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WORK IN PROGRESS

Introduction

Currently, it appears that Victorian education sectors are uncertain about what to do in relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) teachers and students. Recent research in Victoria and Australia has reported on issues affecting LGBT teachers and students and found that people who are homosexual, bisexual or transgender within the education sector experience disproportionate levels of discrimination and abuse.

The lack of attention from non-government and government education departments is surprising, considering their record in taking action around other issues of difference. For example, they have rightly developed specific policy and program responses to address discrimination or harassment of teachers and students based on gender, ability, race and cultural identity. Specific policy and programs which respond to discrimination or harassment associated with not being heterosexual, however are yet to be developed and implemented by education departments within Victoria.

This lack of action is also surprising considering the work being undertaken in other youth sector settings. For example, there are a number of youth work agencies that are providing services targeting same-sex attracted and transgender young people, in recognition of the specific needs of these young people. Many of these organizations are also working with schools and report that they are wanting Professional Development around constructing whole school environments that are open to sexual diversity. In the absence of the provision of professional development by the State Department of Education or the Catholic Education Office, professional development is being delivered by youth workers or health professionals.

Another response from outside of Victorian Educational Bureaucracies concerned with addressing the needs of LGBT people in youth sector settings has been the work of a non-profit community group called Context. Context is a group for teachers and youth workers who share an interest in issues affecting LGBT workers and young people and has been meeting in Melbourne since 1996. Context has developed and implemented a range of strategies aimed to contribute to the work of improving the experience of LGBT people in youth sector settings, particularly schools. Context has sought to build alliances of workers and in the process to support the work that these people are doing around responding to
homophobia and promoting sexual diversity. Context has sought to bring workers together, to energise them and to rupture their isolation.

In this paper we present the work of Context as a approach for action around issues affecting lgbt people in youth sector settings. We begin by discussing the aims and various activities of Context. This includes the conferences and seminars Context has hosted, submissions and articles members have written and the development of a website. We then explore current projects of Context. In particular, we report on research in progress, which investigates contemporary workplace experiences of homosexual bisexual and transgender teachers and youth workers.

**Context**

**Introduction**

Context is a group for teachers, youth workers and others who share an interest in contributing to the work of improving the experiences of LGBT workers and young people in youth sector settings. Context is based in Melbourne and has been meeting since 1996.

Context emerged partly in response to the growing body of literature which reports that lgbt experience in youth sector settings, particularly schools, is not good. A number of people were eager for change to happen and were interested in exploring approaches and implementing strategies to make a contribution to change.

Context operates within a community development framework, in that it positions itself as part of a broader project of awareness raising and social change. The aims and activities of Context are determined by the members of the group in as open and non-hierarchical fashion as possible. Context is non-profit and is not incorporated.

Members share a belief in the importance of supporting links and collaboration between schools and youth services to assist in developing responses to address the needs of lgbt people within these sectors. For example members believe that youth work agencies are well positioned to support change within schools and that schools and youth services can share expertise to facilitate improvements for lgbt people.

**Activities**

Context has been involved in a range of activities, and these have all been achieved with minimal funding and as a result of the efforts of members. It is important to remember that in keeping with a community development framework the work we discuss below is not intended to be prescriptive. The various strategies have emerged as a result of the particular political, social and cultural situation and climate in Victoria. Therefore, this approach and aspects of it may not be relevant or appropriate in different places.

**Conferences and Forums**

Context has hosted a number of conferences and seminars; including:


This conference focused on current activities occurring around lgbt people in youth sector settings in Victoria. 46 people gave 25 different paper, workshop and performance
presentations on a range of current practice and research occurring around LGBT young people. 120 people attended.

* ‘Supporting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual And Transgender Young People In Schools And Youth Sector Settings: A Forum’ (October 1999)

This forum focused on providing practical examples for supporting LGBT young people in schools and youth sector settings. Ian Seal, as well as representatives of youth services implementing work around LGBT young people (Cutting Edge Youth Services, GASP!, Y-GLAM) spoke. 40 people attended.

* ‘Strategies To Address Homophobia In Schools: A Forum’ (July 1999).

This forum focused on practical ways of responding to incidents of harassment directed at LGBT young people in schools. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli spoke. 70 people attended.

* ‘Young People and Sexualities: Experiences, Perspectives and Service Provision: A Community Conference’ (October 1998). This conference focused on bringing together people interested in exploring issues affecting LGBT people in youth sector settings in Victoria. 33 people gave 20 different paper and workshop presentations on a range of issues and work occurring around LGBT young people in Victoria. 75 people attended. A description of the conference, as well as a selection of papers from speakers has been compiled.

An outcome from each event has included the compilation and distribution of an attendance list, to assist in on-going networking and promotion of further activities. At each event participants have also been invited to complete a feedback form, where their ideas for on-going action and events have been collected. These ideas have also been compiled and distributed to participants, as well as assisting Context in developing on-going activities.

Context has also been invited to speak at a range of forums and has been approached to host forums, including:

* A consultation with Bruce Mildenhall (ALP Opposition Spokesperson for Education) (July 1998).

* Working With and Helping Young People with Same-Sex Attraction. A seminar for health service providers from Rural Victoria. (May 1999).

* Victorian Association of Teachers of English (VATE). 'Bullying and Homophobia' panel discussion. (July 2000).

Submissions and Articles

Context has written a number of submissions to Government inquiries. These include:


* Submission to the Victorian Premiers Department, Youth Suicide Prevention Taskforce (1997)

* Submission to the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, Inquiry Into Same Sex Relationships (1997)
* Submission to the Victorian Governments Ministerial Advisory Committee On Gay And Lesbian Health (2000)

* Submission to the Education Department Victoria, Public Education the Next Generation (2000)

* Submission to Victorian Homelessness Strategy (2000)

Context has been involved in making contributions to journals and other publications. These include:

* Redress: Journal of the Association of Women Educators; Special Edition on 'Sexuality and Education', Vol. 9., No.2, September 2000


* Crowhurst, M. and Emslie, M., (comp), (2000), Young People and Sexualities: Experiences, Perspectives and Service Provision, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, Parkville.

Many members of Context have completed or are completing post graduate studies concerning lgbt experiences and issues in youth sector settings, and have published in the area.

Website and Internet

* Context has established a website at: "http://www.vicnet.net.au/~context/" - The website offers an excellent opportunity to develop a range of accessible activities on the internet.

* Context has established an email address list through the Context email address at: context_vic@hotmail.com Approximately bi-monthly Context circulates a newsletter which includes information on forums, resources, websites, publications and other useful information which people have forwarded to share with others.

* The most recent conference, 'New Work, New Work: A Conference Exploring Current Practice And Research Around Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual And Transgender Young People' was organized and promoted entirely via email.

Monthly Meetings

Context holds monthly meetings for teachers, youth workers and others to come together to informally discuss:

- workplace experiences and issues

- activities and research

- project ideas

Other Activities

Other activities of Context include:
* Providing information, material, referral, resources and contacts for people who contact Context with such requests

* Writing letters of support for groups and organizations seeking funding

* Representation on various networks, reference groups and steering committees

* Applying for funding

Conclusion

Context is involved in a range of activities aimed at improving the experience of LGBT people in youth sector settings. Adopting a community development approach, strategies have included:

* providing opportunities for networking, training and information sharing (by hosting conferences and seminars, holding monthly meetings and using the internet in innovative ways)

* pressuring governments and others for change (by making submissions to inquiries and writing articles for journals and other publications)

* supporting work occurring in the area (by writing letters of support for groups and organizations seeking funding and by being involved in various networks and on committees)

* providing opportunities for people to direct the work of Context and set an agenda for action in the area (by inviting written and verbal feedback at conferences and seminars from participants and disseminating the findings, by holding monthly meetings and having other opportunities for people to become involved with the group)

* being a contact point for information, material, referral, resources and contacts

Research

Conducting research and presenting the findings at conferences is a community development and activist strategy that members of Context are keen to pursue.

One area of research that is particularly relevant to the aims of Context is the workplace experiences of LGBT teachers and youth workers. In the second part of this paper we discuss research being conducted by Context in this area.

Workplace Experiences of GLBT teachers and youth workers: Report on Research

Introduction

In an article focusing on the high profile lesbian relationship between Dr. Kerrin Phelps, President of the AMA and Jackie Stricker, a Primary School teacher employed at a private school in Sydney Betina Arndt wrote:

While teachers are entitled to live their personal lives
as they wish, there remain questions about the effect
on the educational process of this kind of public
proselytising and media revelations of intimate private
lives

While we disagree with Arndt’s suggestion that Jackie Stricker is ‘taking it upon herself to set
up a {gay} agenda for the school’, we agree that there are important questions around
sexualities and working with young people specifically in relation to the linkages between the
sexuality of teachers and youth workers and educative and youth work processes. For
example, how does being a lgbt teacher or youth worker influence the work of these
professionals?

Members of Context are currently investigating the workplace experiences of lgbt teachers
and youth workers in Victoria. Exploring issues affecting homosexual, bisexual and
transgender youth workers and teachers, and examining factors which constrain their work
practice, is important for a number of reasons:

First, there is a need to examine discrimination directed at lgbt teachers and youth workers.
Research has shown that lgbt workers generally experience discrimination and abuse within
the workplace. While such research has included the experiences of lgbt teachers and youth
workers there is a need to investigate such experiences in more detail.

Second, we believe there is a growing need to document the experiences of lgbt teachers
and youth workers who are ‘out’ in the workplace. In our opinion, more homosexual, bisexual
and transgender workers are being open about their sexuality and gender identity in the
workplace. This is a fairly new phenomenon and we are interested in exploring the
experiences of this group of workers.

Finally, we consider research into the experiences of lgbt teachers and youth workers is
useful in order to explore the linkages between not being heterosexual and being active
around issues of discrimination for lgbt young people.

There is an increasing amount of work around lgbt young people in schools and other youth
sector settings in Australia. This work includes policy development, the development of
curriculum materials, the provision of professional development, and the direct provision of
support services.

What is often overlooked this work is the role played by teachers and youth workers in doing
the work. This raises important questions including: Who is actually doing this work?, and,
What constrains or enables this work to occur within a classroom or youth sector setting?

From our experience (and in the absence of any research at this point in time) we would
argue that it is mainly lgbt teachers and youth workers who are doing work that addresses
the needs of lgbt young people. Why do we believe that this is the case?

This might be so because lgbt teachers and youth workers have an enhanced cultural
sensitivity around sexuality issues and therefore a greater awareness of the issues that
might negatively impact on lgbt young people. We would also argue that homosexual,
bisexual and transgender teachers and youth workers have a greater awareness around the
need to work in ways that open up services so that they might be affirming of a diversity of sexualities.

The argument being made here reflects the experience around gender, ethnicity and aboriginality. Historically, it has been the case that marginalized groups have mobilized their own resources often in the face of indifference, lack of awareness or resistance in order to improve the experiences of a particular group of people. For example, in relation to the women's movement it has been women who have facilitated social and political change.

As we are interested in improving the experiences of LGBT young people in youth sector settings it is important to explore the experiences of the group of workers who are most likely to be working in their interests. Further we argue it is important to explore and identify factors that constrain and enable the work that LGBT teachers and youth workers do in this area, and the ways that a workers' queerness can enable or constrain their effectiveness.

**Methodology**

One purpose of collecting the stories from LGBT teachers and youth workers was to collect autobiographical narratives which explored in depth, aspects of the experiences of queer teachers and youth workers. In particular, to identify factors which constrained and enabled them in their places of work.

We circulated some key ideas about what we would like contributors to discuss in their stories (Appendix 1). These key ideas aimed to encourage participants to describe the context, setting and frame of reference of everyday life events in plain language. We have not edited the narratives that have been sent in, and have asked for minimal clarification from contributors on aspects of the stories.

Initially we set out to complete an edited collection of stories. In the process of collecting these however, we have become increasingly interested in key themes which have emerged through reading them. Therefore, the narratives are now serving multiple purposes. Firstly, they are stories in their own right. Second, the narratives are material which we are utilising as data for research purposes. We have informed the contributors that after stories had been collected that we would be exploring key themes with their involvement. This paper is preliminary work for this process.

Following the work of feminist and poststructural researchers, autobiographical narratives can be used in multiple ways. They are valuable in themselves as stories, and can be read as such. They are also valuable in that collectively they afford the opportunity for key themes, and dominant discourses that contribute towards the production of certain effects to be identified.

Once we had decided that we would endeavour to collect LGBT teachers and youth workers narratives we constituted a small committee in order to discuss ethical considerations. The main issue that surfaced in this stage of the project was a concern around ensuring confidentiality. The committee decided that pseudonyms would be used. Consequently the names that are used in this paper are fictitious.

This study is based on five narratives that have been contributed. All contributors have submitted stories via email. People have offered stories after learning about the project from a range of sources. This has included an advertisement in two of Melbourne's queer community newspapers 'Melbourne Star Observer' and 'Brother Sister'. Both newspapers supported the project by offering free advertising space. A call for contributions was also
posted on the Context website. We also approached people that we knew and invited them to be involved in the project.

The narratives obtained for this paper are not representative of the experiences of all LGBT teachers and youth workers. For example, we have not obtained stories from people working in the wide range of youth sector settings. For this reason, the themes that we argue emerge from the narratives may not be applicable or evident for all LGBT teachers and youth workers.

However, what is useful about a collection of autobiographical narratives is that they offer the opportunity for the exploration and recognition of similarities and commonalities across the stories. Such similarities and commonalities can in turn illuminate discourses that have contributed to the production of the experiences in the stories.

**Literature Review**

Most research into the experiences of LGBT workers in Australia focuses on their experiences of discrimination. Recent research on the experiences of LGBT workers in Australia, for example, reports that between 40-59% experience discrimination, harassment or prejudicial treatment on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity.

This research includes people who work in youth sector settings.

There are a number of key themes in relation to discrimination that emerge through the literature that documents the experiences of LGBT teachers and youth workers. Some of these themes illuminate discourses that privilege heterosexuality and that enable discrimination. Some of these are:

- The positioning of non-heterosexual sexualities as a 'lifestyle' and not as a deeply embedded aspect of lived-subjectivity
- The linking of homosexuality and paedophilia
- Discriminatory and inadequate legislative frameworks and government bodies, for example The Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995, Equal Opportunity Commissions and Legislation relating to superannuation.
- Examples of homophobic harassment, which are an effect of such discourses, are also described in the literature. Some of these are obvious and some are less so. Obvious expressions of homophobic harassment that we have identified through the literature include:
  - Homophobic comments
  - Inaction and a positioning of a complaint/s of homophobic harassment as insignificant or non-existent
  - A positioning of individuals who raise concerns around homophobic harassment as incompetent and therefore as unprofessional.
  - A resistance to work in this area
  - A devaluing and censoring of same-sex partners (e.g. partners are not to attend public school functions).
Experiences of harassment, discrimination, abuse and physical violence.

Individuals having an expectation placed on them not to 'come out' by other staff and management.

Parents and others associated with youth sector setting communities can be a source of homophobia.

The 'Three Parent Syndrome' where resistance to work around sexual diversity is justified on the basis that parents would not support such work.

Other expressions of homophobic harassment that we have identified in the literature are more subtle than those just outlined. These include:

Teachers and youth workers wanting to do work but not being supported and in the process having such work positioned as unimportant or insignificant

The individualizing of issues around sexual diversity and harassment rather than situating them structurally.

The positioning of 'coming out' as a problem that individual TYW have to deal with rather than as something that might be beneficial and positive.

A lack of support for work in this area.

A lack of professional development and curriculum resources.

A lack of systemic support in the form of departmental and school based policy.

There were also effects that accrued to individuals that we identified through the literature. Some of these were to do with effects or feelings experienced by LGBT teachers or youth workers and some were to do with perceptions formed by them. Some of these that we have identified throughout the literature include:

Negative emotional, financial and personal costs.

Negative vocational and professional costs (for example workers resign or are not employed on the basis of sexuality).

Tension, stress and lack of support around 'coming out'

Fear of being sacked and fears of other detrimental consequences associated with doing work around sexual diversity.

Fear around the imagined reactions of parents should sexuality become known.

Isolation and invisibility.
People feeling that they have a lack of power in responding to discrimination as a result of existing contradictions and ambiguities in the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act, specifically around exemptions.

As outlined there are a number of themes that we have identified through the literature. Broadly these concern the shape that harassment can take and the effects that it can have.

Some LGBT workers have experienced harassment and discrimination in youth sector settings. As a consequence sometimes an expectation of being discriminated against comes into effect.

There are also themes that are evident in the literature to do with issues around 'coming out'. These include:

- Individuals feeling a sense of responsibility to 'come out', for example, so that they can act as role models, or so they are actively involved in doing work around issues of sexual diversity by being visible.

- Individuals feeling pressure to be 'out' and not deny their sexuality in the workplace (for example not to let the LGBT community down or feeling a sense of guilt if they don't 'come out').

The themes around 'coming out' are interesting to consider in relation to those to do with the shape of harassment and discrimination outlined previously. Themes to do with a sense of responsibility towards LGBT clients, where this responsibility is linked to 'coming out', sit uncomfortably alongside LGBT teachers and youth workers experiences of harassment and discrimination in the workplace. There is a tension at play here that is made evident through the literature.

Not all accounts of LGBT teachers and youth workers in Australia are concerned with experiences of discrimination and harassment. Some of this work looks beyond discriminatory accounts. For example:

- Some LGBT teachers and youth workers report experiences where school and youth sector settings cultures have been supportive.

- Some LGBT teachers and youth workers report being able to actively do work around addressing homophobia and promoting sexual diversity in youth sector settings.

- Some heterosexual teachers and youth workers have done work around responding to and/or addressing homophobia and/or promoting sexual diversity in youth sector settings.

- Some people propose that LGBT teachers and youth workers would make good role models for LGBT young people.

- There have been suggestions around how LGBT teachers and youth workers can effectively do work around addressing homophobia and/or promoting sexual diversity in youth sector settings.
Findings

In this section of the paper we will present preliminary findings that have emerged from contributors narratives. This is not an exhaustive list of the issues that contributors described as occurring in their work in youth sector settings. We have identified a number of themes which we have grouped under the following subheadings. We also illustrate the themes by drawing on the contributors stories.

Tension

* Lgbt teachers and youth workers experience tension around issues of sexuality but quite often are unable to explain that tension.

*Tension*

Today was no exception. I was taking a tutorial about psychological disorders and the problem of defining what is normal...and what is abnormal...This was the second time that I'd given this tutorial. The previous year, I'd been extremely nervous. I didn't really want the students to know that I had a personal interest in the topic. My heart had been racing as I brought up the issue of homosexuality as an example of a behaviour that had changed from being labelled 'abnormal' to being considered within the normal range of human sexual behaviour. But this was my second year at it. I was a little nervous - I'm not sure what it was exactly that I was nervous about. (Jeff, gay, university lecturer, 2000)

This raises a number of questions including:

* If lgbt teachers and youth workers are not clear about why they feel nervous around issues of sexuality while at work then how do they deal with this tension?

The positioning of sexual identity as 'private'.

* Lgbt teachers and youth workers are often questioned around their sexuality and when they are they often position such questions as a challenge.

* Lgbt teachers and youth workers encounter discourses that position making a public statement about 'private' sexuality with service users as unprofessional.

At the same time lgbt teachers and youth workers are able to be 'out' to colleagues without being positioned as unprofessional.

One day when I was working in an intensive support job driving a very unwell female client I was working with down St Kilda rd and she suddenly turned to me and asked THAT question, "You're not gay are you?" I froze. The moment had come. I had been dreading this question from this client for some time, and had managed to fob her off with my usual answers before. So I tried it again. But it wasn't working...It is easier now to look back on the situation and know that there were some difficult elements at play, however the reality was that I was still confronted by a situation where I was challenged on my sexual identity and I had to respond. (Beth, lesbian, youth worker, 2000).

"Are you a dyke?" I hate that question. How am I meant to answer that while holding some sense of personal integrity and maintaining a level of professional boundaries?...I have a number of well honed comebacks including, "Why are you asking me that?", "That's really personal and I don't discuss my personal life at work" and "Would it matter if I was?"...These
answers worked pretty well for me while working with lots of different young people in youth refuges, although I was often asked more general questions about, "Where do you live? How old are you? and Do you have a boyfriend?" to which I would answer that they were personal questions and I didn’t go into my personal details at work...I am out in my workplace and always have been. They {my work colleagues} have been a very supportive team in many spheres of my professional life... (Beth, lesbian, youth worker, 2000).

This raises a number of questions including:

* What is the source of the tension that circles being 'out' to service users?
* Why is this tension often non existent as far as colleagues are concerned?
* Can lgbt teachers and youth workers be professional and open about their sexuality?

'Coming Out' Issues

* Lgbt teachers and youth workers experience barriers to 'coming out' in the workplace.

* There are many ways of 'coming out' in workplaces apart from teachers and youth workers saying that they are lgbt.

* Lgbt teachers and youth workers identify certain benefits associated with being 'out' in the workplace.

* Lgbt teachers and youth workers identify negatives around being 'out' in the workplace.

* Lgbt teachers and youth workers often report feeling that they should be 'out' in the workplace.

...{They picked I was gay by}...my haircut? Manner? They {the students} just knew. But they also thought a straight teacher was gay just because he was 40 and single and a nice guy...(John, gay, teacher, 2000).

...being able to walk into a class of fifteen students and be asked how I enjoyed my weekend does make possible such comments as "well, my boyfriend and I..." and so on...While this might result in negative reactions from some members in the class (which is, in my experience very rare) this openness in fact appears to assist in the teaching process: I am not an authority who exists for them only in the seminar room, but have a life outside and one which (sometimes to their surprise) I am willing to be open about. The very positive result is a converse willingness of their own to be open about problems they are having with understanding, say, a particular concept...it also helps to delineate the heterosexual 'norm' for the majority of students present; to show them all that there are alternatives to the social expectation of compulsory heterosexuality...As a result of this apparently open environment, from time to time a student will come to me after class or see me in an office on order to discuss his/her sexuality... (Sam, gay, university lecturer, 2000).

There were numerous instances of homophobia directed towards me...too many to write here. For example, students quietly chanting gay-hate slogans just loud enough that I can hear them, quotes like 'X sucks cocks', 'why didn't you walk past us today? Are you scared we'll bash you? my dad used to bash pooffers! Are you gay?, 'gays must die', 'I want to bash them', 'when was the last time I called you faggot?', 'backs to the wall', 'fuckin gays, I hate them'. (John, gay, teacher, 2000)
Am I a dyke?...I should always answer that question with a confident and proud yes shouldn't I...Then I did something that I am not proud of I said 'No No I am not gay.' I swear I could have heard the cock crow three times. I felt like Peter denying Christ at the hour of his crucifixion...She {service user} stopped abusing me and I was left with this horrific feeling of regret and guilt. I had let the team down. And myself down...the lie I had told...{I was looking for} a pardon from the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community that I had just denied that I was part of...I am ashamed of my response that day...I am not proud of saying no... (Beth, lesbian, youth worker, 2000).

This raises a number of questions including:

* What factors impact on lgbt teachers and youth workers being able to be out in the workplace?

* How does the reaction of others to teachers and youth workers 'coming out' contribute to constructing that experience?

* What might prepare lgbt workers in youth sector settings to respond to negative reactions to disclosures?

Why do some lgbt teachers and youth workers feel that being 'out' is better than not being 'out'?

Individualizing Solutions

* There is a discourse that positions lgbt teachers and youth workers who are 'out' as role models for young lgbt people, and by being 'out' as able to challenge structural factors that promote discrimination.

* The assumption that being lgbt means that a worker has professional expertise around issues of sexual diversity.

...It was only a couple of days later that a co-worker, let's call her Sally, approached me with a matter she wanted to discuss. Sally was a Youth Activity Worker who had a young girl, let's call her Fiona, who wanted to discuss her sexuality. "I'm only asking you because you'd know what she's going through. I've contacted PFLAG and got as much information as I can, but I thought it would be good if you talked to her. I haven't mentioned it to her. Wanted to make sure you wouldn't mind."...So there it was. In that moment I was no longer just another Youth Worker. I was the lesbian Youth Worker. Not that I minded. I didn't. It's just that I'd never thought of myself as much of an expert on sexuality. But there was no doubt that it was me who was expected to support young people with questions about their sexuality. (Helen, lesbian, youth worker, 2000).

Throughout the ordeal, I thought of those students who would be gay. Being out as a teacher was not a good model for them, as I think it really just highlighted for them the level of homophobia that existed and would only solidify their feeling of isolation. (John, gay, teacher, 2000).

To be asked several weeks in a row in discussion following research seminars "well, as a gay person what do you think..." can be in some ways more demeaning than enforced invisibility. (Sam, gay, university lecturer, 2000).
Part of my coming out at uni has been in order to provide a positive role model for gay/lesbian students, or those needing to explore their sexual orientation. The gay group had been formed as part of the student association was no longer running (the previous charismatic leader had graduated), so I did the leg work in starting it up again and leading it for 12 months before handing it on to one of the students. As a staff member, I was useful as a regular phone contact for students. I displayed the notice for the gay group on my office door, and around the department notice boards...This was one of the factors that allowed me to provide a mentoring role for students who were able to come and talk with a gay-identified staff member in a personal and non-threatening way. Since then, a couple of students in my classes who are gay or lesbian have come and said "Hi" and have been able to chat in a safe environment about things concerning them. (Jeff, gay, university lecturer, 2000)

This raises a number of questions including:

* Are lgbt teachers and youth worker essentially expert around issues of sexual diversity?

* What are the limits of individual action around structural issues?

* How does the discourse of 'role model' play into the individualization of what is a structural concern?

* What role might lgbt workers play in developing services to do with sexual diversity?

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**Homophobic actions and worker reactions - Mind and Body.**

* While homophobia can be enacted verbally it is often actualized in an embodied fashion.

* Where lgbt teachers and youth workers are confronted with homophobia they react to that homophobia in multiple ways including embodied and verbal responses.

She started saying things like "Oh my god, I can't believe they put me with you. That's it I want another worker. There is NO WAY I am having one of them as my worker. It's wrong and you're going to hell". (young person to - Beth, lesbian, youth worker, 2000).

I noticed the student in the back row smiling and smirking, and talking to the girl next to him. While I was talking he made some exaggerated gestures with his wrist, mimicking the stereotype of camp behaviour in gay men...My heart dropped into my stomach. I felt vulnerable; attacked. I knew he was taking the mickey out of me. Should I say anything? Should I ask him to stay behind and talk about his behaviour an how I was finding it upsetting, and disrupting my ability to conduct the class for the benefit of all students? Should I ignore his juvenile attempts at humour and just be 'tough'? Or should I pity him - as he was probably only trying to cover his own insecurities and internalized homophobia as a young man struggling with his own sexual identity?...I did nothing - I thought I'd wait and see whether things changed the following week. The heritage of growing up with shame and embarrassment about my sexuality meant that I did not recognise my right to dignity and respect. Having spent my youth developing resilience to cope with prejudice and harassment, it did't occur to me that it was no longer necessary for me to put up with it. (Jeff, gay, university lecturer, 2000).

On my first day the usual banter could be heard, one colleague sussing out another, assessing my suitability. Was I an asset or a dead weight? The usual anticipation
surrounding a new employee. And then, before I knew it, the question was asked, "Are you married?" Without a moments hesitation I replied, as any self respecting lesbian would, that I was gay. The words were well and truly uttered before I noticed various jaws either hitting the floor or clamping shut as that familiar look of anxiety appeared that said so much without saying anything. Despite their obvious shock they managed an acceptable, "As long as you're happy."...It was then that it dawned on me. I realised that I may in fact be the first living lesbian this parochial group had ever consciously laid eyes on. Now, instead of heeding the signs and retreating with dignity, I felt the overwhelming urge to compensate for their awkwardness by justifying myself. "Yes I am actually. Moving in with my partner soon. Totally in love. Never known happiness like it." Ugh! I was appalled at my inability to shut up.

Throughout first semester, 1996, I have been regularly harassed and taunted about my sexuality by the students...While on a checkpoint for a school fun run, one student intentionally detoured off the path to push me. He did this as he and his mates jogged by...In response to my presence, some students in class intentionally move their chair away from me as I stand near them to look at their work. On one occasion several got out of their chairs saying, 'bums against the walls'. One student has told me that he is homophobic and another has said, 'If you tell me you're gay I'll have to bash you.' A student on several occasions says 'stop looking at me' when I look at him. Some students have persisted in referring to me as 'poof' while working in class. Students have said, 'You scare me, Sir'...A group of boys stand waiting for friends outside the school in the morning. On a few occasions, immediately after I've walked past their faces, a student says, 'gaybo'. In the schoolyard it is not uncommon to hear students yell 'poof' loudly across the grounds. In one instance a group of boys all said 'bums to the wall' as I approached them, and ran to the line with their back to the fence. In another instance two students yelled 'fucking poofter', loudly across the school yard as I walked to class. In yet another instance as I asked one student to move to class after the bell had gone, he turned to me and grabbed his genitals while performing a pelvic thrust in front of me. A teacher has said to me, 'typical faggots drink', after I said that I like hot chocolate with marshmallows.(John, gay, teacher, 2000)

This raises a number of questions including:

* Is there a difference between resisting homophobic comments and resisting other embodied expressions of homophobia?

* What are the differences and similarities between the nature of homophobia and other forms of discrimination?

- Policy, Procedures and Support

* There is a need for policy which aims to minimize harassment and that supports diversity however, such policies can be limited in their effectiveness in the context of youth sector settings.

* Where there is a procedure in place for dealing with homophobic harassment that when implemented these are often effective in minimizing or dealing with such harassment.

* Lgbt teachers and youth workers are unfamiliar with being supported around issues of sexual diversity and therefore are unclear about their expectations in this regard.
* Lgbt teachers and youth workers experience a lack of support around sexual diversity.

_I was having lunch with a couple of colleagues...I mentioned the students {homophobic} behaviour...They were appalled at the students behaviour, and reminded me that I was entitled to a workplace free of harassment and discrimination. They encouraged me to report the matter to the head of the department so that there would be a formal record of what had happened. She acted promptly and arranged for the student to come and see her. She indicated to the student that she had received a complaint about his behaviour (she didn't disclose that I had made the report), that it was not appreciated by other students, and was disruptive to the class...He only attended one more class before semester ended._ (Jeff, gay, university lecturer, 2000)

_I only know of one student who was ever disciplined appropriately, out of about 35 official incident report forms submitted about students who had harassed me relating to my sexuality. Even in this case the schools Equal Opportunity person suggested to the student the legal situation in the 'real world' workplace and that we are treating this as a 'training issue'. For the record, this student was perfect after that time, with no overtones of homophobia directed toward me...In all, this situation was ignored by the Union, ignored by the Directrorate of School Education, and largely ignored by the school who endeavoured to place the problem back to me as one I must deal with as a normal disciplinary issue. In fact, the school made it clear that they would not jump up and down about it, and that they did not see it as their responsibility to protect an employee from this kind of harassment._ (John, gay, teacher, 2000).

_{Beth recalling a homophobic incident with a service user} I went back to the office and told my work colleagues who seemed less supportive than I hoped_ (Beth, lesbian, youth worker, 2000)

_I recall a case in which I had given a student a very low mark for a poorly written essay. Immediately following a tutorial in which the essays had been handed back the student called the name 'faggot' as I left the class...In this scenario, the only possible action appears to be to remain silent, put up with the remark, and hope the student learns to dislodge her/his heterosexist assumptions through future in-class comments and discussion ...There are few institutional constraints in a university...where discrimination on sexuality issues is viewed unfavourably - which is not to suggest that it does not exist, but that where it does it is limited to the personal attitudes of senior members of the hierarchy_ (Sam, gay, university lecturer, 2000).

This raises a number of questions including:

* What constitutes a supportive working culture for lgbt teachers and youth workers?

* What impact does a supportive culture have on the attitudes and actions of people within that culture who might be homophobic?

* What impacts do various aspects of school and youth sector settings have on the attitudes and actions of lgbt teachers and youth workers? Particularly in relation to being pro-active around minimising harassment and promoting sexual diversity?

**Conclusion**

Research into lgbt teachers and youth workers experiences, and the narratives that we have collected suggest that sexuality impacts in a substantial manner on the professional practice of lgbt teachers and youth workers. In particular where people are working in contexts that
are embedded with values which are not supportive of sexual diversity it is not surprising that they experience problems.

There is a need for more substantive research into these issues. Although the sample that we have used is small, the issues that have been raised provide a useful focus for future research. In particular there is a need for research that establishes how many lgbt teachers and youth workers there are in youth sector settings. Further there is a need for research that clarifies key issues and concerns for this segment of the teacher and youth worker population. We have identified many areas of concern which could form the basis of future research.

**Conclusion**

Context offers an approach to supporting lgbt teachers and youth workers. There is considerable research, including our own investigations, that suggests that this group of workers experience discrimination and are constrained in their practice in the workplace. There are many opportunities for workplaces to be open to, accommodating and accepting of sexual diversity which is essential if such discrimination is to be addressed.

Context is a small not for profit community group and as such we are aware that we are under-resourced and not in a position to adequately address the structural issues that produce homophobic harassment. However, Educational and Youth related Government Departments, Unions and Education and Youth Sector settings are suitably positioned and resourced to intervene in order to support such work.
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