights. He argued that the demand to cover forces gay or lesbian individuals to behave in ways that prevent them from "being too gay," thereby protecting the heterosexual norm. He used the example of gay marriage to illustrate this, stating, "The contemporary resistance to gay marriage can be understood as a covering demand: *'Fine, be gay, but don't shove it in our faces'"* (p. 19). Kissen (1996) explained that covering meant "gay and lesbian teachers censored their words and actions but did not explicitly lie" (p. 41).

Yoshino (2006) maintained a compelling argument for including the demand to cover in the discussion of progress in the civil-rights arena. He suggested that a process of dialogue around the demand to cover sexual-minority status is the key to social change, positing that

> this covering demand is the civil rights issue of our time. It hurts not only our most vulnerable citizens but our most valuable commitments. For if we believe a commitment against racism is about equal respect for all races, we are not fulfilling that commitment if we protect only racial minorities who conform to historically white norms. As the sociologist Milton Gordon identified decades ago, the demand for "Anglo-conformity" is white supremacy under a different

> guise. Until outsider groups surmount such demands for assimilation, we will not have achieved full citizenship in America. (p. 23)

Covering is the process by which a member of a minority group downplays his or her minority status by keeping any obvious signs of the minority traits at bay. Yoshino described his own reluctance as a law-school professor to write on gay legal subjects in response to the demand to cover. To understand the concept of covering and how a homosexual person arrives at this point in the process, Yoshino reflected upon his own experience as a gay male. He illustrated three specific phases of his gay identity development—conversion, passing, and covering. According to Yoshino, "They [covering behaviors] described not only a set of performances on my part, but also a set of demands society had made of me to minimize my gayness" (p. 19). A discussion of conversion and passing will establish an understanding of how the demand to cover became a current area of concern with regard to gay civil rights, particularly within the realm of education. King (2004) opined, "As teachers and prospective teachers, gay men have made a very bad bargain. We have tacitly agreed that we would not promote homosexuality and do so by keeping ourselves in the closet" (p. 126).

Conversion

Although the validity of conversion therapy for homosexuals remains recognized, most mental-health workers agree that conversion is not a scientifically valid form of therapy. The USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (1997) acknowledged that conversion therapy is questionable. In a discussion surrounding the role of therapy, the bishops confirmed the right of the homosexual person to refuse therapy aimed at conversion and stated, "Given the present state of medical and psychological knowledge,

there is no guarantee that such therapy will succeed. Thus, there may be no obligation to undertake it, though some may find it helpful" (p. 3).

Conversion from homosexuality to heterosexuality was the chief aim in the treatment of homosexuals prior to the Stonewall riots during 1969. The riots created a major shift in the self-perceptions of gays and lesbians; they began to view themselves as defenseless against homophobia and violence. This shift was particularly evident within the mental-health field. It was during this period that gay and lesbian mental-health professionals challenged the American Psychiatric Association inclusion of homosexuality as a mental illness (Kutchins & Kirk, 1997). Methods including lobotomies, brain surgery, and electroshock therapy were routinely used to "cure" the homosexual individual of his or her malady (Yoshino, 2006, p. 39). The question of conversion with regard to homosexuality is a frightening one. Yoshino argued convincingly that the prospect of converting the homosexual to a heterosexual refers to the transformation of the very core of a human being. For Yoshino, the question of

> who will convert, who will be radically transformed, has always been the primal question of civil rights. Who will change? The gay son or the straight parents? The homosexual or the homophobe? Just thinking of such change can change us. (p. 46)

According to Yoshino (2006), on December 5, 1973, the American Psychiatric Association deleted homosexuality from the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM).* This was the result of a three-year confrontation between gay activists and gay psychiatrists and the committees of the Association responsible for diagnostic changes (Kutchins & Kirk, 1997, pp. 65–71). The deletion initiated by the American Psychiatric Association dramatically changed the debate surrounding homosexuality as a mental illness. Kutchins and Kirk argued that those on both sides of the debate understood the impact of the

decision. They wrote, “The psychiatric supporters of the diagnosis and their gay challengers understood that the decision to delete homosexuality from DSM would have far-reaching consequences. It was the first step in legitimating lifestyles on the basis of recognition of sexual diversity” (p. 55). Although removing homosexuality as a disorder from the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* had a positive social impact on the gay and lesbian community, the psychiatric treatment of homosexuals barely shifted. Psychiatrists continued to offer treatment consistent with their theoretical approach to therapy, regardless of the diagnosis. Therapists who practiced reparative therapy continued to attempt a change in sexual orientation in their clients (p. 76).

Conversion therapists are rare and no longer receive the support of the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association (Yoshino, 2006). Although passing and covering are not strong characteristics of healthy identity development, the demand to convert is a radical end to the question of equality for gay men and lesbian women. A number of studies identify the psychological problems that can result from conversion therapy (Brandt, 2005).

Passing

Kissen (1996) described the experience of passing by articulating what it is like for a teacher to make a decision about being “out” in school. The demand to pass is a decision of safety and job security. Kissen asserted, “Gay teachers know that in most places they can be fired, harassed, or even physically assaulted if they are honest about their sexual orientation” (p. 16). Therefore, passing required gay or lesbian individuals to present themselves as heterosexual, even if this meant lying to self-protect. The demand to pass might require the teacher to create stories of an opposite-sex partner, change the

names or pronouns of partners to disguise a homosexual orientation, or bring opposite-sex dates to school functions.

According to Griffin (1992), teachers practicing a passing strategy are typically left with a sense of operating in a dishonest and cowardly manner within their world. In terms of civil rights, the progression from conversion to passing does, in a small way, indicate progress. The aim of conversion was the elimination of homosexuality, while the aim of passing is the silencing of a gay or lesbian identity. Yoshino (2006) opined, "No matter how bad it is to live in the closet, it is preferable to electroshock treatment" (p. 69). Bartlett (2005) wrote,

> Gay and lesbian professors at Roman Catholic colleges have learned that it is often easier, as well as safer, to keep a low profile. Even when administrators want to be supportive, they have to worry about the backlash from alumni and Catholic groups that oppose homosexuality. (p. 1)

Covering

As noted earlier, covering is another form of discrimination that many gays and lesbians use to manage a homosexual identity (Griffin, 1992; Yoshino, 2006). The elimination of the demand for covering is the final stage in the development of discrimination politics and in the development of a gay identity (Yoshino, 2006). Yoshino reported, "Everyone covers. To cover is to tone down a disfavored identity to fit into the mainstream. In our increasingly diverse society, all of us are outside the mainstream in some way" (p. 1). He maintained that covering occurs in two situations—when individuals are specifically instructed to cover and when they feel social or psychological pressure to conform. The process of covering begins in childhood and is difficult to recognize as a form of discrimination because it is deeply embedded in the process of assimilation, which Yoshino acknowledged is often necessary and helpful in

the navigation of culture. An individual can be openly gay with family and friends, but not to the extent of introducing discomfort.

Yoshino (2006) argued that progress in the area of gay and lesbian civil rights will only occur with elimination of the demand to cover. Covering submits full control to the dominant culture over what is deemed "normal" and accepted. In a response to the claim that homosexuality is culturally mainstream, Yoshino explained, "The selective uptake of gay culture—gay fashion, yes; gay affection, no—shows that acceptance is driven by the desires of the straight cultural consumer rather than the dignity of the gay person" (p. 85). He concluded that gay and lesbian people will be deemed equal when the demand to cover has disappeared and the deeper traits of an individual are valued, regardless of their appeal to mainstream culture.

The underlying premise of the Yoshino (2006) theory regarding the demand to convert, pass, or cover relates to his overarching goal of moving society beyond thinking solely in terms of group-based civil rights to thinking in terms of individual liberties that guarantee all people the right to their authentic selves. Yoshino is pushing for social solutions that rely more upon the story and experience of the individual than on the legal solutions that demand equality for protected groups. At the heart of his suggestion is a reliance on dialogue and authentic human interaction. Yoshino maintained that full civil rights for gays and lesbians will emerge not only from laws that protect minority groups, but also from the stories of gays and lesbians who struggle against oppression. He wrote, "This book [*Covering*] uses both languages, relying not only on legal arguments but on literary narrative—the stories of people, including me, who struggle against demands for conformity" (p. 26). As did Freire (1970, 1992) and Hooks (2000), Yoshino relied upon

the struggle to tell the story and to fight for emancipation, stating, “Told carefully, the gay story becomes a story about us all – the story of the uncovered self” (p. 27).

Summary

This review of literature on the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality identifies the distinction between a homosexual orientation and homosexual genital activity as key to understanding the theological and philosophical position of the Church on homosexuality. The Catholic Church has claimed that the distinction between orientation and activity must be properly understood if the gay or lesbian Catholic wishes to remain in communion with the Church. The Church makes it clear that homosexual genital activity may never be condoned. Any sexual activity outside the context of marriage does not meet the Christian purpose of sex, which is the unity of the couple and procreation. The Church does state, however, that the homosexual individual must always be treated with dignity and compassion and that every act of injustice, violence, or discrimination against gay and lesbian people must be avoided.

Critics of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church have maintained that the position of the Church on homosexuality reduces the homosexual person to nothing more than the sexual act and that there is more to human sexuality than unity and procreation (Jordan, 2000; McGinley, 2006; McNeill, 1993). This review of related literature reveals that some theologians believe the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church to be psychologically damaging to homosexual people and that a theology of gay and lesbian sexuality must be developed if the Church hopes to maintain a relationship with members of this orientation. Critics have argued that the pastoral care of homosexual individuals must become the focus of Catholic theology and teaching and that a limited focus on

genital activity denies the complexity of sexual identity. The literature also revealed that, although the language has “softened” in more recent pronouncements from the USCCB and Rome, the teaching has not changed.

Existing literature on public-school teachers within the United States has indicated that gay and lesbian educators also struggle to survive in a homophobic culture that rewards heterosexuality (DeJean, 2004; Harbeck, 1992; Kissen, 1996; Sanlo, 1999). Although the experiences of teachers are improving slowly, the data suggest that gay and lesbian teachers within American schools continue to struggle for fair treatment and the right to be themselves within their classrooms. Literature focused on the life-span theory of gay and lesbian identity development has suggested that older stage-theory models of development are no longer appropriate (D’Augelli, 1993, 1994). The studies suggested that gay and lesbian identity develops over the course of a lifetime and that the historical and contextual features of life impact the development of this identity. Identity is fluid, frequently changing to meet the unique needs of life situations. The life-span theory, as proposed by D’Augelli (1994), provides a context for the experience of the Catholic gay or lesbian educator within the Catholic-school setting. The reviewed literature reveals that oppression is an important factor in understanding the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators. It suggested that participation in personal liberation is an essential aspect of transforming adverse situations. The demand to cover is a form of oppression that masks the real struggle for gay and lesbian civil rights.

The current study documented the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian Catholic secondary school teachers using participatory action research as described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose

The call for gay and lesbian rights within the civil arena has grown in intensity, which has spurred renewed attention to the issue of homosexuality within the Catholic Church. While studies and theological reflections have documented the experiences of Catholic gays and lesbians, not a single study exists with a focus on their experiences as teachers within Catholic education. The closest exception is an unpublished study on the experiences of Catholic, gay and lesbian, elementary-school teachers (Litton, 1999). Consequently, this current study explored the experiences of Catholic, gay and lesbian, secondary-school educators within Catholic schools of northern California. It provided an opportunity for participants to develop an action plan that addressed their concerns.

Research Design

Overview

To understand the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators, PAR, as described by Maguire (1987), was employed in this study. At the heart of her feminist perspective of research is the belief that knowledge is constructed and reality can be transformed by those who participate in its investigation. The participatory-research model provided the opportunity to interview the participants directly, allowing for honest dialogue. The participants had the opportunity to act as experts on their own experiences as Catholic gay and lesbian educators within Catholic secondary schools, as they related to injustice, oppression, and violence.

According to Maguire (1987), PAR "aims to develop critical consciousness, to improve the lives of those involved in the research process, and to transform fundamental societal structures and relationships" (p. 3). This method enabled the participants in the current study an opportunity to engage in critical reflection related to the experience of Catholic, gay and lesbian, secondary-school educators within Catholic-school settings. This, in turn, provided an opportunity for the participants to identify potential steps toward social action. The PAR design allowed the form of reflection and social action that is grounded in the work of Freire (1992). This approach permits the engagement of dialogue that facilitated this exploration of the relationship between sexual identity and the experiences of this population within Catholic education. As Yoshino (2006) so aptly described, "Told carefully, the gay story becomes a story about us all—the story of the uncovered self" (p. 27).

According to Montero (2004), the relationship between the researcher and the participants is key to successful PAR. He maintained,

> Citizen participation means a horizontal, equal relationship. It means relating with the other at the same level. One understands one's usefulness as part of the solidarity produced within the relationship. Accepting the *otherness* involves admitting different modes of knowing and making possible the dialogue and the relation with the other in a plane of equality based on the acceptance of our own differences. (p. 252)

This form of study emerges from the social-science discipline. The attraction to the method is based largely in the prospect of its contribution to social reform. A chief aim of PAR is organizational and social reform. Rather than reliance upon the objective interpretation of an outsider, PAR demands a type of insider participation that illuminates the problem under study. Whyte (1991) claimed that "the participatory research process not only can achieve results of current benefit to the organization but can lead to a

rethinking and restructuring of relations so that the impact of the process can carry far into the future" (p. 40). Although not speaking directly about PAR as a method, Freire (1970) described the process of problem-posing education in similar terms. He wrote, "Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality; thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (p. 84).

The purpose of this current study was to document the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools. The participants were given the opportunity to name their experiences in Catholic secondary education, learned more about themselves and the world in which they live, and identified possible strategies for creating positive change. Davis, Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, and Taylor (2004) identified knowledge construction as a major benefit of PAR. Through participation in this research project, the participants contributed to the construction of knowledge that may become a foundation for additional research in this area. According to Davis and colleagues,

> As a result, all participants in the process broaden and enrich their understanding and knowledge of the social issue. This type of reflexivity is a key component of the researcher-participant relationship in any participatory approach. Thus, knowledge acquisition by both participants and the researchers is another central goal of participatory action research. (p. 5)

According to Maguire (1987), social transformation is one of the primary aims of PAR. She described three types of change possible in this process—"to develop critical consciousness of both the researcher and participants, to improve the lives of those involved in the research process, and to transform fundamental societal structures and

relationships" (p. 3). Put simply, the process is an exercise in civil rights. Yoshino (2006) defined civil rights in a manner consistent with the aim of PAR. He wrote,

> For this reason, we should understand civil rights to be a sliver of a universal project of human flourishing. Civil rights has always sought to protect the human flourishing of certain groups from being thwarted by the irrational beliefs of others. Yet that aspiration is one we should hold for all humanity. (p. 25)

Phases

The organization of this current research adhered to the following phases established by Maguire (1987) for conducting participatory research:

1. Organization of the Project and Knowledge of the Working Area
2. Definition of Generating Problematics
3. Objectivization and Problematization
4. Researching Social Reality and Analyzing Collected Information
5. Definition of Action Projects (pp. 40–42)

During Phase 1, dialogue was initiated with Catholic, gay and lesbian, secondary-school educators teaching within Catholic schools in an attempt to develop relationships between the researcher and members of this community. An attempt was made to understand the concerns of this community through active listening and careful participation in dialogue with the participants. To identify study participants, the researcher networked with other gay and lesbian educators working within Catholic education in northern California. This first phase of the research allowed an opportunity to learn more about the experiences of the participants as Catholic educators, and the topic of study originated from their lives. According to Maguire, "The initial phase includes gathering and analyzing existing information about the research area and about the central problems faced by the people" (p. 40).

As explained by Maguire (1987), “In [the second] phase [of PAR], numerous techniques and processes are used to enable both researchers and participants to identify and understand participants’ perceptions of their most significant problems” (p. 41). In this current study, the researcher engaged in dialogue with the participants both individually and in a small group, identifying the problems associated with being a Catholic gay or lesbian educator within a Catholic secondary school. During this phase of the study, specific questions guided the dialogue to identify the major areas of concern. The questions also facilitated development of the problems of focus during a second dialogue. As Maguire went on to explain, “Problem-posing continues as a dialogue over time, each phase [taking] the researchers and participants to a deeper and more critical understanding of reality as perceived and experienced by both participants and the researcher” (p. 41).

Although the current study was initiated with a set of questions based upon the experience of the researcher and the literature review, it was during the third phase of the study that the participant experiences and interpretations were explored, refined, and articulated. The themes generated by the participants became the central focus of the dialogue; hence, the problems identified by the participants became the central focus of the investigation. “By the end of this phase, the researchers and participants [will] have compiled the questions and themes which will be investigated” (Maguire, 1987, p. 41). The participants and researcher worked together to deepen their mutual understanding of their experiences and to begin to propose possibilities for social action. It is during this phase that the participants and investigator began to own the research as a group effort.

During Phase 4, dialogue with the participants investigated specific problems generated during earlier phases of the study. The dialogue reflected a deep understanding of the problems identified by the participants, of the literature on related topics, and of the process of dialogue. Dialogue between the researcher and participants was aimed at analyzing the data in a manner that would develop theories and solutions. As Maguire (1987) explained, "In this phase, participants develop their own theories and solutions to problems" (p. 42). During Phase 5, decisions were made surrounding possible social actions resulting from the research and ideas for future study. The benefits of the research were immediately evident. Unlike other methodologies, PAR involves the transformation of all those involved in the project. Maguire wrote, "Ordinary and oppressed people move from being objects to being the subjects and beneficiaries of research" (p. 42).

Research Setting

The dialogues were conducted in a location agreeable to both the researcher and the participants. All sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. Each participant signed a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix A) prior to the performance of any dialogue sessions and was provided the Research Subjects' Bill of Rights (see Appendix B)—both effectuated following approval by the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C). All data collection and analysis was conducted within the boundaries of the approved application. The group dialogue session was conducted at the University of San Francisco, Office of University Ministries.

Population

The population represented Catholic secondary schools from several dioceses within Northern California, both private and diocesan schools. The study participants

were identified via the snowball method. The study was initially introduced through researcher discussion with colleagues and announcements in classes and doctoral seminars at the University of San Francisco. Preliminary phone conversations were conducted with potential participants to determine whether they met study criteria such as an ability to identify as a practicing Catholic and current employment within a Catholic secondary school in northern California. The participants engaged in two individual dialogue sessions focusing on their experiences within Catholic education, which were followed by an opportunity to participate in a voluntary small-group dialogue addressing an action plan and recommendations for future research.

Participant selection in this research was difficult due to the challenge of meeting all study criteria. While many potential candidates self-identified as loosely affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, most could not commit to the term *practicing Catholic* as it was defined for purposes of the study. Several chose not to be included in the study for fear of being "outed" during the process and subsequently terminated by their school administrators. Despite the safeguards provided by the protection of human subjects, several educators decided the risk still outweighed their desire to participate. The study participants comprised of four women identifying as lesbian, bisexual, gay, and/or "queer" and four men identifying as gay. Each of the participants asked to remain anonymous and voiced concern over disclosure of their identities within the dissertation documentation. The fear was not typically based in disclosure to their school administrators, but in being outed to the hierarchy within the diocese in which they worked.

Ethical Concerns

The names of the participants and their schools within which they worked have been changed throughout this documentation in an effort to protect their identities. The specific details regarding a particular school have also been changed when the context of the transcript quotation would reveal the school identity. The specific characteristics of each school (e.g., single sex or coed and private or diocesan) are also excluded for this same purpose. The researcher conducted the dialogues in private settings that were comfortable for the participant. The small group dialogue was conducted at the University of San Francisco to minimize the risk of meeting in a school setting. The participants were made aware of their rights using the "Research Subjects' Bill of Rights" (Appendix B) as approved by the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in several phases. The first two phases included a dialogue session, transcription of the dialogue, submission of the transcript to the participant for editing and approval and, finally, corrections to the dialogue transcript as indicated by the participant. The third phase of data collection included a voluntary small group interview including five of the eight research study participants. The small group dialogue was transcripted and then sent to the participants for approval. The participants had an opportunity to make any corrections to their responses.

The first dialogue began with use of the predetermined questions (Appendix D). Participants had an opportunity to consider the questions in advance, to raise their own questions in the first dialogue and to help develop questions for the second dialogue.

The initial dialogue gave structure to the research and initiated a journey of self-discovery and storytelling for the participants. PAR and narrative analysis demands honest exchange between the researcher and participants that evolves into a transformative mutual experience. Webster and Mertova (2007) explained,

> In the telling of researcher stories, the stories of the participants merge with the researcher's to form new stories that are collaborative in nature. These become the collaborative document that is written on the research, which opens new possibilities for further research. (p. 88)

Broad, open-ended questions characterized the first dialogue. The participant responses provided an opportunity for follow-up questions that helped the stories unfold. The conversation between the participants and researcher initiated a relationship within which personal and social transformation emerged. The dialogue was transcribed and distributed to the participants for accuracy checks and any changes in the transcripts to properly represent their intended thoughts. Participants were given an opportunity in each phase of the process to make sure that the transcripts accurately represented what they intended to say. According to Smith, Williams, and Johnson (1997),

> It is about transformation on both personal and social levels. At the heart of this transformation is a research process which involves investigating the circumstances of place; reflecting on the needs, resources, and constraints of the present reality; examining the possible paths to be taken; and consciously moving in new directions. (p. 8)

After the researcher concluded the first round of dialogues, he developed a second set of dialogue questions (Appendix E) that were based on input from participants during the first dialogues and from themes emerging from the dialogues as a whole.

Prior to the second dialogue, the participants received the prepared questions so they would have an opportunity to reflect upon them and determine whether they desired any additional questions. The participants had the freedom to respond to the questions

presented or move the dialogue in a different direction. The second dialogue was transcribed and again presented to the participants for accuracy approval and any needed changes. The researcher edited the transcripts as directed by the participants. Seven of the eight participants engaged in the first and second dialogues. One participant completed the first interview only.

The final phase in the process was a third dialogue with the participants in a small-group setting. Participation was voluntary and depended upon the comfort of the participants in a small-group environment. Five of the eight participants engaged in the small group dialogue that took place at the University of San Francisco, Office of University Ministries.

The transcripts were then merged into a single document titled "The Experience of Catholic, Gay and Lesbian, Catholic Secondary School Teachers Within Northern California: A Participatory Action Research Study (Participant Dialogue Transcripts)" (Everitt, 2010) and will be stored in a locked closet in the researcher's home for seven years.

The researcher adapted a data collection process developed for a similar study of gay and lesbian public school teachers (Pekman, 1997, pp.100-101) to include an additional small-group dialogue. It is difficult to completely separate the process of data collection and data analysis when conducting PAR because of the cooperation between the researcher and participants in the interpretation of data. Numbers 1 -12 chronicle the data collection process while numbers 13 – 19 outline the process for data analysis. In PAR data analysis is a constitutive element of the data collection process as well.

1. Created research categories and questions to guide the dialogues;
2. Defined the research community and participants;
3. Submitted research questions to participants;
4. Conducted and recorded the first dialogue;
5. Transcribed and analyzed the first dialogue;
6. Submitted the transcripts to the participants for approval;
7. Made corrections to transcripts as indicated by participants;
8. Generated and submitted guiding questions to the participants for the second dialogue using themes developed by the participants;
9. Conducted and recorded the second dialogue;
10. Transcribed and analyzed the second dialogue;
11. Submitted the transcripts to the participants for approval;
12. Made corrections to transcripts as indicated by participants;
13. Analyzed data and made initial attempt at generating findings;
14. Submitted the findings to participants in narrative format (early version of Chapter 4);
15. Conducted a third interview in a small group to respond to initial themes and generate an action plan;
16. Coded data to make connections between research questions and participants' narratives;
17. Formulated tentative conclusions;
18. Submitted tentative conclusions to participants and requested changes or deletions;
19. Formulated final conclusions.

Data Analysis

As described by Riessman (1993), “Interviews are conversations in which both participants—teller and listener/questioner—develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerable freedom to both” (p. 55). According to Riessman (1993), the researcher “must consider how to facilitate narrative telling interviews, transcribe the purposes at hand, and approach narratives analytically” (p. 54). The purpose of the dialogue is to generate narratives that will illuminate the experiences of the participants. Webster and Mertova (2007) maintained that analysis of participant stories can deepen understanding surrounding questions under study. “Narrative can tap the social context or culture in which teaching and learning takes place. Just as a story unfolds the complexities of characters, relationships and settings, so can narrative illuminate complex problems in teaching and learning” (p. 13). To this end, data analysis occurred during the dialogue process in conversation with the participants and at the end of the study when the researcher sat with the data alone.

Although PAR does not traditionally directly address the question of validity the researcher provided several opportunities for the participants to approve of and suggest changes to the emerging themes, conclusions and recommendations for further research. Significant effort was made to solicit the feedback of the participants to guarantee that the researcher was not imposing his agenda on the participant’s story. On the question of validation when using narrative analysis as tool, Riessman (1993) wrote,

> How are we to evaluate a narrative analysis? Can one tell a better one from a worse one? Prevailing concepts of verification and procedures for establishing validity (from the experimental model) rely on realist assumptions and consequently are largely irrelevant to narrative studies. A personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of a

> world "out there." Our readings of data are themselves located in discourses (eg., scientific, feminist, therapeutic). (p. 64)

Prior to the small-group dialogue, the researcher spent several weeks reading the transcripts and considering the themes that emerged during the first two dialogues before writing a narrative that tentatively identified the themes that would answer the research questions for the study. The researcher then isolated himself for seven days to code the data, document the findings, and complete a first draft to be submitted to the participants for approval. Over the course of the seven days, the researcher color-coded participant responses as they corresponded to the research questions. For example, a response that spoke of a participant's fear of being fired was coded red. A response that indicated a commitment to personal prayer was coded green. The researcher contacted several of the participants by phone to clarify the meaning of an unclear response. The color-coded themes were then organized according to the research question to which the narrative spoke. Finally, the researcher drafted a first version of the findings to be submitted to participants for approval.

The researcher submitted the first draft of findings to the participants so that they had an opportunity to read the draft and to reflect on whether or not the findings were consistent with their experiences. During the small-group dialogue that followed, the five participants unanimously supported the findings as written in the first draft. The three participants who did not participate in the small group dialogue were given an opportunity to approve of the findings as well. All three of the remaining participants indicated support for the findings as agreed upon in advance.

Upon the conclusion of the small-group dialogue the researcher revised the first draft, generated conclusions and proposed ideas for further study. The participants

received a copy of the chapters that would be submitted for the dissertation defense and were given an opportunity to suggest changes or to contest conclusions. Not a single participant in the study challenged the conclusions or requested edits to the draft.

A summary of the data analysis process follows:

1. Recorded impressions after each dialogue, highlighting key themes;
2. Submitted questions and themes to participants prior to each dialogue;
3. Coded data and generated findings;
4. Submitted findings and conclusions to participants prior to the small group dialogue;
5. Conducted small group dialogue to generate an action plan;
6. Formulated conclusions and made proposals for further study.

Unlike more traditional forms of quantitative and qualitative research, narrative analysis is concerned with the perspective of the participant. Webster and Mertova (2007) described narrative analysis as a process that "seeks to elaborate and investigate individual interpretations and worldviews of complex and human-centered events. It is more concerned with individual truths than identifying generalizable and repeatable events" (p. 89).

Background of the Researcher

The researcher serves as a principal within a Catholic high school located in proximity to San Francisco, California. Prior to the principalship, he filled various positions within the same school including a religious-studies instructor, Chair of the Religious Studies Department, personal counselor, and director of the Office of Equity, Justice and Multicultural Education. His tenure with the school covers nine years and he

previously taught in another school sponsored by the same religious congregation. The researcher has been involved in Catholic education for 15 years. He was raised in Texas where he earned a bachelor of arts in theology and philosophy from a Catholic university. Before earning a master's degree in education in counseling psychology, he studied theology as a lay student at a major seminary in Texas and is currently completing the requirements for a doctorate in Catholic educational leadership from the University of San Francisco.

The researcher is a member of the National Catholic Educational Association and serves on the board of trustees for a small, underserved Catholic school within the Diocese of Oakland. In addition to his interests within the realm of education, the researcher is active in community-based initiatives involving racism, militarism, and human-rights issues. During his years as a teacher, counselor, and administrator, the researcher has worked to create inclusive communities within which GLBT adults and students feel safe, cared for, and respected. He has been involved in the development of multicultural programs fostering strong identity development and peaceful communities.

In the next chapter, you will hear the voices of the participants who agreed to engage in the study. Their testimonies illustrated the challenges of Catholic gay and lesbian Catholic secondary school teachers and highlighted their contributions to Catholic education.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Research Questions

The findings are organized according to the research questions under consideration in the current study. Each question was answered using participant narratives that illuminated his or her experience as a Catholic gay or lesbian Catholic secondary school teacher. The participants were given the opportunity to approve the themes that supported the questions under investigation. The themes that emerged were (a) Catholic identity, (b) prayer/sacramental life, (c) mentoring gay and lesbian students, (d) silence/invisibility, and (e) fear.

Research Question 1

How does a homosexual identity affect what it means to be a Catholic, gay or lesbian, secondary-school educator?

Although the theme of silence/invisibility was commonly experienced among the sample, it emerged differently for each study participant. For a few, silence was experienced during the celebration of weddings, the baptism of children, or in the absence of a partner's name within the staff directory. For others, invisibility manifested as colleague fear of engaging in conversation with them at lunch or fear of displaying a photo of their partner in their office. Invisibility was also expressed as a lack of clear support from administrators that contributed to a sense of marginalization. In the following dialogue excerpt, Ashley described her fear of engaging in any classroom discussion related to sexuality due to her sexual orientation:

> So I've always been very careful and, in fact, because of being gay—you know, being a lesbian—I think I almost stayed away from sexual issues in the classroom more than, you know, other teachers who, you know, just tackled it and didn't

> think about it twice. I didn't want kids to ask me questions in a public forum. In some sense, it almost felt like I was failing my students because of my own fears. (Everitt, 2010, p. 8)

When asked if she felt like she feared punishment for engaging in classroom discussion involving her partner, Ashley explained that it was difficult to balance the real possibility that she could lose her job with the impossibility of denying the existence of her partner with her students. Lying is not an option for her, as evidenced in her following dialogue comments:

> There is no way that I could not be honest in a sense. I just don't have it in me to not be honest, to blatantly lie. I just can't do that. I'm not, I've never been that kind of person. My mom taught me well when I was a little girl. (Everitt, 2010, p. 14)

Ashley was asked if she spent a significant amount of time each day thinking about the fact that she is a lesbian woman working within a Catholic school and she stated,

> No, it's definitely not always present. I don't know. I don't know, this is a total "guesstimate"; I'd say maybe half. You know I think it depends on who I am with and what the situation is. If I am leading a meeting and this person is praying for his wife because it is her birthday, but then I consciously don't pray for my wife on her birthday, kind of thing. You know? Or [a] lunchtime conversation; it's like, I look around, "Who am I sitting with; what can I say?" You know, but I have a picture of my daughter and my wife in my office. You know, sometimes, depending on who is in there I wonder if they are going to notice, and other times, it's like, I don't even think about it. So, half the day, I guess. (Everitt, 2010, p. 16)

After many years of working within a non-Catholic environment, Roger began a 30-year career in Catholic education. He had not yet disclosed personally or publicly his sexual orientation, and teaching within a Catholic school caused him to maintain this privacy for many years. He stated,

> You know, I look back on that and I think, "Oh, once I started teaching religion full time in a Catholic high school, I became more closeted." I believe that, by entering a Catholic high school [as a teacher], I basically became more closeted. (Everitt, 2010, p. 270)

Roger was asked if he made a conscious decision not to deal with his homosexuality and he stated, “Yeah . . . I mean, my intentionality was conditioned by the repression and fear that I felt about my own internalized homophobia” (Everitt, 2010, p. 271). Roger described his relationship with school administrators and colleagues as prudent. He was not entirely comfortable disclosing his sexual orientation to administrators because he was uncertain as to the manner in which they would respond. He explained, “I seek to access the virtue of prudence; I seek to be prudent in my choices. I would say that it would be rare for me to tell an administrator” (Everitt, 2010, p. 272). Describing his relationship in this regard with colleagues he stated, “I will not lead a totally closeted life. I choose people I want to share with, and those people I trust and tell them; I trust them. It is a little bit more of a deliberate process” (Everitt, 2010, p. 281).

Although Cyndi had disclosed her sexual orientation to many of her colleagues, she remained careful, as indicated in the following dialogue excerpt:

> I think, if they knew for sure. . . . I think people [students] can guess, and think of “Well, yeah, she is.” If they know for sure, like if it was a statement, then I think that would be something that they could use against me.

Cyndi was asked if she ever felt oppressed because she could not be completely open about who she is as a Catholic lesbian. She was hesitant to use the term *oppressed* because it placed her in the position of a victim. She did, however, describe her experience as a gay Catholic in the following manner: “I do find it exhausting, I mean, and I feel like sometimes it’s exhausting just to do a lot of stuff, but being gay is another part; it’s a piece of that” (Everitt, 2010, p. 75). When asked if it was possible that exhaustion is another manifestation of oppression, she replied, “Maybe; it probably is. I think maybe that the reason we don’t want to say we feel oppressed is because that’s so,

like, oh my God; why would you do that to yourself'" (Everitt, 2010, p. 75)? Cyndi was asked to provide a 30-second summary of what she wished to convey in this study. Her response indicated frustration toward a culture and society that is rigid in its thinking concerning homosexual people. This caused her to feel discounted. She stated,

> I would basically say that we're discounted, that we are not trusted and that our experience is not trusted. I wonder how much of it is combined with being a woman, too. People don't want to understand. It's like, "Not only can you not understand it, but you don't even want to spend 5 minute[s] to try and understand it or listen to my perspective."

Joseph described the experience of invisibility at his school following his commitment ceremony. It is a common practice in his school to celebrate the important milestones of community members (i.e., birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, and births). Joseph was asked if he expected to be recognized publicly at the school and he responded that he did not have that expectation. When asked why, he stated, "No, there won't be anything because it is organized by the administration and I'm not even talking to them about it [the commitment ceremony]" (Everitt, 2010, p. 140). He explained that it was the same for other gay and lesbian teachers at his school, stating,

> I know that some of the homosexual teachers are partnered. You know some of them bring their partners to different events, but you know, if it's, like, they are celebrating an anniversary, they're not gonna say, "[administrator named], you know, could . . . ." They wouldn't expect [administrator named] to recognize that at a faculty event.

In several dialogue sessions, the participants described the policies of their school regarding sexual orientation as similar to the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Lori explained,

> [School named] policy of dealing with homosexuality is "don't ask, don't tell." I know that my administrator is trying to nuance that. My administrator is working with other people from around the Bay Area to try and get better help for the kids, but as for faculty right now, it's "don't ask, don't tell." (Everitt, 2010, p. 197)

Jean also described the unwritten policy at her school as “don’t ask, don’t tell.” She acknowledged feeling somewhat hopeful, but dealing with gay issues is “an area of growth” for her principal. She reported, “Yeah, you can be gay, but not too gay” (Everitt, 2010, p. 130) Put simply, covering is the expected norm at her school. Jean has been an active member of two parishes within her diocese. However, she has been hesitant to get involved in a group that supports GLBT parishioners because there are several parents from her school community who belong to the parish. She confided,

> I wish I felt more comfortable being open in my parish . . . and so, there are plenty of parents that go to my church . . . so there’s a GLBT group at my church, but I …and I know who runs it, but I’ve never gone to anything.” (Everitt, 2010, p. 118)

Kenny felt strongly supported by his school community of colleagues and administrators, [but] he was unsure how the governing board of his school would feel about an openly gay man at the school. He commented,

> The board of directors, the board of trustees, you know, again if . . . if I were to put that out [being gay] in a more visible way, I don’t have the confidence that I would be as supported as I am now. (Everitt, 2010, p. 167)

Kenny has struggled to find an appropriate way to disclose his sexual orientation to students without it being viewed as a major statement. He explained,

> I don’t know if that is something that I would necessarily want to do in a statement. I think that what I would try to do is “come out” in those times and places where it would be natural, like at a conversation at the table . . . talking about my partner. I have a picture of my partner right there on my desk. (Everitt, 2010, p. 173)

He went on to describe the student culture at his school, maintaining that the students feel comfortable coming out at school, but the gay and lesbian adults continue to experience fear in that regard. He commented, “It is really . . . it is frustrating. It’s frustrating and

there is a sense of fear. I don't understand if that fear is about the parents or the board of trustees or our reputation" (Everitt, 2010, p. 169).

The dialogue with Michael did not directly address the concerns that were discussed in Research Question 1.

Research Question 2

How does identity as a Catholic gay or lesbian educator impact the experience of teaching within Catholic secondary-school education?

Catholic Identity

The theme of Catholic identity emerged clearly within the dialogue transcripts. Working within Catholic schools was a choice made freely by the participants in response to their love for the Church and their hope that their own witness to the Christian life would have an impact on their students. They were intentional about their commitment to Catholic education, and their love for their vocation within the Catholic education community was clear. Although many gay and lesbian Catholics leave the Church after coming to terms with their sexual orientation, the study participants were nurtured and affirmed by the Catholic Church during their coming-out process. For many, it was a relationship with a Church member or membership within a Catholic community that helped them come to terms with their sexual identity.

Ashley was raised Catholic and has always identified as Catholic. Her experiences of Catholic community in graduate school led her to a career path in Catholic education. For Ashley, leaving the Church was not an option, in terms of dealing with her identity as a lesbian. She described her relationship with the Church as positive, one within which she came to understand the fullness of God's love. In the following dialogue excerpt,

Ashley discussed what the Catholic faith means to her and how her experience of God facilitates her honesty about her sexuality:

> It's just, it's like, I mean, it sounds "cliché-ish" after a while, but it's like, this is how God made me. Honestly, there are many a day when I think I wish God hadn't made me this way because it would be a hell of a lot easier, but by the same token, it's made me more compassionate. You know, it wouldn't be right to deny part of who I am because it's fundamental to my being. It's very fundamental to my being and to who I am. I've learned so much about love by being in different relationships and the challenges of how to love a person, and so much about love, even more so in my romantic relationships about love, and being a parent, and none of that would have happened had I not come out. I mean, you know, it's just like I remember holding my daughter very early on, like within her first weeks of birth and thinking, "Oh God, if God loves us as much as I love this infant that I'm holding, that's amazing." Like it's just this whole new understanding of how much God loves us, and that's kind of this cyclical thing, like thinking about who I am, who God created and made a being. It's like, well, accept it and a move on kind of thing. God wouldn't do this to me, you know. I think so many gay and lesbian people just denied it for a long time, ignored it; maybe it'll go away. Tried making it work with guys, you know; it's just kind of natural, kind of typical coming-out story, and it's like I've got to come out, and leaving the Church wasn't an option at that point either. I didn't see them [coming out and staying in the Church] as being mutually exclusive because it was within the Catholic Church that I have this spirituality and relationship with God, and there's so much more to my Catholicity. It's working with the poor and all the "underdogs" in society, and you know, it's like, I love the underdogs that much more now because I'm one of them, different than others are, but we all have to stick together and look out for each other, and it is just about loving other people too, like I've said before—loving myself and loving others. (Everitt, 2010, p. 22)

Roger has always been Catholic and cannot imagine his life outside the Catholic Church. With the exception of a few years right after college, he has worked within Catholic education as a classroom teacher and administrator for over 20 years and takes great pride in his Catholic faith. He stated,

> I would say, you know, first of all, my relationship with the Catholic Church has always been conditioned by my family life. My devotional experiences in my family and my grandparents were the "lenses" through which I saw the Church. My relationship with the Church has always been conditioned by my relationship with Christ. (Everitt, 2010, p. 272)

Roger continued to describe his relationship with the Catholic Church as a response to his baptism. He was hesitant to say that there is one clear definition of what it means to be Catholic, but he was able to identify what it means for him in the following dialogue comments:

> What's Catholic identity? It's the same question; it's never going to be answered, and I thought about it in terms of myself. The Catholic identity question has never been a big problem for me because of the source of my Catholic identity. The source of my Catholic identity is rooted in my baptismal certificate, and in the worst moment—the angriest moments that I have had with the Church . . . when I've been with people, Catholics who've come from the extreme opposite side, who look at me like people might have looked at protestors in the Vietnam War. When they say, "Love it or leave it," I just stand there and say, "Hey, I have my baptismal certificate. I don't need your approval," and with that, that understanding of my identity has always been through the sacraments. It's always been through my relationship with Christ and with the sacraments that make me a Catholic. So for me, Catholic identity in my prayer life has always been secure. What has changed is that I don't go to my prayer life to ask to be forgiven [for being gay] anymore. You know? That's over with. Yeah, no more forgiveness. You know? No more asking for forgiveness for being gay. Now it's acceptance and gratitude for the life I've lived. I try to teach what it means to believe in God's providential care. For me, it's the Eucharist in the Catholic experience that makes me Catholic. (Everitt, 2010, p. 275)

Lori comes from a religiously diverse family. Her mother is Catholic and she describes her as "Irish Catholic—very, very, very, very Catholic" and her father is Protestant. Lori was raised in the Protestant Church but converted to Catholicism while she was an undergraduate at a Catholic university. Her conversion to Catholicism was the result of the relationships she had with the religious at her university and the Catholic Church commitment to social justice. She explained,

> The piece that really brought me into the Catholic Church was not social justice for charity, but social justice for solidarity and relationships. You know, going to Mexico when I was a kid and building homes. You never met the people for whom you were building the home. I mean, that's a fundamentally different experience when you're doing service in a Catholic environment. It's all about relationships, or it should be, and I had a few priests that I became very close friends with who were academic mentors to me. Just some key people and a nun

> at [university named] who were, you know; I'd take a class and the classes were six people. So you'd end up going to coffee after class with your professor. That level of closeness was great and I loved it. I loved the intellectual history of the Church, so it really was kind of an idyllic, optimistic entry into the Church, and it was through an academic and social justice lens. It was that more than it was liturgy; it was definitely more cerebral in that way. (Everitt, 2010, p. 191)

Joseph has been teaching within Catholic education for his entire career. He left religious life after many years and has worked within Catholic schools since that time. Joseph became aware of his sexual identity during his time with the religious order. His experience in religious life was primarily positive, and it was within the religious community that he began to feel affirmed as a gay man. In the following dialogue excerpt, he described his first two years in religious life as a positive experience:

> I had a self-awareness that wasn't really comfortable; wasn't really out to hardly anyone but a couple of friends prior to entering the [religious community named] . . . but during the first years of formation, there was a very strong emphasis on soul searching, introspection, discernment, lots of time to really consider self, [and] self-identity, and so that was a great experience. It was great to have a spiritual director who could really guide me through some of the questions that came up, just a very supportive group of people, and a number of my fellow students were gay. So it felt comfortable to gain my self-awareness there. I felt very supported as a member of the [religious community named] and a gay man. (Everitt, 2010, p. 133)

In a conversation with Joseph about his commitment to Catholic education and his identity as a Catholic gay man, he shared how spiritual direction helped him find his place within the Church. He stated,

> I think, when I was struggling the most with my vocation in the [religious order named], I think that I was fortunate enough to have an excellent spiritual director who, as we kind of worked through the issues, helped me understand that it was never an issue of whether or not I wanted to continue ministering in the Church. It was more a matter of whether or not God was calling me to religious life. Since leaving religious life, I have had some interesting conversations with former classmates who were also gay. Some of them have left the Church, but I never felt like that was something that I was even considering. So in a sense, I haven't really even discerned that question, you know. I've always felt like being Catholic is

> what I am comfortable with in terms of my religious identity. (Everitt, 2010, p. 153)

Joseph reflected on a few family members who were raised in a more fundamentalist tradition and have since left the Church. Although he does struggle with some of the doctrinal positions of the Church, being Catholic is a positive experience for him. He offered the following dialogue comments:

> I don't know if those same kids would have grown up with so much anger if they had been raised Catholic. I think that there is something—this very positive message, very important message—in a way of living your faith that is part of being Catholic, and so I think it's more than just having grown up with it and it being what I know. If I'd grown up in a fundamentalist faith, I could imagine seeing the Catholic Church as offering a lot of really important things for living out faith in a meaningful way. (Everitt, 2010, p. 158)

When asked if it was fair to say that being Catholic is as much a part of his identity as being gay, Joseph made it clear that, for him, Catholicism is a choice. He does not view the two concepts the same because he has a choice about being Catholic, while he does not have a choice with regard to his gay orientation. He also indicated that, if he had not had a supportive community within the Church, he would have left. He concluded by stating, "So I hope I never have an experience that's so negative that it would drive me away or force me [to] choose, to that decision" (Everitt, 2010, p. 158).

Cyndi is an Italian Catholic who described herself as "very Catholic." She was raised Catholic in the San Francisco Bay Area by ethnic, immigrant Catholic parents. She left a religious order for a career in Catholic education. She has always worked for Catholic institutions and considers her work a vocation. Cyndi described what it means to her to be a practicing Catholic in the following manner:

> I guess I have never thought about it like that. I mean, I just feel so Catholic. It's hard to imagine not being Catholic, probably because of the way that I look at things like the sacraments. They are really important. I'm very sacramental, not in

> terms of like going to a baptism and all that, but I feel like the whole thing that grace is interacting with ordinary life is so important to me, and to me, that's very Catholic. Catholic social teaching is huge in how I make my decisions and how I look at the world. The theologians I read are mostly Catholic theologians. Even given every awful thing about the Catholic Church, I think it has one of the broadest ways of looking at the world, and when I look at other world religions, you know, like sure, Buddhism is kind of cool and interesting, but I'm not Eastern so like it doesn't make sense to my head; like psychologically, it doesn't make sense, and I like to struggle with stuff. I think Catholic theologians are some of the smartest people in the world, and I kind of join them and struggle with them. So that's kind of how I see practicing. I don't see it as [just] going to church. (Everitt, 2010, p. 280)

When asked if she is as Catholic as she is a lesbian, she responded,

> Right, yeah. It's kind of the same thing as people saying, "Do you choose to be queer or do you choose to," you know, "Is it a choice or were you born like that?" I just feel like it's who I am. I feel like my sexual orientation, psychological orientation, and spiritual orientation are the same. It's just inborn like that, like I am just very Catholic, you know, and like being Catholic is so worldwide. It's very universal. You know, you can go to a Catholic Church in any country and, in some ways, you will see it so different and, in some ways, so similar. It's like paradigms always clashing all the time, all over the world . . . and it's been happening for so long. I mean, I love that part. (Everitt, 2010, p. 40)

Michael is clear about why he loves his Catholic faith. He was born and raised Catholic. His entire life journey has been within the Catholic Church. As a member of an ethnic Catholic community, Michael says that "a Spanish kind of Catholicism was engrained in us" and that he was raised with processions and rituals and that he was drawn to it as a child. He stated, "I didn't know anything other than that. I just thought everyone was Catholic" (Everitt, 2010, p. 234). In a conversation about Catholic identity and the teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality, he explained how he manages the resultant conflict in the following manner:

> I've always been Catholic. As I'm teaching and getting deeper or questioning my faith every day, every year I always ask myself, "What's going on with the Church and why do I remain Catholic?" And where I'm at now, at this point in my life and my relationship with [partner named] and so forth, I'm very comfortable with where I am, and I'm proud to be Catholic, despite all of the bad

> things that are going on, especially with the doctrines, encyclicals, and official letters coming out from Rome about homosexuals and how bad we are. I'm very active at the parish that [partner named] and I belong to so, yes, I am very much Catholic. (Everitt, 2010, p. 234)

Michael described his faith with great excitement and an obvious passion as he went on to explain how, at pivotal moments in his life, the Catholic Church was a grounding force for him. He recounted,

> When I started, like, getting involved in church when I was little, becoming an altar server and an altar boy, and I started doing things, Mass wasn't just something up there on the stage that was going on, but I was actually participating and helping out in the Mass. That experience brought me closer to my faith. So that was a significant point in my faith development as a child.
>
> And then again at confirmation. When I was preparing myself for confirmation, it brought me deeper and made me appreciate my Catholic heritage and my Catholic faith so that I was able to "yes" consciously. Yes, I want to be Catholic, and so completing my initiation sacraments with confirmation, I was saying, "Yes, I will be Catholic." Back then, they used the term *soldier of Christ*, but it wasn't so stressed, but you know, to use that term, that old term, I will stand and defend our faith as best as I can, and then that was when I started seriously considering the priesthood as an option for a career.
>
> I was a young vocation so, in college, the professors always stressed the importance of questioning your faith, and that was difficult for me because, in my culture, you don't question authority. You don't question your faith. It's just handed down to you and you accept it, kind of like the Baltimore catechism. So… when my professors questioned or challenged me to grow in my faith by questioning it, it really was hard for me, but again, it was a pivotal point in my faith formation as a Catholic, and it was because of them [priests at the seminary] encouraging me to question my faith that I embraced it all over again because I got to know again what it means to be Catholic, but not only in the academic sense, but they were also encouraging us to grow spiritually. So both were going on at the same time and, coincidentally, it was in the seminary that I came to embrace my homosexuality—my sexual orientation—and be proud of it.
>
> And I think that's why I remain Catholic. All of these pivotal points in my faith journey have always been within the Church, and they've always been sacred, formative years, and I was never, in a sense, "burned" by the Church. I could have been. If I had come out to a spiritual director or to a formation director that was homophobic, I could have been easily tossed out of the seminary, but that wasn't my experience. I know it's been other people's experience, homosexuals' experiences, that they've come out and they've been, you know, asked to leave,

> but that was never my experience. I've always had a positive experience in the sense of me embracing my sexuality, my gayness, so to speak, in the seminary. So that's why I think I stay Catholic, because the Church actually helped and nurtured me in my most vulnerable years of discovering my sexual orientation. (Everitt, 2010, p. 235)

Michael also spoke of the issue of choice and, more specifically, his choice to remain Catholic given the teaching of the Church. His position on his membership in the Church relates to freedom. When asked if he ever resented the Church, he responded,

> No, because I know that it is a choice. I have a choice to be in this situation and . . . no one is forcing me to be in this position. I think that is one of the liberating things for me in my process as a gay man in the Catholic Church. I choose to be in this Church. No one is forcing me and, because it is a choice, I do it willingly, but I also know that it is hard and that there are times when I do have to censor [my sexual orientation and my relationship with my partner] and they are hurtful; they are sad, but, again, ultimately it is a choice that I make. I remind myself that I do not have to be in this situation. I choose to be here. So at any time that I don't feel like I can [do] this anymore, I can leave. I don't have to stay here, but I choose to be here. When I remind myself of that, it doesn't make me angry. It reminds me that I have a choice, that I am free. I think that is where gays, lesbians, and those who are transgendered who stay in the Church or stay within the ministry, ordained or not, become angry—when they don't realize that they have a choice, because they do. We all do, ultimately, at least that is what I believe. (Everitt, 2010, p. 256)

Kenny's experience as a Catholic dates back to his experience as an active member in his high school youth group. As with several of the other participants, his Catholic identity is "woven into the fabric" of his entire life. He was raised a Catholic by parents who were involved in the local parish. When asked if he felt as Catholic as he is gay, Kenny responded,

> Yeah, I was thinking about that. What is it that makes me who I am? And again, I just can't separate the two. You know, part of it, sure, is growing up culturally Catholic from the beginning. Although my parents weren't very involved, they were Catholic. They always have been and always will be. So you know, it's something that was just part of who I was growing up. You know, there wasn't a point where I remember making a decision or realizing that I was, because I just grew up from the cradle, you know, in this family faith environment. It wasn't a

> religious denomination; it was part of my cultural makeup, that familial experience of who I was and will continue to be. (Everitt, 2010, p. 185)

Kenny disclosed his sexual orientation during his sophomore year in high school. He had positive experiences coming out and even entered the seminary after graduating from high school. The Church was a welcoming and positive experience for Kenny during the years of his identity development as a gay Catholic man. He recalled, "I didn't hear anything negative from my parish about homosexuality. I don't remember. I don't have bad experiences from early on" (Everitt, 2010, p. 161). It was a priest who, after hearing Kenny's confession, helped him come to terms with his homosexuality and his relationship with God. Kenny recounted,

> I told him I was gay and his response and his reaction to me was very affirming. We talked afterwards and, for the next couple of years, periodically. We'd meet for lunch, coffee, and just talk. He was delightful in terms of not taking this issue I presented him and causing me any harm. I mean, he really just treated me like a friend; he honored it [my homosexuality] in a very positive way. (Everitt, 2010, p. 162)

Like Joseph and Michael, Kenny entered the seminary before beginning his career in Catholic education. It was while in the seminary that he began to fully accept and understand the relationship between Catholicism and homosexuality. Kenny's faith in God helped him understand the teaching of the Church. In turn, the education he received in the seminary helped him put the teaching of the Church into perspective, which has allowed him to maintain a strong Catholic identity. In response to a question regarding the role the Church played in helping him understand his sexuality, Kenny replied,

> Right, in an academic sense, having studied philosophy and finding sort of an affinity to that sort of thinking, that logical exploration of ideas helped me sort of, in the abstract academic sense, realize where the teaching [on homosexuality] came from, and I was able to sort of "step back" from it and recognize that "thread" of how an Aristotelian natural-law understanding of human sexuality sort of trajectory led in that particular direction, and it had less to do with my faith and

> more to do with a particular theological strand. So, for myself, I would say also the same thing, that the more I learned about it and the more I saw that it was in a negative light, the more I was able to kind of realize that it didn't say anything about me and my relationship with God. It said more about an outdated philosophy that just didn't fit anymore. (Everitt, 2010, p. 162)

When asked how he manages comments from colleagues and friends who cannot believe that he maintains a positive Catholic identity in light of Church teaching on homosexuality, he acknowledged that some of his colleagues struggle to understand him, stating,

> It's been interesting because many of them are confused as to how I can continue to be Catholic and continue to be a happy Catholic, for the most part, positive and encouraging, when, as some of them see . . . my Church theologically doesn't value me and my relationships and my identity as a gay man. So there is some confusion there. I would say, being here, having been here now for several years, that my colleagues are able to sort of intuit that there's something more there, that my faith does not rest on particular teachings, but that my faith sort of rests on something bigger. (Everitt, 2010, p. 166)

Jean was raised Catholic and comes from a family in which the Catholic faith is still practiced. She attends Mass with her family when she visits them out of state and worships in a local parish on a regular basis. Catholicism was the grounding force in her family because her father's profession required them to move on a regular basis. She struggles with Church teaching on homosexuality, but maintains a Catholic identity. She explained that the Catholic culture of her childhood is one of the reasons she remains Catholic today. She stated,

> We were suburban Catholic. It wasn't until I moved to the Bay Area that I realized people were Irish Catholic or Italian Catholic. We were just Catholics in a suburban kind of way. We went to Mass pretty much every Sunday. My parents were lectors and lay Eucharistic ministers, took communion to the homebound. I was part of CYO and the youth representative on the parish council. (Everitt, 2010, p. 81)

Jean continues to struggle with finding a parish that meets her unique needs. She would like to be more involved in parish life but experiences anxiety surrounding the relationship between her school and the local parish. She values the community of parish life but would also like to belong to a parish where she could be more open about her sexuality. When asked why she remains Catholic, Jean responded,

> Well, I have toyed with being Episcopalian and my mother was Episcopalian. She converted when I was 10. So I don't know. I'm pretty Catholic, but I am tired of the patriarchy, and I'm, you know, Catholic and I work in a Catholic school, you know. (Everitt, 2010, p. 122)

Catholic identity was a substantial theme throughout all of the dialogue sessions. All of the participants described their relationships with Catholicism from significantly different perspectives, but maintaining a Catholic identity is important to each of them. Some are clearer on why this identity is important to them, but they all addressed the issue in some manner. The participants were clear on the importance of prayer and sacramental life in their relationships with God and the Church.

Student Mentoring

The issue of mentoring gay and lesbian students surfaced early in the participant-dialogue sessions. It initially appeared as if there was little interest in mentoring this student population, but as the dialogue progressed, the concern over the implications within a Catholic school surfaced. Unlike their public-school peers, gay and lesbian Catholic educators are less concerned over their freedom to officially mentor gay and lesbian students. In contrast to their public-school peers, Catholic gay and lesbian educators did not believe that nondisclosure of their sexual orientation impacted their teaching or their relationships with students. In fact, several of the study participants suggested that the environment within Catholic schools is more supportive of students

than that within public schools. The participants referred to the considerable effort Catholic schools make to support all students. It is an integral facet of Catholic-school culture to create a loving environment within which all students can thrive. The diversity of responses received to questions related to mentoring gay and lesbian students is compelling.

Cyndi plays a significant role in mentoring students at her school. Although she has a positive relationship with her students, she has chosen not to disclose her sexual orientation to them for fear of professional harm. When asked if it was her openness about many issues that prompted homosexual students to seek her advice, she replied,

> Yeah, I don't know if it is because they are gay that they come to me. They will come to me about anything, and I don't know, I mean, I would be really, I don't think I would feel comfortable [with] people knowing I was gay, and I don't know, sometimes I go back and forth. I kinda believe, as a teacher, you know, your personal life should be private, but this kind of [has] even a more extra thing on it because I feel like, if people found out, they didn't like it, you know. You said, like, what could they do, like, you know, I feel like they have a lot of power over you, or over me, like, you know, I think if they knew for sure, I think people can guess and think, "Oh well, yeah, she is," or whatever, but, if they know for sure, like, if it was a statement, then I think that would be really, I would feel like it would be something they could use against me. (Everitt, 2010, p. 69)

The topic of gay-straight alliances (GSA) emerged in several of the dialogues. The purpose of such alliances is to form supportive relationships with straight students whose goal is to confront homophobia and organize events to educate the school community on issues facing homosexual youth. GSAs typically require adult sponsors; however, they are not permitted to organize within the majority of Catholic schools. Ashley's school does not permit the organization of any special-interest groups that represent a protected class or particular cause. She acknowledged that the mentoring of gay and lesbian students is conducted on an informal basis, explaining,

> So any mentoring that I've done of [gay or lesbian] students has been done accidentally. A couple of students over the years have sought me out, you know, figured out who I am. In the years after I came out in that class, a whole generation of students knew who I was because kids talk, but now nobody seeks me out, and that's where I sometimes wonder if I am failing my students because I am not more open because of my own fear about the "other shoe dropping," but I do, you know, here in my head, I say I want to stick with Catholic education because I want to be an example to students, but I don't know if I am being a very good example because I am so "under the radar." Part of me is afraid that my own fear and kind of needing to keep quiet has meant that I haven't been as accessible to students who might need me. (Everitt, 2010, p. 20)

Roger expressed concern over mentoring gay and lesbian students within the school setting. He did not view a GSA or other support group for teens as appropriate unless it was handled by the counseling department. He explained,

> If I had a son come to me and say that he thought he was gay, my counsel would be to live his life as he saw fit, but not to make a public disclosure until at the least his senior year, but if it's possible to live his life fully without disclosing it until after he got out of high school, I would urge them to do so. I would be fine with mentoring gay teenagers, but through a church, a parish, a recognized nonprofit organization, but not in a school setting. I would be uncomfortable as a teacher; it wouldn't really meet what I believe to be true. The students I've known who have come out in high school, by and large, are coming out in some ways for the same reason I prepared to come out—for the wrong reasons. I mean, they are not bad reasons, but they are not necessarily the best reasons, given the time and place. (Everitt, 2010, p. 294)

When asked how he would respond to a request from a student for help with starting a GSA that was approved by the principal of the school, he answered:

> I would respond with appropriate prudence. There are so many emotions that come to bear on this issue in high school. I would immediately begin to question what safeguards were in place for the students, as well as for me, because, again, it is my bias, but I can't see that happening. It's hard for me to picture it at a Catholic school in 2009. Now, maybe 10 years from now, 15 years from now, when these kids are parents and their kids are in school, another generation will shift, but for many people of my generation, they don't want their sons or daughters exposed in private schools to what they might consider inappropriate sexual lifestyles. I mean, I know these people. I'm sure you do too, right? And I, I don't agree with them totally, but I would always want to be prudent, and prudence in these situations dictate[s] concern for the individual, but finding an appropriate place for him or herself to express themselves, you know? The only

> time I thought about mentoring gay students as a positive thing would be in a small Christian community. I would only want to do that within a faith context, but it is so hard to do because the minute . . . you become identified . . . you are exposing yourself to all sorts of political foolishness. (Everitt, 2010, p. 294)

Roger also expressed that, at this point in his career, he has no interest in disclosing his sexual orientation to a student, explaining,

> In the last six or seven years, I've become more comfortable with that [deflecting honest responses to personal questions from students]. I've changed a lot in the sense that, now, for me, being a Catholic, coming out in the classroom setting, I don't want to do it, and I wouldn't want to do it. I have a life of my own that I cherish. If a kid came to me, I would first refer him to the counseling center. If they're under 18—that's the other thing—I think it is a risky thing for a teacher to mentor a gay student. I would never mentor him outside of the counseling center's direction. The most appropriate place for them to be going is to a counseling environment where there are safeguards in place for the professional, as well as the student. My challenge of being a Catholic who happens to be gay is how do I become actively involved in change outside of the classroom? (Everitt, 2010, p. 277)

Cyndi's approach to mentoring gay and lesbian students is centered around the needs of the students. Although her school has chosen not to establish a group specifically addressing the needs of this student population, she is certain that the school would respond if a group of students expressed it was important to them. She explained,

> Now, if the kids decided that they needed one, it would be a different story. I've never had students talk about it. They have sometimes said to me that it is more of an issue for adults than it is for us, which is kind of interesting. I don't know where that is going in the future. (Everitt, 2010, p. 49)

Cyndi does address issues of sexuality with her students, but in the context of spirituality and human development. She commented,

> When you are in this work with kids you have to talk about it. Anytime you are dealing with people, you are going to be dealing with gay people too. Kids are dealing with sexuality. Sexuality is top on their list and kids experiment. (Everitt, 2010, p.69)

Cyndi has chosen not to disclose her sexual orientation to students in private unless they have graduated from the school or there is a specific pastoral reason to do so. Rather, she listens to student concerns and attempts to convey her understanding of the issues they face. She explained,

> It really depends on the student and what they need to hear. I might not say in "black-and-white" terms that I am a lesbian. I will say something like "I have been there. I understand what it feels like to not know who you really are," and I feel like, then, they can kind of think, "Well, is she talking about being gay or [what]?" I've never had a kid straight out ask me. (Everitt, 2010, p. 207)

Joseph reported that the topic of homosexuality emerges in classroom discussion on a regular basis. Although he addresses the topic in an abstract manner, he does not disclose his own sexual identity. When asked in a dialogue about his impression of how students view this issue, he responded,

> Certainly it comes up. The kids are so far beyond caring what the Church teaches on this that it, like, they just think of it as anachronistic and outdated. I think that they see that their positions are so different from the Church's that they can't even see whether there are similarities. They're just like, "Oh, that's interesting and nice that they say we shouldn't treat gays and lesbians with disrespect. We should treat them with love and respect, but don't give them options for marriage or lots of other things, sacramental life." I think the kids just see it as hypocrisy and they are pretty dismissive. (Everitt, 2010, p. 135)

Joseph was surprised that some of the study participants had described a fear of mentoring gay and lesbian students within their respective schools. He expressed that he is not fearful, but acknowledged that he has not extended himself in a deliberate way to mentor this student population. However, he did reveal that he had concerns over the level of support he would receive from the administration if he openly overexpressed the desire to more formally mentor gay and lesbian students, stating,

> As much as I've had some opportunities to talk with students who are dealing with issues of their own orientation and wanting to do something about it, it made

> me wonder, if I hold back more than I would want to because of the uncertainty about how the administration will deal with it. (Everitt, 2010, p. 150)

Joseph described the following conditions necessary for him to agree to mentor gay and lesbian students in a more formal capacity:

> I think what I'd need from the administrators here is to know that I had their backing. If concerns are raised by either elements within the school, but probably more so from the diocese . . . if there was pressure put on them, I would like to know if they will support me in being a moderator of a club or whatever the support group is. I guess I don't know how I'd measure that in terms of . . . it'd have to be a big amount of trust that the administration would support me, and you know, when they have pressure from different elements in the community to stop something like that . . . I'm sure if it [student group] were something much more visible, there would be elements that would say I shouldn't be in a Catholic school. (Everitt, 2010, p. 150)

Similar to the other schools represented in this study, the school within which Joseph taught does have an "umbrella" diversity group that often addresses issues of sexual orientation. He suspected that the school did not support a single-issue group, given the problems other Catholic schools have had when they attempted to support gay and lesbian students within the context of a student group. He explained,

> I know the teachers . . . involved in putting it [diversity group] together would like to have had a support group just for the gay students on campus, but I think [they] were also aware of what was going on at [school named] at the time and they were getting a lot of pressure from the bishop. I think they took just a little, you know, more low-key approach. (Everitt, 2010, p. 150)

Joseph addressed mentoring gay and lesbian students when responding to a dialogue question on how he would present his perspective if the bishops reviewed this study. He stated,

> I think I'd want to emphasize that a lot of the students I see who are struggling—you know, same issues—have simply just lost any hope that the Church is going to be there for them, and that as a gay Catholic educator, it's very hard for me to defend the Church's teachings and practices even though I know certain teachings are supportive of the dignity of all people and there are different positive statements that are made by bishops. There are different policies and rules in the

> way schools are run that the students can't even get to the point of hearing their message about all people being treated with dignity and respect. That's being lost.
>
> I think many students will walk away from the Church and find communities that are more supportive. I don't see a lot of the kids having, you know, being . . . you know, like, from my generation. I think we felt very much a part of the Church and it would have felt like I was losing something, a really essential part of who I am by leaving it. It's not like they have something [relationship with the Church] that's a regular part of their life outside of [school named] that they are walking away from. (Everitt, 2010, p. 152)

The school within which Kenny taught also prohibits the formation of specific affinity groups addressing sexual orientation or other issues of diversity. He regards his conversations with individual students as opportunities to mentor those with a homosexual orientation. For Kenny, it is less about helping students with sexual identity than it is about affirming goodness and encouraging students to take their faith seriously. He explained,

> Well, to me, that speaks of the student needing to know if he fits in. A young person coming and asking that question says that they're also struggling, that they have faith questions that aren't resolved, that they have viewpoints that are maturing, that a sixth-grade spiritual education isn't addressing them as young adolescents, and to me, that is sort of like an opportunity for me to share. If there's room for me, there's room for you, you know. Why do I stay? Because this is my family, you know, and I might disagree with family members. I might disagree with experiences that have taken place in the past, but I'm not going to walk away from my family.
>
> I think if we get credit for anything [it's for] helping young people navigate their own faith. I mean, I think about the missionary effort of the Church to evangelize people. I meant that, to me, is evangelization right there . . . able to share with a young person our own faith struggles in a way that is going to affirm them in their own faith struggles? If toasters were given out for reaffirming young people in the Catholic faith, I think we'd have a lot of toasters. (Everitt, 2010, p. 182)

Kenny spoke of the great work gay and lesbian Catholics do in giving testimony to the Christian life under frequently painful circumstances in the following dialogue excerpt:

> We give meat to the Gospel, not in a sort of "fluffy" way, but again, the "rubber hitting the road" of it being painful or a struggle to continue to be a witness in the best sense of the word. If our Church were to recognize us for being the healers and the evangelizers that we are, wow. (Everitt, 2010, p. 183)

If Kenny were given the opportunity to start a support group for gay students at his school, he would need the support of the administration. He expressed this in the following dialogue comments:

> I think it is just a matter of having the support of the administration, that this [student group] is for the purpose of supporting a healthy understanding of a young adolescent's sexuality, alleviating some of the anxiety that comes with growing up, feeling and knowing that one is different, sort of "nipping" at its source, that sense of dissatisfaction that might lead to harm to a young student, whether it is emotional or physical or even suicide, you know. I think that's important enough to have an administration see that as a valuable resource to have for young gay and bisexual students in the school environment. (Everitt, 2010, p. 184)

Michael's approach to mentoring gay and lesbian youth is intentional. He feels strongly that he has a responsibility to provide the same type of care he received when struggling with his own sexual identity. The following dialogue comments illustrate his passion in this regard:

> I think that's one of the reasons [mentoring gay and lesbian students] I stay within the Catholic institution, or educational institution, because just like those priests and those academic advisors—a nun was one of them. . . . Just as they were loving and very kind to me, I want to be there for those young, gay youth who are coming up. I can show to them that you don't need to leave the Church to be honest and to be true to yourself. I mean, yes, we have our foibles, but at the same time, we have our wonderful gifts and tradition, and you don't need to leave. I mentioned this in our first interview. That one student who was speaking when she asked the question in the class, she was asking it from the heart. She was saying, "But what makes you stay [teacher named], with all these Church teachings like on homosexuality, on abortion? Why do you stay?" And I said, "I stay because there is a lot of good in our tradition in our Catholic Church, and no one should ever make you feel like they're pushing you out because it's your right to stay, and if you go to any other religious institution, they're going to have the same kinds of, you know, debates and foibles, just as the Catholic Church. So it's kind of like, what do you want? Do you want to stay with an institution that you know and that you've grown up with, or do you want to go to something

> unfamiliar that you're going to have to start from the very beginning?" So I kind of joked with her and said, "You know, I'm very lazy; I want to stay within the Church. I don't want to go through all that education and catechesis all over again." (Everitt, 2010, p. 255)

In response to a dialogue question asking Michael if he would disclose his sexual identity if his school asked it of him and guaranteed his job, Michael stated,

> If my principal said that to me? Yes, I would, and if she said that I'm not going to lose my job and she was supportive and all that, she thinks it's important, then yeah, I would come out, but I would come out in a natural way where the conversation comes and lends itself for me to come out. Just like a straight person would talk about his wife, or you know, their spouse in class, I would come out in that way. It is natural; my relationship with [partner named] is natural. There's nothing wrong with that, and there's nothing out of synch, so I don't think I need to announce it, but I think I'll come out in that way. (Everitt, 2010, p. 255)

As did several of the study participants, Lori also expressed concern over mentoring gay and lesbian students in her following dialogue comments:

> I would have to be confident that I would be safe [with] job security. I don't feel that now. I have informally mentored students in [a] job capacity, just kind of pastorally mentored them, but not formally. That is also why I don't help with our club that supports gay and lesbian students. I am so conflicted about that because it would be so validating for those kids. It would mean a lot. I have taught a few of them, you know. It would embolden them. (Everitt, 2010, p. 223)

When asked if she has ever thought that students wonder why she is not supporting them, she replied,

> I know, all the time. My fear is that they think I think there is something wrong with it, or wrong with them. Totally; I think that all of the time because, like, the kids who [know] [that I am gay]. . . . I even think that about the faculty because I am not more open, that there must be, I must feel negatively about that or there must be some self-hate, or I must be ashamed. Oh my God, the last thing that I want is for those kids to feel shame, and if somebody they respect, especially if they respect me in other arenas. I'd hate for them to just assume that it was shame. Yeah, I think about that a lot. (Everitt, 2010, p. 224)

Lori continued to discuss the importance of mentors in the lives of students and the few experiences she has had with gay and lesbian students during their struggle with issues of

sexual identity. She reflected on the fact that sometimes she worries that kids feel personally responsible for creating change. She explained,

> I wonder, you know, kids are funny. They like heroes. I wonder how many of them think that some kind of heroic action must be needed or something. You know, that we should all be Harvey Milk. I don't know. I think about it a lot with regards to mentoring students. I fit a different type than the other lesbians and so I have to believe that it would be helpful for kids to see that there are many different ways of being a lesbian. I am just [not] sure how to [do] that and feel safe. (Everitt, 2010, p. 101)

Jean has significant concerns over becoming involved in any program that specifically mentors gay and lesbian students. However, she has found other ways of providing support to this student population, as she discussed in the following dialogue excerpt:

> I've suggested books to the librarians. I have suggested young-adult novels like *The Geography Club, Keeping You a Secret.* I bought copies and donated them to the library at my school. I don't know if I will ever get involved with our GSA, but when [the movie about] Harvey Milk came out, I asked one of the moderators if he was going to take the group to see Milk, and he said, "Yeah, yeah." I said, "Well, it's only at the Castro for a few more weeks. You've got to go." A few weeks later, I asked if they'd gone to see Milk. "Oh, no, I haven't gotten around to it." I'm thinking, "What do you mean, you haven't gotten around to see Milk? Come on; take them," you know, and "take them while Milk is still playing in the Castro." (Everitt, 2010, p. 101)

When asked in a dialogue session if something kept her from offering herself as a leader of the GSA group, Jean replied,

> Well, partially because I wasn't out to very many straight people before. . . . It wasn't until this last fall with all that "No on Prop 8" stuff. . . . I didn't talk about sexuality with . . . or I didn't bring that up at work unless I was talking about it with other very close friends or other gay and lesbian teachers. (Everitt, 2010, p. 101)

The issue of mentoring gay and lesbian students was an integral topic within the dialogues. Although each of the participants discussed the issues differently, there was a common thread running through all of the sessions—the participating gay and lesbian

educators experienced anxiety over mentoring gay and lesbian students. The anxiety was rooted in job security, community exclusion, and concern over the appropriate nature of disclosing sexual identity to high school students. Unlike their public-school colleagues, the participating educators did not feel the obligation to disclose their sexual orientation to students or the pressure to moderate a Catholic version of the GSA. All, however, indicated how wonderful it would be if they could conduct such work without fear of job loss.

Research Question 3

How does a homosexual orientation impact a career within Catholic secondary-school education?

Fear

The most saddening, yet not surprising, finding during the sample-selection and data-collection phases of this study was the fear the potential participants and final participants expressed with regard to the research process. Several potential participants chose not to participate out of fear that they might be discovered by their administrators or the diocese. The primary fear was that, if discovered, they would lose their jobs teaching within Catholic schools. Those ultimately participating in the study also expressed concern over their anonymity and the potential impact participation could have on their careers. The educators involved in departments, such as Campus Ministry or Theology, exhibited greater concern than those working within nonreligious departments. One participant commented, “There is certainly faculty in other departments who are gay. I think that they are a lot more open and don’t feel so constrained in living out the teachings of the Church as a religion-department person would” (Everitt, 2010, p. 139).

The dialogue revealed true concern over the impact of a homosexual lifestyle on a career in Catholic secondary education.

Two of the situations within which Catholic gay and lesbian educators feel compromised is when students make derogatory or hateful remarks related to homosexuals and when a student asks about the sexual orientation of a teacher in front of the class. The study participants who experienced one or both of these situations discussed the anxiety and the dilemma they faced as a homosexual individual who has been explicitly or implicitly instructed to keep their personal lives private within the classroom. Roger experienced students making negative remarks regarding gays and lesbians and asked his administrator for permission to speak to them directly about what it was like for a gay man to hear such remarks. In reference to the event, he stated, "You know, the funny part is that I never wanted my being gay to be the center of what we were talking about in the classroom" (Everitt, 2010, p. 277). He did, however, want the students to know that their behavior was an example of the course content. He explained, "I wanted to have the freedom to speak personally about why it was wrong and why it was [an] issue of social justice." Roger was not permitted to address the issue from a personal perspective. He said, "I was naïve to think that they were going to say, 'Yes, gee Roger, we trust you'" (Everitt, 2010, p. 278).

Ashley had an experience within the classroom similar to the account contributed by Roger; however, she did confront her students because a decision to remain silent would have violated her conscience. She described the experience in the following manner:

> It was probably four or five years into my teaching, so it was a few years into my career. I was teaching this class, and the kids do these independent study projects.

> Three boys had made this movie and they were showing it to the entire class and they were very excited by it. I happened to teach the class with three other people. So they're showing this movie to the class and part of it was kind of a talk show and they had a character that was clearly gay, kind of effeminate, and one of the other teachers and I are kind of like, "Well, that's not okay, but we're like, well, we'll let it go for a little while, if it doesn't go any further than this." You know, "We'll talk about it at the end, but we can let it go." Well, it kind of continued and became kind of more obnoxious and more "out there," and you know, after we talked about it, like, they didn't realize what they were doing, but we ultimately decided that we had to stop the movie, and the four of us in the back are talking about it. One of my fellow teachers who is pretty passionate and very opinionated said, "This is not right," and she just kind of stormed up there and stopped it, and she said, "This is not appropriate; we're not watching the rest of this. Why would you think I feel so strongly about it?" And then it evolved into—and there were probably about 40 kids in this class; it was actually two sections of a class—having a pretty good, a decent discussion about why she thought it was inappropriate, but a lot of the kids were like, "It's no big deal; we see gay people being made fun of all the time in the popular media," and she said, "But that's not okay, you know," and the kids weren't seeing it, and there was even a boy in the class who has lesbian mothers. Interestingly, he said, "Well, one of my moms would be very offended by this, but my other mom would probably be laughing," and the kids just weren't getting why we didn't think it was okay. So finally—and it was like something—it wasn't me speaking almost, and finally I said, "There are 40 of us in this room. If there are 40 of us in this room, statistically four of us are gay or lesbian." I said, "I don't know about the other three, they may or may not be willing to speak, but I'm going to tell you that it's not okay, and nobody else who is, or is going to realize that they are, you know, needs to hear that it's okay, because these messages are degrading and da da da," and you know, by the time I finished saying it, I was sobbing and shaking and left the room. I knew one of the other teachers was queer, and I think they were kind of dumbfounded, too, by what had happened. I don't think I would have done it if I hadn't really trusted the group of students and my fellow teachers, and you know, from that point on then, we had great discussions, not only about gays and lesbians and how they are perceived or not perceived, but also other things. The boys said they didn't intend it to be this way, so lots of great stuff came out of it, and you know, it wasn't a big revelation. A couple of them are like, "We knew already," although I knew some of them knew; it's a big divide to kind of cross. (Everitt, 2010, p. 4)

After that experience, Ashley disclosed her sexual orientation to a few students when it seemed appropriate and helpful to the student. However, it was made clear to her by the administrators at her school that she was not to discuss such content within the classroom again. Consequently, Ashley was uncertain how to respond to a repeat scenario. Because

it was anticipated, she had discussed ways of deflecting it with a colleague due to the instructions from her administrator.

Cyndi was confronted by a student who voiced concern over a negative relationship with a lesbian teacher and reflected,

> Like, I thought, if I hadn't told [administrator named]. . . . If [administrator named] didn't know my sexual identity, if I had never told . . . this is when I thought, "Why did you ever tell the adults in your school?" you know. I've never told the kids, but this made me think I should have never told the adults because I felt like it put me more at risk. (Everitt, 2010, p. 31)

Michael had a similar classroom experience. The topic of homosexuality frequently arises in the classroom, particularly in response to the California law limiting marriage to a union between a man and woman. Michael was asked in a dialogue session if students have ever asked him if he is gay. He responded that they have never asked him the question directly and explained,

> The students I teach are very intuitive. I think that they know and I think that they are more, what is it, not so much sensitive, but they are more politically savvy or astute. They know it's not an appropriate question to ask me in public. They are very protective. I have seen that in my interaction with them. (Everitt, 2010, p. 240)

Michael did have an uncomfortable experience at a Back to School Night presentation in his classroom. After describing his course, one of the parents asked if he was going to be faithful to Church teaching on homosexuality. Michael was uncomfortable with responding to the question and was particularly aware of a lesbian parent in the room from whom he was anticipating a response. He expressed frustration with himself in terms of the manner in which he handled the situation at the time, but feels more confident today. He stated, "It's like I wish I had handled that better, but because I guess

part of me wasn't as comfortable as I am now with my sexuality, I wasn't able to handle it as well as I should have" (Everitt, 2010, p. 242).

Lori has engaged in several follow-up conversations with students as a result of discussions emerging within her classroom. Although students have never confronted her in front of the class, they have approached her outside class to seek advice or talk to her regarding her perspective on Church teaching related to homosexuality. Lori reported that students struggle to understand how she can remain Catholic, given the climate within the Catholic Church toward homosexuals. Students have challenged her for endorsing the teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality and gay adoption. When she spoke with her administrator on the experiences, he enforced the "don't ask, don't tell" policy adopted by her school. She described the experience in the following dialogue transcript:

> I went to my administrator and told him about it. He said, as long as you did good work, you keep doing what you are doing. My administrator is wonderful, but [his] [school named] policy is "don't ask, don't tell." So he didn't necessarily want to and was, like, "You don't talk about this to students in class, right?" I'm like, "No." [Her administrator commented], "Well, this feels like it was a kind of pastoral moment, right?" I said, "Yes." [He replied], "It was about an issue, and it wasn't about you, so great." (Everitt, 2010, p. 197)

Job loss was a consistent theme throughout the dialogue sessions. While the majority of the participants felt secure in their particular school communities, concern over the diocese and its reaction to homosexual individuals working within Catholic schools was expressed. In an effort to understand California law regarding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, Roger discovered he is not protected by federal or state law. He explained,

> When I went to an attorney so that I could understand my rights as a gay man working in a Catholic school, the attorney told me that . . . there was a woman working in the business office and . . . she was very professional. She had no student contact. She got here at 8:00 and left at 3:00 every day. If the school

> found out she was gay, no matter what the circumstances, they would have the legal right to fire her, and so, and I got that answer in relationship to thinking, "You know, they'd never fire me." I can't believe they can do this. It's like, somehow, because you're part of a ministry, you think it's just sort of a natural protection, but according to law, according to this lawyer, that protection doesn't exist. (Everitt, 2010, p. 301)

The visit to the attorney caused Roger to reflect upon the career ramifications of sexual-orientation disclosure. He stated,

> You know, you're picturing some woman sitting in the business office with no contact. She could, literally, just be in the wrong place at the right time. She could be on You Tube and someone could forward it to the principal and then next year she could be told that she's leaving, and that could be the reason, so it's just a "wake-up call," you know. I wish I'd gotten this information beforehand, when all this stuff started, because it's a wake-up call again, in terms of the virtue of prudence. It's like, "Okay, what am I doing?" And in terms of conscience, I'm not saying there isn't anything that ever would happen in my life where I would not [disclose my sexual orientation to students]. I would not come out, but I would never do it as. . . . It would have to be a pretty extreme issue of conscience, you know, because, at my age, or at any age, the older you get, what I've learned since my last experience with losing a job, another cold, hard fact. One of the reasons I didn't, I don't think I took it as serious as I did, is I've never had a problem getting a job at any point in my life. I mean, literally, I've fallen from one into another, into another and this was the first time in my life. Wow, this is what it's like when you can't get a job? If you come out at 25 and you get fired, you know, no big deal. You come out at 40, 50, or 60 and you get fired, it's not the same thing. It's a whole different reality. It doesn't mean you won't do it, but it is a different reality. (Everitt, 2010, p. 301)

In terms of managing her anxiety related to direct communication with her school administrator, Cyndi finds it helpful to keep her supervisor informed of all situations involving her sexual orientation to avoid any surprises. Depending upon the political climate within the country or among Catholic schools, Cyndi has varying degrees of confidence in her job security. When asked in a dialogue session whether she felt vulnerable as a homosexual woman working within a Catholic school, she responded: "Yes, sometimes, and it depends. When things are going on politically [referencing Proposition 8 and a play that another Catholic school presented dealing with the issue of

teen homosexuality and Christianity], I feel more vulnerable than at other times" (Everitt, 2010, p. 32). Cyndi emphasized the impact of a local bishop on her sense of security, stating, "Sometimes I feel more vulnerable. If he [bishop named] says something stupid, then all of a sudden we would be under some kind of 'bizarreness.' So anytime something is happening, I tell my administrator what I am doing" (Everitt, 2010, p. 32) In a discussion related to nondiscrimination policies at her school, Cyndi opined that the policy of her school includes sexual orientation. She explained in the following dialogue excerpt why this did not give her peace of mind:

> Well I always figure, see to me, I mean—and this is maybe where I get more paranoid or whatever—I always feel like, if someone just, like I always get more anxious about other stuff in my job. I make sure that I do everything. . . . I get like this sometimes, when I'm really feeling paranoid, like, do everything perfectly because they can fire me and say it was because I did it, this other thing, but really, they don't want a gay person in the school anymore, so they get rid of me because I did this other thing. So it is, like, don't do any of those things wrong because they always have this other information [about sexual orientation]. (Everitt, 2010, p. 73)

When asked if that was also exhausting, she responded,

> Well, it is exhausting. It's like, okay, like make sure when you buy that thing, you get a receipt, you know. . . . I just feel like, someday, someone is going to say, "Well, we don't like the way you do this, so we're going to fire you," whatever, and it will all be on the, you know, how everything looks so perfect on paper? . . . It will all be documented, your three chances or whatever, and then "We're firing you," and then it's, like, "I think they really fired me because I'm gay." Like, you know, there's nothing, it's all about the way you know you were insubordinate or whatever, because I'm insubordinate a lot, that makes me nervous, because I know, technically, whatever that means, but I mean, I've heard others say like "Well, they were telling me I was insubordinate." I'm like, "Oh my God; I do that a lot!" I question things because you're not just like, "Oh yeah, that sounds good." Sometimes I can feel, like, the fear and I just go, "Oh God, that could be really a thing or someone just got tired of it or. . . ." (Everitt, 2010, p. 74)

Jean articulated her concern over job security in a discussion on sexism in the Catholic Church and the "good old boys network" at her school. While the role of women

in the Church is a difficult issue for her, she pointed out that she would not lose her job because she is a woman. She fears losing her job due to her sexual orientation and stated, "Yes, so on a day-to-day basis, the woman thing is more of an issue, but when 'push comes to shove' . . . as far as being concerned about job security, the queer thing is a bigger deal" (Everitt, 2010, p. 122). She explained her concern over being gay at her school in the following manner:

> I don't know what the parents would do. You can read stories in the news about parents who "freak out" when they discover a teacher is gay, and I'm, like, "You know, I'm not a pedophile. I'm sorry, but if you think helping your kid understand that gay people are people too, and that you don't want that for them, well that's too bad," but I am just thinking that and not saying that. I do have a little celebrate-diversity sticker in my classroom, but it's little. (Everitt, 2010, p. 99)

Public debate over the California Proposition 8 is an issue for several of the study participants. The position of the Catholic Church on same-sex marriage is clear to them; they have been faced with the dilemma of having to choose between marriage and their jobs. When asked if he would have married his partner if same-sex marriage had been approved, Joseph responded,

> I don't know if we would have. I don't know if we would have. I don't think we would have gotten married. I think we, at least not suddenly, but I think . . . we were trying to figure that out. Okay, that's a civil recognition that is not a private thing, and I'd have to say that I am concerned about job security in a Catholic institution. (Everitt, 2010, p. 137)

He continued to explain that fear was certainly an aspect of his decision, stating,

> Yeah, fear certainly is there. I want to continue to work in Catholic institutions. I don't plan on staying at [school named] for much longer. I like it here, but I think it would be really good for me to move on. I would like to keep the doors open for being in a Catholic institution because that's where my heart is and I would like to continue in that ministry. (Everitt, 2010, p. 137)

Joseph chose to exclude administrators from his commitment ceremony to avoid conflict if his ceremony became an issue with the diocese within which he works. He explained,

> I invited a number of my colleagues, very close friends, but I didn't invite a single administrator. I didn't think I could. They are very nice people. I don't think I could put them in that position of having to defend me to someone from the diocese. I could imagine that being very problematic for them. I don't think that they would stand by me to that extent. They are going to protect this institution [the school]. I admire them in many ways, but I think that they would not be willing to fight the diocese and I'd be out of here so quick. I've just seen it too often with . . . not around the morality clause, but around other things where people who have challenged them or done things that they don't like and there isn't a strong sense of job security. (Everitt, 2010, p. 137)

Lori suggested that some gay or lesbian Catholic educators might fear losing their jobs because they lack the credentials to work outside the Catholic system. She remarked,

> Fear is real. Especially for those who are pitted in Catholic education, who don't have the credentials to teach in the public school system. They are really locked into this. Some may have theological degrees and work experience that is only recognized in the Catholic system. (Everitt, 2010, p. 221)

Lori is at a "crossroads" in her career and personal life. She and her partner would like to have children in the coming years, but she would also like to remain in Catholic education. She has been able to work discreetly as a lesbian teacher, but has concerns over how having children will impact her career. She stated, "I love education. I would love to be able to stay in Catholic education, but my Number 1 priority is family. We'll see if the school has the power to protect me." Lori indicated that she feels vulnerable at her current school due to the past experience of other gay and lesbian teachers within other Catholic schools. She said,

> I'm not naïve. I know people from other high schools who have been removed from the classroom. The thing that people tell me is in my favor is that I am really appropriate. I take lots of cautionary steps and I am good at my job, but at the same time, I don't know if "push came to shove," even if people love me, it's not enough protection, just not, and it doesn't matter how much I argue out of

> conscience. They can just be like, "No," you know? Catholic social teaching is great, but it can also be full of error. (Everitt, 2010, p. 202)

When asked how she might feel if she lost her job due to her sexual orientation, Lori responded, "So it's their loss is how I feel about it. If it gets to that point, it is so sad. It's such a shame for a Catholic adolescent is kind of what I think" (Everitt, 2010, p. 203).

Although Kenny addressed the issue of fear in our dialogues, he was not overwhelmingly concerned about the loss of his job or his ability to make a career in Catholic education.

Research Question 4

How do Catholic gay and lesbian educators balance a homosexual identity with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality?

Catholic Identity

Catholic identity was a dominant characteristic of the participants in this study who are also clear with regard to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality. Without exception, they were all able to identify the distinction between a homosexual orientation and homosexual genital activity, as outlined in the teaching of the Church, and each has navigated the conflict between Church membership and homosexuality. All eight of the participants have either been involved in a long-term monogamous relationship in the past or were currently involved in such a relationship. They did not ignore the teaching of the Church. Each engaged in some form of discernment regarding their choice to remain Catholic and concurrently involved in a same-sex relationship. For the participants in this study, this did not present a conflict.

The difficulties encountered by the participants with regard to the teaching of the Church related to the language the Church used to describe homosexual individuals and

the pronouncements of the Roman Curia and American bishops with regard to homosexuality, particularly as it related to marriage and the adoption of children. The study participants continue to struggle in this realm while making a clear decision to remain Catholic. The level of hurt the Church has caused varies among the participants; however, the ability to transcend the pain is consistent among these individuals. They remain hopeful about the future and long for a Church that is more inclusive, loving, and supportive of all members. The participants acknowledged that they remain in the Church with the hope that they can contribute to reshaping the mind-set of a new generation of Catholic laity.

Ashley's membership in the Roman Catholic Church is closely tied to her experience of community. At her school and in her parish, the individuals with whom she works and prays are the reasons she remains Catholic. She explained,

> One of the reasons why I stay is because [school named] is an absolutely wonderful community, despite everything that has happened. If I didn't love the vast majority of the people with whom I work, I wouldn't want to keep going back there. It's very much a community of mostly good people so that's why I stay. I get something personally out of it just as a human being working with great people. (Everitt, 2010, p. 16)

Ashley has chosen to avoid active involvement in her parish due to school commitments; however, she does rely upon the weekly experience of church to sustain her prayer and community life, as is evident in the following dialogue excerpt:

> I attend [parish named] and I sit in the "queer ghetto." It's a church that has an altar in the middle of the church and a lot of the gays and lesbians sit together behind the altar. I just stumbled on it because it was the neighborhood church and it became clear that it is a welcoming parish. Even though it is out of our way, that's where we go for church. The pastor was totally "cool," baptizing our daughter, and we are both listed on her baptismal certificate. Our second child will be baptized later and, as far as we know, it is not an issue. I think it has to do with the pastor. It is just another place where we can fit in, and there are other families just like us who sit two pews in front of us and have two kids and nobody

> seems to “bat an eye,” and they say “Hey, how are you doing,” and “Oh, it is so good to see you.” It is just totally welcoming. I have purposefully not gotten involved in parish life. I like to have a place where I can just go and be and not deal with politics. It is just my own time, just to sit and be Catholic in the way that I know and love. I don’t get caught up in politics of any kind. (Everitt, 2010, pg. 16)

After years of prayer and discernment, Ashley no longer listens to what the Church teaches on homosexuality or gay and lesbian people. She explained,

> I try not to think about what the Church officially says, to be honest. I mean, it’s like, that’s where, you know, there’s, it’s in the catechism and I forget what number it is. You know, it says that, if in your conscience, after you have prayed over an issue, and you are divergent with the official Church’s teaching, then you have to stick with your conscience, and that’s where I am comfortable being who I am because I cannot image, you know. I mean, I would be dead. I would have killed myself if I had not been able to come out, you know, or I’d be some horrible, miserable person, an alcoholic. God knows how I would deal with suppressing who I truly am. (Everitt, 2010, p. 21)

Roger has had a long, productive career in Catholic education. During the majority of that time, he lived as a heterosexual man. However, in the last decade of his career, he came to terms with the label *objectively disordered.* When asked if he dismisses Church teaching on homosexuality because it doesn’t match his experience, he responded,

> Well, I wouldn’t say I dismiss it; I understand it. I understand it and I understand from this point of view: I understand the significance theologically and historically of the Christian story and, therefore, I look at it like this is not, for the most objective and literal of Catholic theologians and followers, an easy theology to live. Therefore, I look at it with the same kind of sadness that I look at *Humanae Vitae*. I mean, 80% of American Catholics use birth control. If you look over the last 10 years—my numbers could be a little suspect—but if you look over the last 10 years, the number of Catholics stating that they use natural family planning doesn’t change. That’s your hard-core group, and God love them. God love them, but that doesn’t make them any better in my view, in Christ’s eyes, of a person using birth control who has three kids and the wife chooses to use birth control. So, I’m looking at homosexuality even though *objectively disordered* is stronger language. I see the two things together. The tragic nature of the Church is that they cannot find the will to begin to open their theology to new life, and it’s true in the straight experience. I think it’s true in the continued failure to seek

> God's grace in new ways, of finding life for people in this time. So, I mean, gay is harder than straight, no question, but the two, I see, I will laugh and say, "Well, it's a matter of degree." If you're struggling to find, if you can't find at least an interest in opening your mind and heart to the spirit of God, in a technological revolution like birth control, about loving human beings who want to have kids, but want God's grace through scientific revelation, that this can be a part of their loving relationship, and that's not open to you, you know what I mean? (Everitt, 2010, p. 280)

Roger continues to see a place for himself within the Catholic Church and hopes to find new ways of speaking about his experience as a gay Catholic man. He offered the following comments:

> What I do find at fault with those in the Church and those individuals who are given credibility in the Church who are actively pursuing belief systems that further disfigure human beings. I don't care who they are, and that's why I think Christ is calling me to move away from that, to move to the place of "it's not bad, I am a member of Christ's body," period. Therefore, I am called to reflect the beauty of that, my place in that body in ways that the spirit calls me to. Now, I don't know what those are, but that's my, that would be my response and reflection as a member of Christ's body. I am called to be open to the Spirit taking me in the way of truth and dialogue, and while I do that with great caution, I still say that is where I think the future for me is lying. I mean, how can you believe in this, how can you believe in the Trinity? In this God, spirit man, and believe that he came as fulfillment of the God of Abraham and revealed the fullness of the Spirit of God and believe in the Trinity and not believe that you are meant to be in communion, full communion as a full human being? I don't get that. (Everitt, 2010, p. 289)

Roger concluded the dialogue by passionately describing how falling in love has continued to reveal God's care for him. He explained,

> That's why I like leaving oppression aside, because I'm called to relationship in full communion and I don't know what that means. I'm not looking to get out in front of any parade, but I know what it doesn't mean. I know that it does not mean sitting alone in your room, celibate or ordained, and believing you are disfigured or somehow not fully human and not fully a part of God's, of Christ's, body. I know that. So, I've been very fortunate. I've been only out for 8 years, but I'm in a relationship, a monogamous relationship for 8 months [with] someone I love. I never thought this was going to happen, and it has happened, and you know? I get up every day and just say, "Thank you." You know? I'm very grateful at my age to be in a loving relationship. I just want to take one day at a time and I believe Christ is with me. I think his providential care continues without intruding on my

> freedom. So, I feel very strongly about that, that he keeps calling me forth in this, in this direction, and again, without intruding on my freedom, you know? Twenty years of analysis; "have at it buddy," you know? (Everitt, 2010, p. 290)

Similar to Roger, Joseph understood the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and has been able to put it into a larger context of Catholic teaching. He stated,

> There's a hierarchy of teaching and ultimately one has to be a discerning moral agent. I need to think about my actions in terms of my relationship to God. Hopefully, all the Church teachings are helpful and kind of give me have a greater understanding. If they don't then I still have to go before God and figure it all out. (Everitt, 2010, p. 135)

Joseph acknowledged that as an agent of the Church it is his responsibility to teach the Church's position on homosexuality even if he personally disagrees with it. He is clear that it is his responsibility to help his students think critically, not push his own experience onto his students.

Michael's membership in the Roman Catholic Church is deeply connected to his own personal journey as a "cradle Catholic" and someone who cares deeply about passing his faith to the next generation of Catholic youth. He feels a responsibility to those he teaches, as well as to other gay and lesbian educators who may not consider a career in Catholic education due to their sexual orientation. He explained,

> I would hope that someone who is Catholic and who is gay and who is interested in teaching religion in a Catholic school would not feel inhibited because they are gay, that they couldn't teach in a Catholic school. It shouldn't be a concern. You can be true to your sexual orientation and not at all compromise that and still teach religion within a Catholic institution. I'm finding out that I'm very much free, and I would like to think I'm not compromising who I am or my sexual orientation when I teach at a Catholic institution. Now some people may argue with me. Some gay Catholics will argue with me and ask, "How can you do that? How can you stay? How can you stay teaching in a Catholic institution that degrades you and that calls you 'objectively disordered' and 'prone to moral evil'?" And again, my response is "You have to . . . I don't see myself changing the system by working outside of it." A colleague of mine said it best when someone asked him, "Why don't you leave the Church when you know that the Church is so out of touch with these moral issues, these current moral issues like

> abortion, premarital sex, and so forth? Why do you stay in the Church?" And he said, "Because I don't have a voice in the Catholic Church if I leave it." I borrow that from him . . . and I would say the same thing to them. If I want to see change in this institution, I cannot leave it. I will do more harm to it and to myself if I leave this Church because I love this Church, and I don't just love the good part, but I have to love the bad part too. I want to make some change, and I think I am doing some change by staying here and teaching them. (Everitt, 2010, p. 137)

Michael concluded his dialogue session by explaining how he feels when he encounters former Catholics who are gay and angry that he remains a member of the institutional Church. He stated,

> I feel sorry for them because a lot of the time they are bitter. They are hurt. They are angry and they are just vulnerable and yet they don't see the power of community. They don't see how community can help them. It's like everyone wants to hold on to anger so they aren't done with that anger, that's how I see them, and I am not angry at them. (Everitt, 2010, p. 250)

Cyndi understands the importance of teaching students to think critically about the teaching of the Church, and she also firmly believes in explaining what the Church actually teaches regarding homosexuality. In a discussion on the difficulty of teaching the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual genital activity, Cyndi offered the following explanation of how she makes sense of it:

> I think they're wrong. I just think it's . . . it's a mistake. People don't understand. They [the Church] are not psychologically able to understand. They're dealing with their own issues. It's . . . just, you know what I think? I don't know if this is only my experience . . . it's kind of like, sometimes, people don't understand what it means to be a woman in this world. I don't think people get it, and they're never going to get it. I think my orientation spiritually is much more of a contemplative mystic kind of person. People don't get that. They don't understand it. They never will. So I feel like I have so many things in my experience that most people walking down the street don't get, so I just put the Church in the same category with the people walking down the street. They just don't get it, and what is hard and sad is they print it [the teaching on homosexual orientation and homosexual activity] for hundreds of millions of other people to read, you know. (Everitt, 2010, p. 42)

When asked to reflect on his first dialogue session, Kenny remarked that he was surprised at how positive his experience had been in the Catholic Church. He stated,

> Truthfully, I was a little surprised at how positive an experience I have had being gay and Catholic and with my own faith journey. It has been a positive experience for the most part. Reflecting on my own journey, hearing, rereading the transcript of some of my responses of how it was, it has been very affirming for me. (Everitt, 2010, p. 178)

Kenny was also struck by his positive experience when considered in light of the negative Church teaching on homosexuality. He explained,

> Interestingly enough, what I did think about is the disparity between the official narrative of the Church and my own experience. If my own personal journey is the unofficial narrative, it stands in such contrast, especially more recently with some of the polemic that gets thrown out about homosexuality and homosexuals within our own Catholic tradition. So, it was a little striking just how, again, if I have such a positive experience, then why is this official doctrinal teaching still so negative and heavy handed? Somehow, I can still be positive about it, and optimistic. (Everitt, 2010, p. 303)

Kenny also articulated his frustration that gay and lesbian Catholic educators are referred to as "issues" rather than real people of faith, engaged in the life of the Church. He stated,

> And people actively involved in ministry. It's not like our interactions with the Catholic community and even the Church hierarchy is something abstract. We know priests; we engage bishops. We work with other people involved in ministry, and so that's where the disparity comes in for me in mind. Why are some of these policies addressing us as if we are issues and not people? (Everitt, 2010, p. 178)

When challenged by colleagues or students as to why he remains a member of the Catholic Church and continues to teach in a Catholic school, Kenny shares his story about "the struggles and joys of being a part of this family that continues to unfold."

Lori describes her relationship with the Church as one that requires a day-to-day approach. While she is generally positive about her relationship with the institutional Church there are moments when the overwhelmingly negative tone of Catholic moral

theology is hard to balance with her experience as a Catholic lesbian woman. She explained,

> It depends on the day. The better my faith life is the easier it is to maintain a Christian identity than a Catholic identity. It has to do with my own prayer life. When my prayer life is going well, when I have a good spiritual director, then I'm good and I am able to transcend it and see that this is only the institution. This is Church. There is doctrine and dogma, but then there are people living that out in a parish. People interpret it [teaching of the Church] and they negotiate these teachings in what it means to be Church. Some days I feel less conflicted than others. I never totally dismiss it and I am never despairing, yet it is never totally hopeful. Most days I am somewhere in between. (Everitt, 2010, p. 206)

Jean did not reflect on her struggle to balance the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church with her identity as a gay woman. For Jean, membership in the Catholic Church is a part of who she is and that experience dates back to when she was a child. She did not place a lot of emphasis on the Church's teaching regarding homosexuality.

Prayer/Sacramental Life

The participants spoke frequently of prayer and the important roles that personal prayer and sacramental life have played in their spiritual journeys. They were sincere and passionate with regard to their relationships with God. It was evident that coming to terms with a homosexual orientation is deeply connected to that relationship. Roger described prayer as the source of his ability to transform his thinking on what it means to be gay and Catholic. He spent many years praying for forgiveness because he was gay. He had no gay relationships for the majority of his adult life; yet, his prayer was focused primarily on the issue of homosexuality. He described the process as one that, over the course of 20 years, began to disfigure him, stating, "I think that all of those days that I was praying for forgiveness was turning me into an arthritic old man, unable to release my hands to love another human being" (Everitt, 2010, p. 276). Roger's prayer is now

centered in becoming a whole human being and deepening his relationship with Christ. He reported, “I now freely go to Christ and ask for acceptance of gratitude and joy, and that comes with the wholeness for me of recognizing that it really is the sacrament of the Eucharist that makes me Catholic” (Everitt, 2010, p. 275).

When asked how he balances the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality with involvement in a committed gay relationship, Roger described in the following dialogue excerpt the role that prayer and discernment have played in his spiritual life:

> I have a very close friend of mine who is a priest and who is gay, and I have phone communication with him. I have a spiritual director who is gay. When I came out 8 years ago, it was the first time in my life that I sought spiritual direction, and that still continues today because I think that the important thing for me as a Catholic is that I take the Catholic Church seriously. We are all called to be men and women of conscience and to be able to stand on conscience [so] there must be prayer, there must be reflection on Church documents. There must be a willingness to seek the spirit of God, and then in conscience, if those things are done, and if you reach a conclusion about what you believe to be true as a member of the body of Christ, then that is what you must do. I sought spiritual direction. I wanted to be standing firmly on the ground that I’ve got my blood and sweat and disfigurement on the floor and in my image of my life, and therefore I have; I’m not taking a “backseat” to any Catholic or Christian when it comes to seeking God’s will in my own life. I mean, I deliberately wanted that. (Everitt, 2010, p. 286)

Roger’s prayer life has given him a great sense of freedom from the early days of his prayer that led him to see himself as a crippled, disfigured human being. When asked about this new sense of freedom, he commented,

> I would say that is why Christ is so important in that my relationship with Christ is mediated by the Church and through the sacraments. The Eucharist is constantly calling me to see myself as one of many standing at the table, you know? (Everitt, 2010, p. 286)

The connection between identity as a queer woman and faith in God surfaced rapidly in the dialogues conducted with Cyndi. She indicated that her faith life facilitated her understanding of her sexual identity, stating,

> I think it is key. I also think, I really think that there is something about knowing, having to look at your sexual identity that makes me as a person, anyway, question who I am. It makes me do a lot more self-reflection than I think the average person does. So if you're having any sense towards God, if that's kind of an important part of your life, then that will naturally become deeper. So they've always been really connected, and I think anytime you have anything that's out of the norm, you naturally take that to God. (Everitt, 2010, p. 28)

When Cyndi was asked if her sexual identity ever seemed to distance her from God, she emphatically responded, "Never, not ever." She explained that her relationship with God has always been an important part of understanding who she is and that the combination of prayer and therapy has helped her make sense out of the relationship between God and her sexuality. Describing her experience in therapy, she commented,

> My sexuality was a huge part of that, and so the only thing that has been consistently positive in my life since I was young is God, and there was only one little period in my life when I wondered. . . . I didn't doubt that God loved me, but I didn't understand why. Like, why would God love me, like, why would God choose me? Kind of like a prophet kind of why. Like, why do you, why would you choose me when everyone else seems so much more wonderful? But it was very short lived, and my relationship with God has really been the only consistent thing in my life. Since I was a little girl, this connection to God has been very, very strong, and the more I learn about myself, the closer I am to God. I understand how God works and that's how I teach. So I teach my students that, "If you know who you are, I don't care if you don't believe in God right now, but if you really know who you are, the connection to God will always be open to you." I teach my students that, "as soon as you start deciding not to look at who you are, the connection to God gets thwarted." It's hard for God. God is there, but it is hard for God to connect to you when you are not open to yourself. (Everitt, 2010, p. 29)

In response to a question on how she nurtures her spiritual life, Cyndi replied, "I like personal prayer. I pray every day for an hour or so and then working at a Catholic school is also part of my prayer . . . this is my faith community" (Everitt, 2010, p. 37).

Joseph never sensed God judging him or God with a problem concerning his homosexuality. He did, however, experience Church teaching as a negative in particular areas of his life. Spiritual direction was an important facet of Joseph's early prayer life, but in more recent years, he has relied upon personal prayer to help him navigate his relationship with God and the Church. He commented, "My prayer life is very important in helping me understand all that [teaching of the Church]. I am currently trying to understand what the sacrament of marriage is all about" (Everitt, 2010, p. 136). When asked about the role of parish life in his relationship with God, Joseph responded, "I mostly go to either [parish named] or [parish named], but [parish named] is where I am registered, and it's certainly been a very supportive community and certainly a place that understands where I am coming from" (Everitt, 2010, p. 136). In response to a dialogue question on the significance of the sacramental life of the Church in his own life, he explained,

> It's a very significant part. I feel very fortunate to be in a place where my main parish and other parishes I go to every once in a while are wonderful worship communities, and the Eucharist is very meaningful in the way it's celebrated in those communities and here in this community when we have all school liturgies. I think . . . there's always been a passion of mine and it's being involved with liturgy and the Eucharist, and I think that is very core for me. Those are all a struggle for me, sorting out, you know, all the plans for my commitment ceremony this summer with my partner and figuring out what aspects of liturgy we would include and would we have a. . . . I would loved to have had a Mass and that was. . . . I don't think that this [*sic*] where my partner wanted to go with things, but he probably would have if I had found a way to, you know, have [the] Eucharist celebrated, you know, and that's, that's something that really was . . . as wonderful as our celebration was. It was missing something for me, you know, that it didn't have the sacrament of marriage. As much as I consider it a very sacred moment, and it was very beautiful and very prayerful and had the liturgy of the Word and blessing, you know, the elements were there, and yet it wasn't the full blessing of the Church either. (Everitt, 2010, p. 155)

Joseph also relies heavily upon a personal prayer life. When asked to describe the role that Jesus plays in his personal prayer, he responded,

> My prayer life calls me a lot to the Scriptures, the Gospels, and a lot with the longer prophetic tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures. I don't know if I would say I have that singular focus on my relationship with Jesus in my prayer life, but it is certainly what grounds me ultimately, but I love the Hebrew Scriptures and I love the prophets, and so to see where Jesus takes that tradition and goes with it really gives me a sense of hope. How did Jesus handle the tradition that he inherited and take it to another level? That's, you know, I love . . . and the Gospels are certainly a big focus of my prayer. I would say my prayer is a little bit more expansive. In terms of persons who are alive and well in my prayer . . . are the saints. Almost more so than Jesus are [the] saintly people that I look to for advice and support. (Everitt, 2010, p. 154)

The first dialogue session conducted with Kenny included a significant amount of discussion on the role intellectual life played in his coming to terms with the teaching of the Church on homosexuality. When asked what role sacramental life or prayer play in helping him in this regard, he replied,

> Yeah, I would say it comes from me engaging my seminary formation as personal formation. My spiritual directors were extremely helpful. Those relationships were very helpful. Giving myself to those retreat experiences two or three times a year while I was in the seminary were very, very helpful. Having good, solid friendships and relationships with my classmates and being able to dialogue about this stuff in a way that was real and relevant was very life giving and affirming. I saw from very early on that being a gay man was part of who I am, and so that's the part that I brought into my spiritual formation. Not to say that it was the end all and be all, but it was a part of how I saw myself as a man, as a gay man, in this particular spiritual formation process. Going to Mass was very life giving and very affirming. There was nothing for me to hide. I was able to sit very comfortably in the pew knowing that I was not hiding anything. I was recognized as a gay man sitting in this pew, as a Catholic seeking formation in the priesthood, you know. That whole process was very life giving. (Everitt, 2010, p. 163)

Kenny is sustained in his spiritual life by identifying with others on the margins of society. He explained in the following dialogue excerpt how the scriptures impact his faith life:

> Being aware of the Gospel call to the people on the fringe is something that I'm very aware of because I, myself, am a person on the fringe. The more I learn about my Church on a hierarchical level and interact with people that aren't as affirming and that [*sic*] are negative and that [*sic*] are putting me down from the pew, from the pulpit, from dogmatic declarations of whatever hierarchical category those might be. It has been more of a challenge, but I am able to see myself as somebody who is on the outside as a minority, not only sexually, but ethnically as well. It makes me that much more sensitive (1) to others who might be on the outside, but (2) to underscoring those teachings of Jesus that are about care for the needy and care for those on the margins and rising to that Gospel call. I think it has helped me be much more sensitive and urgent about being inclusive. (Everitt, 2010, p. 165)

Kenny has experienced difficulty finding a parish that meets his needs. Although he has tried many parishes within his hometown, he has been unable to find one that is welcoming and inclusive. His frustration with the local Church is illustrated in his following response to a dialogue question that asked if he was involved in a parish:

> I am not, and I've looked and I've looked, and maybe it is my own sense of hesitancy and being on the defensive about who I am as a gay man. I don't feel as confident and as comfortable acknowledging within Catholic circles that I am a gay man. Although socially, it is sort of the opposite in that it is not an issue being a gay man in northern California. Ah, but being a gay Catholic seems to be sort of more of a challenge, being identified. (Everitt, 2010, p. 169)

When asked why he remains Catholic and what prevents him from becoming Episcopalian, Kenny explained,

> It would have to be, it would have to be that sense of loyalty to this process. Now, the teaching on homosexuality from the Church is not going to change in my lifetime, but I think I can sort of do something from, from within my own faith tradition of encouraging, engaging dialogue, of pointing out myself as a gay man and not as an issue, as a Catholic gay man and not as an issue. I can help other people. I was just at a conference with a group of other Catholic educators and I made it a priority that I bring up, not the fact that I'm gay, but tangentially, that I have a partner and then making sure that I use the pronoun "he" so that people kind of understand, and it was interesting. I would say that this was the first year of the three times that I've been at that conference that I actually felt kind of a negative reaction from the person sitting on my right. Prior to my sort of bringing up the fact that I have a partner, the person was very talkative, and then I felt that, that pulling away and kind of shutting down. So as a gay Catholic man, I want to make sure that I do what I can to kind of show my face as a gay Catholic man, not

> as a gay, not as a Catholic man hiding the fact that I'm gay, but just doing what I can to not make it seem such a big deal.
>
> Yeah, a lot of different images come to mind. Being involved with the Franciscan School of Theology, FST, and the experience of prayer. Coming together for [the] Eucharist was an incredibly inviting, welcoming, and healing prayer is less about the doing, but allowing myself to just feel that sense of connectedness to my faith community, to this Catholic tradition that I choose to be a part of. (Everitt, 2010, p. 172)

Kenny also described how he brings his frustration with the Church and the issue of homosexuality to prayer, stating,

> I do, yeah, and that is where the comforting part comes in, that is where the healing part comes in, because it seems like, below those layers of official doctrinal, you know, theological, philosophical systems, at the heart of it really is this welcoming and inclusive experience of Jesus who sometimes gets covered up with all of the trappings and all of the pomp and circumstances of our Catholic faith. So going to Jesus, going to that heart of mystery that is inclusive and embracing and welcoming, that's where I find life. Whether that takes place in a Eucharistic setting or in a paraliturgical setting or out in nature, I mean, it's, it's almost like that energizing core that gives me courage and strength so that I can go into the world and feel that sense of being embraced by this loving God. (Everitt, 2010, p. 181)

When asked if Jesus is a Jesus that he encountered in the Scriptures or a feeling, he responded,

> No, I would say it's substantiated by that scriptural image from the Gospels of a Jesus who is challenging to the status quo, of a Jesus who is very aware of those on the margins, a Jesus who is affirming of differences. The woman at the well. I mean, so many stories that communicate over and over Jesus' own active engagement with people on the margins. I mean, if that story isn't life giving for those of us who are pushed to the margins, I don't see what can be. (Everitt, 2010, p. 181)

Michael is actively involved in his parish, which has a large gay and lesbian population. He described his experience at the parish as one that gives him life and that encourages him when Church teaching is hurtful. When asked how the sacramental life of the Church sustains his faith, Michael explained in his following dialogue comments why communal prayer is so significant for him:

> Because—and again, I've been taught and I really believe it and know now the lesson—we have to have a spiritual, personal life with our God, and we also have to pray and to be together in a supportive group and community among, you know, like-minded people, and so when I go to [parish named], I know that is what I'm doing, but they have taught me and, through experience, I know that I need to go to church in order to stay, to keep fighting the institution and to keep my head up high, because when I go to church, they give me strength and . . . my presence gives them strength. So, whenever we get together, because we are primarily a gay community, we know what each other is going through and we know our pain. We know each other's pain, and when the Church or the Pope has come out with a hurtful promulgation, we come to church, we support one another, and we say to one another, "He is just our Pope and we'll get another pope," and we share our common stories, and because we have a common story, it gives me life, and so that's why I continue to go to church at [parish named] and belong to them and try to be as active and help out as much as I can. (Everitt, 2010, p. 237)

One of the ways in which Michael came to terms with his homosexuality was through reading. One particular publication facilitated his understanding of himself as a young man trying to discover who he is and trying to embrace his sexual orientation. He began to understand that God was present in his anguish and struggle, which in turn, helped Michael to understand that God is present in the most difficult times of his life. During a sabbatical, while discerning his call to the priesthood, Michael had a particularly intense experience in prayer. He was praying at the foot of his bed when he had an encounter with God that changed his life. He explained,

> And I was praying by the foot of the bed and I asked myself, "Why God, did you bring me here to deal with this when I don't really want to deal with it? I'm afraid people may not accept me. My parents, the Church, etc., you know, what am I going to do here?" I was just pouring out myself in prayer to God, and when I was done crying and when I was done praying, I felt the presence of God, and this was the first and only time that I really felt the strong physical presence of God in my life, and it was like God coming down behind me like the picture—the Prodigal Son—where the father embraces the son and is almost carrying him, and that's what I felt, and when I felt that, I knew that everything was going to be okay and I knew that my place in the Church was alright and that I didn't have to leave. At least that is what I interpreted from that experience. So, I don't ever question being Catholic and gay. Ever since that experience, it was like God tell[ing] me, "I love you. It's okay and end of the discussion." (Everitt, 2010, p. 258)

When asked if he still brings his sexual orientation to prayer, Michael said that he does but that he prays for different things now. He stated,

> And being gay is just one part of my life, but I guess you can say that I do pray about it because I always pray with [partner named] and I pray about our relationship growing stronger. It's hard to be in a relationship—gay or straight. In our tradition, you are constantly having those miniconversion experiences in order for you to become a better person. I am just finally realizing that.
>
> I made it to the point in my life where I make sure that, in the course of the day, I am acknowledging God's presence whether I am angry, upset, happy, or whether I am looking at the moon or I am running with my students. I have tried very hard to integrate my spiritual life during the course of the day. (Everitt, 2010, p. 260)

Lori acknowledged that her conversion to Catholicism has helped her come to terms with what it means to be a lesbian and person of faith. Her colleagues and supervisor have mentored her with regard to what it means to be a gay Christian. She is still searching for a parish community that meets her needs because she believes parish life is important to her spiritual growth and helps her to deal with the anger that can potentially emerge as a gay Catholic. She commented,

> Without a strong parish family and prayer life, it would be much harder to be gay and Catholic. I mean, to choose to be gay and Catholic and for it to be life giving, embracing being gay and Catholic, not to just be suffocated by it, but to daily make that choice, and there are days, there are successive days when I am more confident of that choice and other days where I'm like, "Wait, so the Jews will take me?" You know? So, yeah, it feels like a commitment I renew at different times. (Everitt, 2010, p. 220)

Lori discussed the importance of a faith community as more of her immediate family were moving to her home area and she and her partner were considering children. She stated,

> It's becoming increasingly important, especially as more family move into the Bay Area. My family, my siblings, and [partner named] siblings are all very active in their faith life and they all go to Church every Sunday. It is really a natural community. I would say that my young Catholic friends and my family are as formative as any of the other communities to which I belong. (Everitt, 2010, p. 192)

In response to a dialogue question on her prayer life and the manner in which prayer informs her spiritual life, Lori stated,

> I also just went on an eight day silent retreat. I had a really good retreat this summer. I am renewed and ready for this year, whatever it will hold. I will be going through a few things professionally this year so it will be interesting to see what happens. I am figuring out what my prayer life is calling me to do this year and I am also being asked to take on more responsibility at my school. I will be discerning what that will look like, but I feel like a more public sharing of my faith life and my prayer life. There is going to be a need for that and place for it within the faculty. There will have to be a lot of conditions in place before I do that, you know, for safety for me. (Everitt, 2010, p. 217)

Lori is committed to her prayer life and her relationship with Jesus. When asked to discuss her prayer life in more depth and, specifically, the role that prayer plays in moving her to courageous action, she explained,

> For me, personal prayer and having a spiritual director where I can set aside some time when I can renew, renew my own faith and figure out where God is in my life and were God is calling me to be, that's where I can continue to sustain myself and reflect on what it means to be Catholic. It is hard for me without those things in place. Participating in liturgy means more if I have been more in tune with my prayer life and more committed. If I am putting more on the line in my own prayer life in terms of how honest I am being and, you know, all of that, I am able to participate more fully, and then the institutional validation of me doesn't hold so much control over me.
>
> It [prayer] also helps me be a better human being and teacher. I can point to the healthier times in my life when I have taken courageous steps, and it was always preceded by committed periods of prayer. (Everitt, 2010, p. 217)

Lori spoke of the role spiritual direction has played in the development of her prayer life and her sense of self as a lesbian Catholic, stating,

> I had spiritual directors or really good retreat directors at different times. There were key people, at times, that didn't mentor, that basically reflected God's love back to me and then helped me go deeper into prayer, and so they kind of gave me the tools to get my own validation of myself. They helped me get that kind of confidence in my own faith life myself. So it, it was definitely because of their love and because they were grounded individuals. They were loving first. They weren't ideologues. They were first loving, and that was, that was what I felt, and

> I would kind of take their recommendations about where to go next, you know. I took that seriously because I trusted them. It was clear they wanted the best for me. Even now, when I think of the people that I go to for some of these questions, they are either priests or former priests, and [religious] women . . . nuns, or just really evolved lay people, just spiritually wise. (Everitt, 2010, p. 229)

When Lori was informed of the common factor among all of the study participants—a personal prayer life—she replied,

> I think you would have to. . . . I think to try to be healthy, to be gay and Catholic and out in a healthy way, I don't know how you couldn't have a prayer life. I don't know what that would [look] like, to not have a prayer life. I know that it would look different [for each of the participants], but to not continue to feed our conscience and to continue to reflect on where God and Jesus are, I mean, without Jesus. Jesus is the reason I am Christian, and so the continual revelation of the Gospels and counterculturalism, and so, for me, yeah, I don't know [what that] would look like, to not have a prayer life. I think I would probably be pretty fearful. I'd be a lot more afraid. (Everitt, 2010, p. 219)

Perhaps one of the more striking responses from Lori was in the context of how she works with her students who are struggling to reconcile the teaching of the Church on any issue with their own personal opinions. She reported, "It's like an adult conversation when there is no answer. There is just prayer. Yeah, just prayer" (Everitt, 2010, p. 220) When the study participants were asked what they would want to communicate concerning their experience as a gay or lesbian Catholic if they knew the bishops would review the findings of this research, Lori stated,

> I would want to be taken seriously, as a Catholic, period. That's the first thing. So, to be respected, that's probably the biggest thing. To have my life and my experience and my prayer life taken seriously, as seriously as they take theirs, and then I would ask for research. I'd ask for funding for research for some of the assertions about gay parents being harmful to kids. I would ask that they take their assertions, their opinions, and their documents seriously. If they are going to make [a] claim, they should be able to substantiate it. So I think the whole thing, that they take me and my life and my commitment to the Church and to their schools with at least a little bit—as half as much—as I take theirs, of respect and sincerity as I take theirs. (Everitt, 2010, p. 226)

As did other participants, Jean has explored several ways of deepening her faith life and maintaining a life of prayer. A few years into her work at her current school, she attended an eight day retreat at the suggestion of a spiritual director with whom she had been working for several months. She described her retreat experience as a positive one, during which she learned about new forms of prayer. She stated,

> I am not paranoid, but I'm like "How can I do this?" My spiritual director said, "Can you do it?" She said, "Well, can you pray for a couple . . . more than a couple hours a day?" And I'm like, "Yeah." So in the process, it became very life giving to spend an hour or so in prayer at night, kind of starting with the examen.
>
> Yeah, so doing examen and the, well, centering, and doing examen and then just kind of working through the day and then trying to do some imaginative prayer, which I'm, I'm okay at. I'm not great at imaginative prayer. . . . I had some amazing experiences. So for I'd say two or three years, I was praying at least an hour a day, usually trying to do that and focus on that. At some point, I was working with a spiritual director for a couple years and . . . and the eight day retreat was good. It wasn't amazing, eye-opening, whatever. You know, some people are like "Oh, it's truly amazing," you know. Well, it was good and it was worthwhile and it also was good to have another perspective on my thoughts, you know, a different spiritual director. (Everitt, 2010, p. 84)

Although disclosing her sexual orientation changed her relationship with God in a positive manner, Jean did struggle with her relationships with religious individuals. She struggled to understand how people who had publicly committed their lives to love and the service of other could be so cruel to gays and lesbians. As indicated in the following dialogue excerpt, she has always felt supported by God:

> Yeah, I don't know. I think it did. It did change even though I was struggling with that a lot in my prayer. Not every day, but different things. I think I focused more instead of on prayer at that point more on, well, prayer was part of it, but trying to . . . trying to figure things out and trying to look at where God was in my life. So, and it is funny because some people say, "Well, are you . . . do you feel that . . . is it? I can't think of a good . . . a better way to say this, but is it that you feel that God feels differently about you?" And I'm like, "No, I feel very supported by God. It's the people who do God's work that I . . . that I have issues with. It's not God. It's not Jesus." (Everitt, 2010, p. 91)

When asked if her relationship with Jesus or God actually allowed her to love or affirm herself better, Jean responded,

> Oh, yeah, I would say so. Yeah, for example, when I think I still hadn't put my finger on what, what, who I was or what was going on, I was reading a book by John—I think it's John Powell, a Jesuit—and it's called *Why am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* It's from the 80s or 70s or something. The story goes, someone came up to him and said, "Hey, you know that, the title of your book or whatever, or your talk." He goes, "Do you want to hear what I, what I think?" He said this in the very beginning of the book. He said, "I'm afraid to tell you who I am because, if you, if you don't like it, that's all I have, whereas if I don't and you don't like that, I can change or whatever," but it was said much more pointedly. So I was, I didn't feel that I was in a particularly prayerful mood. I was sitting on the back porch, you know, a place kind of like this, and then, and so I'm just reading that and thinking about that, you know, it wasn't a whole prayer thing, and then I heard a voice say, "I know who you are and I love you." Like, wow, okay. "But who is that? Who am I? Can you tell me who I am?" So I've always felt supported by God, just not so supported by people.
>
> And then another time, not that God talks to me a lot (but I don't cry a lot) and I mentioned earlier, lesbian is not a word I really like. It doesn't bother me as much now, but it just seems like, I don't know, gay is more of an adjective whereas lesbian is a noun. So, it's more, like, of a noun and I'm, like, well, I'm me. Well it's, then I struggled with that and I'm like, "Well, I'm a soccer player and that noun doesn't bother me," you know. But anyway, so what happened? Oh, so I, so I was doing another "Who am I" kind of thing. I was sitting in church. I forget what time of the year it was, and Mass was going to start and I was just obsessing over the whole "Who am I?" thing, just kind of. . . . I forget why, but once again, I heard a voice that said, "You're a lesbian and I love you." "God, could [You] pick a different word?" So I'm, like, "Okay, fine, fine, okay, and that's actually the story that I told when I finally came out to my therapist. I'm like, "So it appears like God is pretty set on this." (Everitt, 2010, p. 93)

Maintaining the sacramental life of the Church has been an issue of struggle for Jean since leaving her last parish as the result of a personnel change on the clerical staff. Although she loved the parish and was adverse to leaving for this reason, she no longer found the experience life giving. As did many of the other study participants, Jean attends Mass for the sense of community, as indicated in her following dialogue response: "So why do I go to Mass? To be able to worship with the community and to make myself take

time to be with others; well, others who have a similar belief system, and to be open to God" (Everitt, 2010, p. 91)

While visiting her family on vacation, Jean had a painful experience at Church with her family. She recounted,

> I was at home for Christmas and attended Mass at the parish where I grew up. I am a founding member from back in the 70s, and it was Holy Family Sunday and, for whatever reason, this priest who was not that old—probably in his 30s or 40s—starts talking about what a good family is, and what a bad family is, and he all but says gay. He says everything but the word *gay* for the bad family. He said, "When a man and a woman have a family" (talking about a man and woman, dah, dah, dah), and I'm like, "Why is this even necessary," you know? He continued with "Don't believe the propaganda that the TV's telling you. . . . There is a good way," and I'm like, "No, let's just talk. . . . The families in your parish aren't going to become gay. Why are you . . . why are you doing this?" (Everitt, 2010, p. 106)

> Well, you know why he's doing it? I know, but, no, so I. . . . I was listening. I was listening and I was getting more and more upset. So finally, I leaned over and told my mom, "I'm going to leave." So I waited until he finished the homily and then I left, and then I called a bunch of people in the parking lot while I cried. I'm like, "I can't believe this," and a friend of mine said she had to deal with that when her parents died. We just, we have a lot of people who aren't very pastoral, and this was a big parish, like, I think 3,000 families because it's a suburb and it's in the south. So I was talking to my parents. . . . Oh, then this one long-time female parishioner talked to my mother and she said, "Did you see that young, that single woman that walked out?" And my mom said, "You didn't recognize her? That's Jean." So that's when the woman came up to me and said, "Oh, don't worry. I walk out lots of times." I said, "I'm not worried about walking out," and then later I told other people at my school, and I didn't even finish the story and they're like, "I would have walked out." I'm like "Uh-huh, I did." Let me finish the story; I walked out. (Everitt, 2010, p. 107)

Summary

The stories documented in the current study illustrate the overwhelmingly positive experiences of the teachers who participated. However, the participants also described painful moments in their Catholic school careers and serious conflict with the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality. The five themes that emerged

in the course of the study are supported by the participants' testimonies as documented in the dialogue transcripts. The themes that surfaced most clearly were: (a) Catholic identity, (b) prayer/sacramental life, (c) mentoring gay and lesbian students, (d) silence/ invisibility, and (e) fear.

The conclusions generated by the researcher and the participants are outlined in the final chapter of the study. Recommendations for future research and for future practice and closing remarks are also included.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

Although few examples of positive statements from the USCCB (1991); the USCCB, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family (1997); and the Vatican (Sacred CDF, 1986, 1992) exist on homosexuality, the bulk of related Church teaching creates a confusing environment within which gay and lesbian Catholics must manage conflicting identities. Positive statements regarding the dignity of homosexual individuals in "whom God's love is revealed" (USCC, UCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997, p. 6) are offset by the use of such terms as *objectively disordered* (Sacred CDF, 1986, ¶ 3). Public discourse in the state of California regarding gay and lesbian civil rights has spurred renewed attention to the presence of Catholic gay and lesbians teaching within Catholic secondary education. Yet, existing literature does not address the real-life experiences of this population of educators. McGinley (2006) wrote, "Of all the issues polarizing American society at this point in time, homosexuality is one of the most divisive" (p. 9). Consequently, this current research documents the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools.

This study is grounded in the PAR method (Maguire, 1987) with the purpose of documenting the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools. The participants self-identified as Catholic and gay or lesbian and were employed by a Catholic secondary school within northern California.

Several themes emerged from within the dialogue transcripts. While participant perspectives widely varied, "common threads" were evident. The participants were given

an opportunity to discuss the themes with the researcher prior to the second round of dialogue and during the small-group session and agreed on the consistent nature of the themes among their experiences. The themes evidenced most clearly were (a) Catholic identity, (b) prayer/sacramental life, (c) mentoring gay and lesbian students, (d) silence/invisibility, and (e) fear.

Conclusions and Implications

The conclusions in this study are based upon the experiences of the participants as Catholic gay or lesbian educators teaching within Catholic schools. While there is certainly diversity among the participants and their experiences, the following conclusions represent their collective voice as drawn from their individual dialogues and the final small-group dialogue. Their experiences as teachers within Catholic secondary education have been generally positive; however, these educators did share some common concerns.

The first research question asked, “How does a homosexual identity affect what it means to be a Catholic, gay or lesbian, secondary-school educator?” The primary impact of being homosexual in a Catholic school relates to the participants’ concern over job security. All eight of the participants expressed concern over job loss if their sexual orientation was revealed to the diocese within which they worked. Seven of eight of the participants disclosed their sexual orientation to their immediate supervisors or school administrators; however, all acknowledged that their school administration may not be able to protect them from diocese repercussions.

All but one of the study participants believed that it is important for their supervisor to be aware of their sexual orientation; three have disclosed their sexual

orientation to a student. In each case of the three cases, the disclosure was made because the participants felt it was an appropriate response to a related student concern or classroom situation. Those who disclosed their sexual orientation immediately reported the incident to their school administration. Seven of nine participants acknowledged they would prefer that their sexual identity was known by their students because it would improve their ability to connect honestly with them. The participants also acknowledged, however, that they would only disclose such information to students with a guarantee of job protection. Kissen (1996) summarized the impact that administrators have on the experiences of public school educators, "Principals and other administrators can be vital allies in a gay teacher's life. They are the ones with the power to hire, fire, and defend the teachers who work under their supervision" (p. 145). The educators in the current study also indicated the importance of a strong relationship with their administrators. Unfortunately, most of the participants were unsure of the protection a local administrator could provide in the face of a diocesan administrator or Bishop.

The fear of being identified as a gay or lesbian educator within a Catholic secondary school impacts the teacher and his or her ability to connect honestly with his or her students. The teacher often hides his or her private life and must avoid personal conversations with students because of his or her fear of being outed. Most of the participants in the study acknowledged that this type of dishonesty has negatively impacted their ability to speak authentically to students about the importance of integrity and wholeness. The experiences of the Catholic educators included in this study were consistent with the experiences of their public school peers. As DeJean (2004) indicated,

teachers must be able to speak honestly about who they are if they are to create a classroom environment in which the student and the teacher are respected.

In discussions related to the second research question, “How does identity as a Catholic gay or lesbian educator impact the experience of teaching within Catholic secondary-school education?”, participants focused on the importance of prayer and their relationship with the sacramental life of the Church. The participants were deeply committed to prayer and sacramental life and believed they had a positive impact on the spiritual lives of their students. All had an active prayer life and reflected positively on their relationship with the sacramental life of the Church. Prayer and worship were consistently identified as a source of strength for these educators. All expressed a desire to help their students develop an interest in prayer or membership in the Catholic community. Seven of eight of the participants were directly involved in ministry to students and believed their commitment to the Christian life has had a positive impact on their students. Several of the participants believed that their willingness to remain Catholic, despite the teaching of the Church on homosexuality, has also been an important positive influence. Two of the participants articulated a sense of responsibility to remain Catholic to nurture the spiritual lives of their gay and lesbian students. Five of eight study participants were happy with their parishes and found their experience of the Eucharist meaningful. Three were not happy with parish life and experience a sense of exclusion when attending Mass. Those who are happy with parish life reported a sense of inclusion and a deliberate attempt by the parish to include gay and lesbian members of the community in the life of the Church. The participants in the study embodied the type of holiness that the Church describes when she talks about chastity in regard to a person

with a homosexual orientation. The Sacred CDF (1991) explained, "Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being" (p. 8). It is clear from the dialogues that the participants had successfully integrated their sexuality with the other dimensions of their personalities. D'Augelli (1994) described this type of integration in psychological terms,

> To be lesbian, gay, or bisexual in the fullest sense—to have a meaningful identity—leads to a consciousness of the history of one's own oppression. It also, generally, leads to an appreciation of how the oppression continues, and a commitment to resisting it. (p. 328)

One could argue that the participants' willingness to remain Catholic and to teach in a Catholic school, despite the often painful discourse of the Roman Catholic Church, is a strong sign of the participants' psychological health.

The gay or lesbian Catholic secondary-school educator who freely chooses to work in a Catholic school so that he or she can have a positive impact on the faith formation of his or her students illustrates how Catholic identity impacts the teacher and his or her experience in a Catholic secondary school. As Whitehead and Whitehead (2001) remarked,

> To acknowledge oneself within the faith community as lesbian or gay can be a generative act. From the witness of mature lesbian and gay persons, Catholic school students-indeed the whole faith community-will learn the patterns of psychological growth and spiritual maturity that can support homosexual holiness. Closeted lives, however holy, provide no wider lessons in religious maturing. (p. 19)

There are significant advantages for Catholic school students if Catholic schools discover a way to integrate the testimonies and the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators in the life of the school. Students will benefit significantly from the Christian witness of their gay and lesbian teachers, coaches and administrators. Based on the data

in the current study, gay and lesbian educators play a significant role in Catholic faith formation.

Another important implication for Catholic schools is the key role that Catholic gay and lesbian educators play in bridging the gap between the Roman Catholic Church and postmodern teenagers who dismiss the validity of Church membership. All of the participants articulated a concern over the relationship between their students and the Roman Catholic Church. The students with whom the participants interact on a daily basis are largely dismissive of the Church and have little faith in its teachings. The participants reported that students believe the Church lacks credibility on moral issues, rendering it unlikely that they will continue their relationship with the Church into adulthood. The participants further acknowledged that this form of hostility toward the Church differs from that exhibited by previous generations of students. They voiced sadness about the lack of student interest in the Catholic community, but believe their ability to remain Catholic is an important student influence. The participants were hopeful they will be allowed to use their personal stories to engage students in meaningful dialogue surrounding Church membership; however, they voiced frustration over the current expectation that they continue to remain silent. It was clear from the dialogue sessions that Catholic gay and lesbian educators have many valuable gifts to share with students and would welcome the opportunity.

Although the Bishops of the United States seem to encourage gay and lesbian Catholics to remain committed to the Christian Community, their message to Catholic gay and lesbian educators promotes confusion. The USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family letter (1997) ends with the following personal invitation to

homosexual Catholics: “Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian Community, from those who love you. In you God’s love is revealed. You are always our children” (p. 6). However, the Roman Bishops made it very clear that homosexual persons must be in complete union with Rome to participate in the life of the Church. The Sacred CDF (1986) insisted that any homosexual individual who publicly disagrees with the teaching of the Church is not fit for public ecclesial service. It is also clearly stated that Catholic schools, universities, and parishes may not grant use of their facilities to groups or individuals who “seek to undermine the teaching of the Church, which [*sic*] are ambiguous about it, or which [*sic*] neglect it entirely” (¶ 17). The teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on *conscience* does not seem to apply to homosexual persons. Gumbleton (1993) illustrated the role of conscience in the life of a practicing Catholic by highlighting the freedom members of the U.S. military have when carrying out the policy of deterrence, despite the authoritative teaching of the Church on the moral evil of nuclear weapons. He pointed out that members of the military are free to act according to their conscience, have never been denied the Eucharist, and are supported by Catholic chaplains. He went on to challenge bishops to exercise the same type of pastoral care toward homosexual women and men and further asserted,

> My expectation is that the Church, especially its bishop leaders, will act the same way toward homosexual people who may from their conscientious discernment determine to live in a way contrary to Church teaching. We will continue to present the teaching clearly. But at the same time we will respect the rights of conscience as every person struggles to find his or her way to God. (p. 20)

As a result of the confusion that many gay and lesbian Catholics find in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, they must make a decision between lying or

walking away from the Catholic community and the Catholic school. The participants in the current study bear witness to the extraordinary positive impact that Catholic gay and lesbians could make to Catholic education if given the opportunity to live as whole, integrated persons within a Catholic school setting. The participants echoed in different ways the claim that McNeill (1993) made in response to the Church requirement that gay men and lesbian women remain silent on their sexual orientation. He wrote, "Most gay Christians know they are obliged in conscience to reject a self-hating, closeted life-style which the Church would like to impose on them and which would in all probability lead to serious mental health problems" (p. xvii). The participants in the study expressed a sincere interest in the type of dialogue that the USCCB initiated in 2006 with the publication of *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Orientation: Guidelines for Pastoral Care.* The Bishops wrote,

> At the same time, it is important that Church ministers listen to the experiences, needs, and hopes of the persons with a homosexual inclination to whom and with whom they minister. Dialogue provides an exchange of information, and also communicates a respect for the innate dignity of other persons and a respect for their consciences. (United States Catholic Conference, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 2006, p. 24)

The third area of interest in the current study was articulated in the question "How does a homosexual orientation impact a career within Catholic secondary-school education?" It was evident from the contributions of the participants that being a lesbian or gay Catholic is considered by them to be an opportunity rather than a challenge. In every case, the participants viewed their sexual identity as a great opportunity for them to connect with their students on a more authentic level. One of the remarkable results of the research process was the participants coming to terms with their identity as gay or lesbian Catholics. They have resolved any residual conflict with the teaching of the Roman

Catholic Church on homosexuality and have developed a clear understanding of their relationship with the Church.

D'Augelli (1994) identified six stages in the development of a gay or lesbian identity. In the final stage, gay and lesbian persons are able to integrate their gay or lesbian identity with the other aspects of their lives. He described this phase in the process as "entering a gay or lesbian community" (p. 324). All of the participants in the current study recognized that they are members of the gay and lesbian community and are interested in integrating it with their religious identity and their careers in Catholic education. They are eager to pass their faith on and feel strongly that they have a gift to share with the students they teach. In particular, they understand what it means to be different and to search for self-identity, which is the major task of adolescence. The participants clearly articulated their experiences surrounding the disclosure of their sexual orientation and coming to terms with their sexual identity. They believe this process uniquely equipped them to offer sound pastoral care and empathy to their homosexual students. The opportunity to minister to such students within a Catholic-school setting is cherished by these educators. The experiences of the participants were consistent with the claim that Jordan (2003) made when he wrote, "For the future only the search for a form of community in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Catholics could discover how to speak their lives in faith more fully" (p. 26). The ability to speak the truths of their lives in faith more fully would positively impact their experience in Catholic education and would benefit the emotional and spiritual development of their students.

Three of the participants in the study indicated an interest in pursuing a career in Catholic school administration but noted that they would face barriers in getting hired based on their sexual orientation. Although they admitted that their local administration would most likely not want to discriminate against them, they stated that their administrators would feel pressure from diocesan authorities to avoid hiring a gay or lesbian administrator. In response to a question about getting fired, Lori maintained, "If push comes to shove, even if people love me, it's not enough protection. It's just not. It doesn't matter how much I argue my conscience, they could just fire me" (Everitt, 2010pp. 201-202). The participants have reason to be concerned. According to the Catholic Church it is morally acceptable to discriminate against gay and lesbian persons. While homosexual individuals are entitled to the same fundamental human rights as all people, "sexual orientation does not constitute a quality comparable to race, ethnic background, etc., in respect to non-discrimination" (USCC, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 2006, p. 15). The Church even goes so far as to identify teachers and coaches as those who can be legitimately targeted for discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The final question the current study addressed was "How do Catholic gay and lesbian educators balance a homosexual identity with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality." The participants in this study unanimously agreed that the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality does not adequately address their needs as gay and lesbian members of the Catholic Church. The participants' testimonies were consistent with the position expressed by McNeill (1993)

when he claimed that the damage done to gay men and lesbian women is devastating. McNeill maintained,

> The result of adhering to these exclusive goals has been that many Catholic homosexuals, even a majority, find themselves faced with a terrible dilemma: either to continue their relationship with the Church at the price of being cut off from any deep human relationship and deprived of their potentialities for growth and development in their self-identity—not to mention their agonies of guilt, remorse, self-hatred, and potential emotional breakdown when they fail to achieve the accepted goals—or to seek their personal growth by means of a homosexual relationship, only at the price of cutting themselves off from the Church community and its sacramental life, with all the attendant guilt and emotional stress which [*sic*] such a separation involves. (p. 2)

Each of the participants described the struggle they initially faced in trying to understand and live the teaching of the Church as expressed in the official documents from Rome and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Roger explained how he developed his own understanding of what God was expecting of him in relationship to his sexual orientation,

> I think that I was aware of the church's teaching about what it means to have an informed conscience. So I was very aware that I was called to listen to the pastoral direction of the bishops, which meant reading their pastoral letters related to sexuality and homosexuality. I discussed those with a member of the ordained clergy. I prayerfully reflected on what I had read in relationship to my own personal life. And in the final analysis my understanding of informed conscience is that I must be able to look at my God and myself and choose what is right. And to the best of my ability, meet the objective standards of the church but not to the degree to which I become a crippled human being. So that's to me the end. If I'm called to follow an objective standard that makes me less of a member of the Body of Christ then my conscience tells me that I must in faith move forward in love, on my own path. (Everitt, 2010, p. 291)

For most of the participants, prayer, reading the scriptures and participating in Christian community were more important to their understanding of the teaching of the Church than were the documents on homosexuality. Without exception, the participants acknowledged that it is important to know what the Church teaches on human sexuality,

particularly homosexuality, but that they are no longer bothered by or pay attention to the condemnations that come from Bishops or Rome. The participants were clear about what they believe and they were confident in their relationship with God. The priorities for the participants in the current study were the pastoral care and education of their students. The process of coming to terms with one's own oppression and using those experiences for good was described by Wink (2005) as Conscientization. She explained,

> Conscientization moves us from the passivity of "Yeah, but we can't do that" to the power of "We gotta do the best we can where we are with what we've got." For example, I see teachers as powerful humans who can make a difference in the lives of students. However, they often feel weak because they see themselves as victims of a system that renders them passive. Conscientization enables students and teacher to have confidence in their own knowledge, ability, and experiences. Often people will say that conscientization is a power we have when we recognize we *know* that we know. (p. 32)

The testimony of the participants clearly indicated that they "know what they know" and that they are using that knowledge to educate a new generation of Catholic students who they hope will remain in the Church as agents of change. Roger explained it this way,

> And to me that's not so much about oppression as it is finding a new away to express my voice. And I think what that experience of the last eight years is calling forth for me is that I don't feel oppressed now at school. What I do feel is that I have my life, and the question is, for me, "How do I share that life in a way that the spirit of God can be present to my experience in a Catholic environment?" (Everitt, 2010, p. 287)

The participants in this study believed it is important for the Church to hear their stories and to find ways of incorporating their experiences as Catholic gays and lesbians into the curriculum. During the small-group dialogue, the teachers discussed the affirming nature of this research process. It was important for them to reflect on their experiences and hear from others the positive impact of their ministry on students within Catholic education. The participants expressed an interest in finding opportunities to

formally share their stories. They discussed ideas for incorporating gay and lesbian narratives into Catholic education and for introducing their stories into the professional development of colleagues.

Recommendations

An essential element of PAR includes an action plan. Due to the fear of being "outed" and possibly losing their jobs, participants were not ready to engage in a group action project to address the areas of concern identified in the current study. However, the participants did help the researcher identify areas for future research and for future practice. Both sets of recommendations should be adopted so that "the intrinsic dignity of each person will always be respected in word, in action and in law" (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,1986, ¶ 10).

Recommendations for Future Research

Based upon an exhaustive literature search, this appears to be the only study focused on the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators within Catholic secondary schools of the United States. It is certainly the first study on Catholic gay and lesbian educators within northern California. It is hoped that the research will open a new field of inquiry within Catholic education, particularly in the following areas:

1. The experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools located in less "gay friendly" U.S. regions.

2. The roles Catholic gay and lesbian educators play in the lives of homosexual students within Catholic schools.

3. The experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators who have been terminated from employment within Catholic schools due to their sexual orientation.

4. The experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators in the faith formation of students attending Catholic schools and their families.

5. Parent perceptions surrounding the impact of Catholic gay and lesbian educators teaching within Catholic secondary schools throughout the United States.

6. The impact of diocesan policies regarding educator disclosure of sexual orientation on the quality of teaching within Catholic schools.

7. The experiences of straight children with same-sex parents who attend Catholic schools and the policies that protect their families from discrimination in school practices.

8. Evaluation of school curricula as it relates to homosexuals and the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on gay and lesbian issues.

9. Evaluation of Catholic school policies as they relate to self-identified transgendered students.

10. The experiences of gay and lesbian students in Catholic schools as they relate to bullying, social aggression and hate speech and hate crime.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian Catholic secondary school educators documented in this study illuminate the work that needs to be done to foster a sense of inclusion and justice for gay and lesbian Catholics in secondary schools. While this study only documented the experiences of adults, it is clear that more needs to be done to

improve the experiences of students and their families. The researcher has included recommendations for future practice:

1. That Catholic schools adopt clear policies that address sexual orientation in regard to admission, hiring, benefits and grievance practices.

2. That Catholic schools adopt clear policies that address the question of same-sex couples attending school functions; such as proms, formals and other school sponsored "couples activities."

3. That Catholic schools adopt clear policies as it relates to transgendered students and their special needs in terms of school uniforms, changing rooms, restrooms and school-sponsored overnight trips.

4. That school administrators educate themselves on the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church regarding homosexuality so that their communication is accurate, honest and pastorally sensitive.

5. That school administrators provide educational programs for students that portray gay and lesbian people accurately and honestly and highlight Church teaching regarding the just treatment of gay and lesbian people.

6. That school curriculum coordinators evaluate religious education materials to guarantee that a balanced and pastorally sensitive approach to homosexuality is presented to students and their parents.

7. That school counselors prioritize professional training so that their work with gay and lesbian students and their families is informed by Church teaching and current psychological practice.

8. That school ministers include prayers in school liturgies that promote the inclusion and dignity of gay and lesbian people in the faith community.

Closing Remarks

The narratives provided within this research documentation address the diverse experiences of the participants in Catholic secondary education. The study reflects the tension that many gay and lesbian Catholics feel between their identities as homosexual individuals and their identities as Catholic educators. The participant contributions to this research evidence the incredible gift gay and lesbian Catholics are to Catholic education.

Initially, I thought that this study would be provocative and would serve as a springboard to engage the many Catholic gay and lesbian educators in Catholic secondary schools in a dialogue so that we might join together in a fight for justice. As it turned out, the gay and lesbian educators who I had the privilege of interviewing for this project have already begun the fight for justice for gay and lesbian Catholics. They are working in Catholic schools, sharing their faith and helping young people understand that God is love. Their perseverance in the face of discrimination and fear demonstrates their tremendous commitment toward serving as a "light unto this world" of God's contrary reign of peace and justice.

It is my sincere hope that this research project will be a small step in encouraging those who fear the gay and lesbian community to open their hearts and their minds to the incredible possibility of a Church and a world in which each person is valued because he or she is made in the very image and likeness of God. I wish to draw this experience to a close by quoting Sr. Joan Chittister (2004), a Benedictine monk who has given her life to be a voice for those of us who so often find ourselves voiceless.

> Between life and death it is for all of us to do one blazing act of good—however small it may seem at the time. Life is the opportunity to speak one great truth in the face of one great lie. It may seem that no one hears it. It may seem that nothing changes. But not to speak—that is the real sin. Then, smallness is the lot even of the great. Only the doing of justice is a good enough excuse to be born. (p. 126)

The experiences documented in this study are one great truth in the face of one great lie.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Appendix A

Participant Consent

James B. Everitt
Doctoral Candidate
University of San Francisco
95 Clinton Street
Redwood City, CA 94062 / 650-465-3097

Dear ,

My name is **Error! Reference source not found.** and I am a doctoral candidate in the Catholic Educational Leadership Program at the University of San Francisco. I am conducting a study on the experience of Catholic gay and lesbian Catholic secondary school educators in northern California. I am interested in understanding the experiences of Catholic gay and lesbian educators. You have given me approval to conduct this research.

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are either a Catholic gay man or lesbian woman currently working in a Catholic secondary school in northern California. I am interested in your experiences regarding your career in Catholic education. If you agree to be in this study, you will be interviewed multiple times and the dialogues will be transcribed. You will have the opportunity to read the transcripts before it is included as data.

It is possible that some of the questions I ask may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or stop participation at any time. Although you will not be asked to mention or state your name during the dialogue, I will know that you were asked to participate in the research because I sent you this cover letter. Study records will be kept as confidential as possible. Study information will be kept in a private location. Only my dissertation chair, Bro. Raymond Vercruysee, and I will have access to the files and the tape recordings will be expunged upon completion of the dissertation.

While there will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding your experience and potential ideas for social action.

There will be no cost to you as a result of taking part in this study, nor will you be reimbursed for your participation in this study.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at 650-465-3097. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS by calling 415 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by emailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Bro. Raymond Verycrusse at (415) 422-5891.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.
Thank you for your attention. If you agree to participate, please complete the attached consent form, and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully,

James B. Everitt
Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Purpose and Background

Mr. James B. Everitt, a doctoral student at the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is conducting a research study that seeks to understand the experience of Catholic gay and lesbian Catholic secondary school educators in northern California. I am being asked to participate because I am either a Catholic gay man or lesbian woman currently working in a Catholic secondary school in northern California.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will participate in interviews.
2. I will have the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview.
3. I will be asked about my experience as a Catholic gay or lesbian Catholic school educator.
4. I will participate in the dialogues with knowledge that they will be taped, and transcribed.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions will make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. Study records will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be kept in a private file at all times. Only the researcher, Mr. James B. Everitt and the dissertation chair, Bro. Raymond Verycrusse, will have access to the files.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of my experience as a Catholic gay or lesbian Catholic secondary school educator.

Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

I will not be reimbursed for my participation in this study, because there are no financial considerations.

Questions

I have talked to Mr. James B. Everitt about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call him at 650-465-3097 or Br. Raymond Vercruysse at (415) 422-5891.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason I do not want to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling 001 415 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, be emailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

I have been given a copy of the “Research Subject’s Bill of Rights” and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

_____

Subject’s Signature Date of Signature

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date of Signature

APPENDIX B

SUBJECTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Appendix B

RESEARCH SUBJECTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a research subject, I have the following rights:

Research subjects can expect:

- To be told the extent to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained and of the possibility that specified individuals, internal and external regulatory agencies, or study sponsors may inspect information in the medical record specifically related to participation in the clinical trial.
- To be told of any benefits that may reasonably be expected from the research.
- To be told of any reasonably foreseeable discomforts or risks.
- To be told of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be of benefit to the subject.
- To be told of the procedures to be followed during the course of participation, especially those that are experimental in nature.
- To be told that they may refuse to participate (participation is voluntary), and that declining to participate will not compromise access to services and will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.
- To be told about compensation and medical treatment if research related injury occurs and where further information may be obtained when participating in research involving more than minimal risk.
- To be told whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research, about the research subjects' rights and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject.
- To be told of anticipated circumstances under which the investigator without regard to the subject's consent may terminate the subject's participation.
- To be told of any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.
- To be told of the consequences of a subjects' decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.
- To be told that significant new findings developed during the course of the research that may relate to the subject's willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.
- To be told the approximate number of subjects involved in the study.
- To be told what the study is trying to find out;
- To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice;
- To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes;
- To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be;
- To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study; To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study;
- To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise;
- To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study;
- To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and
- To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study. If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher or the research assistant. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling (415) 422-

6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to USF IRBPHS, Department of Counseling Psychology, Education Building, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Appendix C

Institutional Review Board Approval

-----Original Message-----
From: irbphs [mailto:irbphs@usfca.edu]
Sent: Thursday, February 26, 2009 6:25 PM
To: James Everitt
Cc: rbvercruysse@usfca.edu
Subject: IRB Application # 08-016 - Renewal Approved

February 26, 2009

Dear Mr. Everitt:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS)at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your renewal request for human subjects approval regarding your study. Your renewal application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #08-016). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must filea renewal application.
2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.
3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE FIRST DIALOGUE

Appendix D

Questions to Guide the First Dialogue

The following questions were used to guide the first dialogue and provide an overall structure to the narration of the participant experience. Questions for the second dialogues emerged from responses collected in the first sessions after the participant accuracy checks of the transcription. No questions were pre-formulated for the small-group session within which the participants reflected on their experience of the process and suggested an action plan to address concerns raised during the study. The following research questions are restated along with their related dialogue questions:

Research Question 1 asked, “How does a homosexual identity affect what it means to be a Catholic, gay or lesbian, secondary-school educator?” Corresponding dialogue questions asked,

1. Do you see a connection between your homosexual identity and your identity as a Catholic educator?

2. In what ways has your homosexual identity positively impacted your identity as a Catholic educator?

3. In what ways has your homosexual identity negatively impacted your identity as a Catholic educator?

4. What, if any, are areas of concern for you as a Catholic gay or lesbian educator teaching within a Catholic secondary school?

Research Question 2 asked, “How does identity as a Catholic gay or lesbian educator impact the experience of teaching within Catholic secondary-school education?”

5. Have you ever witnessed or directly experienced colleagues delivering disparaging or offensive comments about gay and/or lesbian teachers or students? If so, can you describe the experience?

6. Have you ever witnessed students perceived to be gay or lesbian being harassed at school? If so, did you witness anyone coming to their aid or offering protection? Did you feel safe protecting vulnerable students?

7. What role, if any, do you play in mentoring gay and lesbian students?

8. Do you have a network of support with other Catholic gay and/or lesbian educators?

Research Question 3 asked, "How does a homosexual orientation impact a career within Catholic secondary-school education?" Corresponding dialogue questions asked,

9. Have you experienced oppression, violence, or injustice within the Catholic school system as a result of your homosexual orientation? If so, how has it affected you as an educator?

10. In what way, if any, do you experience the structure of Catholic education as an oppressive system?

11. What has been your experience with career promotion within Catholic schools? Do you have the same opportunities as your peers?

12. What has been your experience with your school administrators and supervisors? Do you sense they respect you as a professional and as a colleague?

13. What are specific actions you and other Catholic gay and lesbian educators can take to create a more just system?

14. How can you work with others in the community to empower Catholic gay and lesbian educators?

15. What changes, if any, are you hoping to make toward improving your experience as a Catholic gay or lesbian educator?

Research Question 4 asked, “How do Catholic gay and lesbian educators balance a homosexual identity with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality?”

16. What role does Church teaching play in your understanding of what it means to be Catholic?

17. Describe how you balance the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality and your identity as a gay or lesbian Catholic?

18. Do you struggle to maintain a Catholic identity? If so, what support structures do you have in place to assist you in that struggle?

19. Do you openly criticize the teaching of the Catholic Church within your school setting?

20. Do you “come out” to colleagues and students when asked about your sexual orientation?

21. Do you regularly attend Mass on the weekend? Do you actively participate in parish life?

22. Is there anything you would like to add that has not been covered?

The following questions guided the second dialogue sessions:

1. With regard to the role of conscience and the process by which you came to terms with an identity as a Catholic GLBT individual, can you be specific about how you discerned your place within the Catholic community?

2. Most, if not all, of the study participants have described Catholicism as an integral facet of their identities, just as a homosexual orientation is integral to identity. Examples of comments are “I couldn’t not be Catholic, even if I tried” or “Catholic is in my blood.” Can you reflect on the idea implied by these comments in greater detail?

3. Despite the official teaching of the Church on homosexuality, it is often a priest, nun, or pastoral lay minister who mentors individuals through the crisis of coming out or internally dealing with sexual orientation. Can you describe those relationships and how they impacted your sense of God’s love or your membership in the Church?

4. Fear or discomfort typically surround the idea of formally mentoring GLBT students. Can you talk more about this? What conditions are necessary for your comfort in participating in such mentoring?

5. The majority of the study participants acknowledged that open identification as a gay or lesbian teacher would prevent career advancement as a Catholic educator. Most accepted this, but do you experience a sense of loss or oppression with this limitation?

6. What would you like Church leadership to know about your experience as a gay/lesbian Catholic educator?

7. Do you have any questions for the group dialogue?

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE SECOND DIALOGUE

Appendix E

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DIALOGUE TWO

Based on the first dialogue, I would like to suggest the following ideas to guide dialogue two. If you have any additional questions that I have not listed below, please feel free to include them in our next dialogue. Also, if you have questions that you would for the group to consider in a third group interview please bring those to the 2nd interview.

1. The role of conscience and the process by which you came to terms with a Catholic / GLB/ Queer identity. Can you be specific about how you discerned your place in the Catholic community?
2. Most, if not all, in some way described Catholicism as an integral part of his/her identity in the same way that being GLB/Queer is integral to his/her identity. One of way of saying it (although not very articulately) is "I couldn't not be Catholic even if I tried." Catholic is in my blood… Can you reflect on that idea a bit more?
3. Despite the Church's official teaching on homosexuality it was often the Church, or in most cases a priest , nun or pastoral lay minister, who mentored you through the crisis of coming out or dealing with your sexual orientation. Can you describe those relationships and how they impacted your sense of God's love or membership in the Church?
4. Mentoring students: Without exception, there was some fear or discomfort around the idea of formally mentoring GLBT students. Can you talk more about this? What conditions would have to be present in order for you to be comfortable mentoring GLBT students?
5. Career: Most participants acknowledged that being an openly gay/lesbian/queer teacher would prevent them from climbing the Catholic school career ladder. Most seemed ok with this. I am wondering if you feel a loss in regards to this or if this limitation is truly ok with you (as indicated in many of the interviews). Does this feel like oppression?
6. Is there something that you want Church leadership to know about your experience? If you knew that every Bishop in the country was going to read this dissertation (wishful thinking) what you want them to know about your experience of being Catholic/GLB/Queer?
7. Do you have any questions for the group interview?