



University of  
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Amherst

## The contextual realities of being a lesbian physical educator : living in two worlds.

Item Type	dissertation
Authors	Woods, Sherry E.
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.7275/14756973">10.7275/14756973</a>
Download date	2024-11-23 05:23:57
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/15465">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/15465</a>

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# FIVE COLLEGE DEPOSITORY

THE CONTEXTUAL REALITIES OF BEING A LESBIAN PHYSICAL EDUCATOR:  
LIVING IN TWO WORLDS

A Dissertation Presented

by

SHERRY E. WOODS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

February 1990

School of Education

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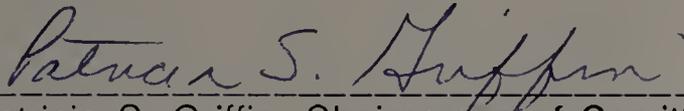
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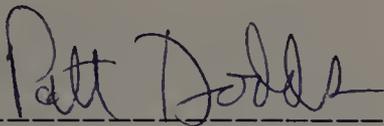
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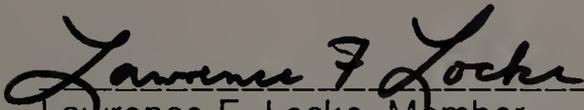
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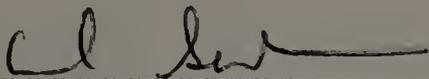
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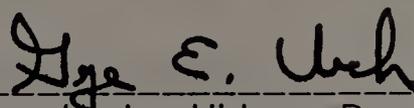
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my friend and mentor, Pat Griffin: for her enduring patience and her belief in me. Her support and guidance were never ending, and I will always be thankful for her presence in my life.

To my committee members, Patt Dodds, Larry Locke, and Earl Seidman: for their invaluable feedback and support.

To the 12 participants in this study: for their courage and openness.

To former and current PETE'S: for their interest and support of this work.

To my family of friends: especially Donna Ruth, Jean, Sue D., Miss Webb, the Hot Flashes, and the many wonderful women of this area. Also, special thanks to Sandy A. for always having a job for me during my tenure as a graduate student; to Paulette and Kathy for sharing their study space and their Mac. And to Anne whose caring and gentle (but, oh, so persistent) inquires into the "Big D" kept me going this last year.

To my family: to my parents, Richard and Helen Woods, my two sisters, Susan and Sally, and my brother, Richard, for our shared understanding and acceptance of each other. I am thankful everyday for having their love and support. Special thanks go to my oldest sister, Susan, who always had a sisterly word (or two) of wisdom to offer. To Karen, for the loving bond we have shared for over 18 years. And to Gayle, for teaching me how to appreciate daily the joy of being alive and for loving me through and through.

ABSTRACT

THE CONTEXTUAL REALITIES OF BEING A LESBIAN PHYSICAL EDUCATOR:  
LIVING IN TWO WORLDS

FEBRUARY 1990

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The purpose of this study was to describe, from their perspectives, the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers who work in the public schools and the meanings they made of their experiences. The participants were elementary and secondary school physical educators who identified themselves as lesbians. Twelve teachers were interviewed using an in-depth phenomenological approach. The teachers interviewed were women of various ages, races, and social class backgrounds who taught in rural, urban, and suburban schools.

The interview materials were presented in two ways: individual profiles of eight participants and common themes. Several key points from the data emerged. First, the participants made two assumptions about being a lesbian physical educator: (a) as a lesbian, you will lose your job if you are open about your sexual orientation, and (b) female physical educators are stereotyped as being lesbians. Second, the participants actively attempted to separate their personal and professional lives. Third, the participants used a variety of strategies to manage their lesbian identities within school settings. These strategies were used both to conceal and reveal their sexual orientation.

Living in two worlds was an accepted reality for the lesbian physical educators in this study. A conceptual model outlining the process by which the participants made decisions about managing their identities as lesbian physical educators was presented.

Feminism and oppression theory were used to discuss the participants' experiences. The participants' descriptions revealed the prevalence of homophobia and heterosexism within physical education environments. The lesbian label was specifically used to intimidate or harass women in physical education. The homophobia and heterosexism the participants encountered in their worlds kept them silent, isolated, fearful of discovery, and powerless. Consequently, the participants in this study did not share a collective identity as a subordinate or oppressed group. Developing a collective identity was described as a critical next step in changing the conditions of their oppression as lesbian physical educators.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
 Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Historical Context of Teaching .....	1
Lesbians and Gay Men as a Stigmatized Group.....	2
The Lesbian Physical Education Teacher.....	5
Homophobia in Sport and Physical Education .....	6
Sport from a Feminist Perspective.....	8
Purpose of the Study .....	8
Rationale for the Study .....	9
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....	12
Section One: Review of Literature.....	13
Political and Legal Campaigns Against Gay and Lesbian Teachers.....	13
Case Law Review .....	17
Recent Trends in Supreme Court Rulings.....	17
Individual Rights and the Historical Context of Teaching .....	18
<u>Sarac v. the State Board of Education: Homosexuality as             Immoral.....</u>	20
<u>Jarvella v. Willoughby-Eastlake City School District of             Education: Rights of the Individual Recognized.....</u>	20
<u>Morrison v. State Board of Education: Landmark             Criteria Set.....</u>	21
Case Law Trends During the 1970s and 1980s: Unpredictable Outcomes .....	22
Research Studies about Gay and Lesbian Teachers .....	25
Research Related to Lesbianism in Physical Education and Sport.....	29
Section Two: Conceptual Framework.....	32
Using a Feminist Perspective for Context Setting .....	33
The Assumed Relationship Between Gender Roles and Sexuality .....	33
Feminist Perspectives.....	34

Oppression Theory . . . . .	36
Deviancy as a Social Construct . . . . .	42
Identity Theory . . . . .	44
Selecting the Oppression Model. . . . .	48
Relevance of the Deviancy and Identity Models to this Study . . . .	51
Chapter Summary . . . . .	51
III. METHOD . . . . .	53
Introduction. . . . .	53
Participants. . . . .	54
Access and Protecting Anonymity . . . . .	54
Data Management and Analysis Steps. . . . .	57
Profiles and Themes. . . . .	58
Profiles . . . . .	58
Themes. . . . .	59
Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability . . . . .	60
Epistemological Issues and Assumptions. . . . .	65
Assumptions About Defining Reality . . . . .	65
Assumptions About the Experience of Lesbian Physical Education Teachers. . . . .	67
Following Chapters . . . . .	69
IV. SELECTED PROFILES . . . . .	70
Toni King . . . . .	70
Susan Carlson. . . . .	82
Mona Taylor. . . . .	92
Pam Luciano. . . . .	100
Jody Porter . . . . .	109
Caren Williams . . . . .	118
Jackie Thompson . . . . .	127
Alice Baker. . . . .	138
V. COMMON THEMES . . . . .	148
Section One: Background Information . . . . .	148
Gender Role Information . . . . .	148
Early Role of Sports, Athletics and Physical Education . . . . .	150
Reasons for Becoming a Physical Education Teacher . . . . .	151
Early Self Awareness about Being a Lesbian. . . . .	151
Nature of Lesbian Relationships . . . . .	152
Self Acceptance of Lesbian Identity. . . . .	153
Themes Unique to a Single Participant. . . . .	154

Section Two: Common Themes. . . . .	160
Assumption #1: To Come Out = To Lose Job . . . . .	160
Assumption #2: Female Physical Education Teachers are Lesbians. . . . .	161
The Personal and Professional Split. . . . .	163
Lesbian Identity Management Techniques. . . . .	166
Strategies To Conceal One's Lesbian Identity. . . . .	167
Passing as Heterosexual . . . . .	167
Personal Censoring/Self Distancing. . . . .	168
Personal Censoring/Self Distancing from Any Association with Homosexuality. . . . .	170
Risk-Taking Behaviors. . . . .	172
Passively Overlapping Personal with Professional. . . . .	172
Active Challenging, Confronting, or Supporting in the Role of Teacher . . . . .	173
Active Overlapping Personal with Professional. . . . .	175
Immediate and Contextual Factors. . . . .	177
Confrontation Scenarios with Administrators . . . . .	178
Section Three: A Conceptual Model of the Participants' Meaning-Making Process . . . . .	181
Chapter Summary. . . . .	185
VI. DISCUSSION. . . . .	186
Being a Lesbian Physical Educator: An Emerging Story . . . . .	186
Consequences and Contradictions. . . . .	187
Lesbian Physical Educators as Risk-Takers. . . . .	189
Living in Two Worlds: Similarities and Differences . . . . .	191
Lesbian Physical Educators as an Oppressed Minority. . . . .	194
Dominants Have Power to Name and Enact Reality . . . . .	197
Subordinates Internalize Their Own Oppression and Collude with Dominants . . . . .	198
Harassment and Discrimination Are Institutionalized and Systematic. . . . .	199
Individual Members Are Socialized to Play Their Roles and to See Them As Normal . . . . .	199
Maintaining a Successful System of Oppression: Consequences of Oppressive Conditions. . . . .	200
Next Steps: Understanding One's Consciousness as a Subordinate and Developing a Collective Identity . . . . .	204
Step One: Understanding One's Consciousness as a Subordinate . . . . .	204
Step Two: Developing a Collective Identity . . . . .	207

Dialogue and Change: Implications for Individuals and the Profession. . .	208
Educating Ourselves. . . . .	208
Developing Support Networks for Lesbian Physical Educators. . . . .	208
Challenging Homophobia within School Environments . . . . .	209
Examining Gender Socialization within Physical Education Classes. . .	209
Providing Support as Heterosexual Allies . . . . .	209
Studying the Effects of Homophobia and Heterosexism within Physical Education . . . . .	210
Making a Commitment as a Profession to Combat Homophobia and Heterosexism . . . . .	210
Using Phenomenological Interviewing to Do Controversial Research: Process, Content, and Ethical Issues. . . . .	212
Choosing the Topic. . . . .	212
Gaining Faculty, Peer, and Family Support . . . . .	214
Selecting a Methodology. . . . .	215
Conducting the Research . . . . .	216
Choosing and Working with a Theoretical Perspective. . . . .	218
Writing the Dissertation. . . . .	220
Pondering the Future: A Vision of Change . . . . .	221
 APPENDICES	
A. WRITTEN CONSENT FORM . . . . .	222
B. DATA ANALYSIS FORMS . . . . .	226
C. DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS STEPS. . . . .	230
D. SUGGESTED READINGS. . . . .	233
 BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	 238

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<u>Page</u>
1. The Homosexual Dilemma: An Identity Matrix . . . . .	46
2. Meaning-Making as a Lesbian Physical Educator: A Conceptual Model . . . . .	184

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 1977 Anita Bryant, spokesperson for the "Save Our Children" organization, targeted one group to justify her efforts to repeal a county ordinance supporting homosexual rights. That group was gay and lesbian teachers. The "Save Our Children" campaign (as the name itself suggests) triggered people's fear of homosexuality by portraying gays and lesbians as child molesters and proselytizers. By framing these stereotypes in the context of teaching, a profession historically linked to religious and moral development, Bryant's politically well-calculated crusade capitalized on the legal, religious, and psychological stigma associated with homosexuality. This strategy revealed the core of the controversy surrounding gay and lesbian teachers: the right of persons stigmatized as immoral child molesters to work in a profession entrusted with the important task of teaching children not only academics but social values as well.

The on-going controversy regarding the presence of homosexuals in teaching lacks a critical perspective, that of gay and lesbian teachers. Homosexuals have always been present in the teaching profession, but they have been forced to remain silent and to hide their sexual orientation to avoid jeopardizing their jobs. Gay and lesbian educators represent the population most directly affected by the debate about the right of homosexuals to be teachers, and thus, it is critical that their voices be heard. The intent of this study is to explore the perspectives of one particular group of gay and lesbian educators: lesbian physical education teachers. Specifically, the main purpose is to describe the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers and the meaning they make of their experiences. Feminism and oppression theory are used as a theoretical frame for analyzing their experiences.

#### The Historical Context of Teaching

Historically, the teaching profession in the U. S. has been held to higher standards of conduct than other professions. In colonial times, the main charge of teachers was the

religious and moral development of their students. As role models, they were expected to exemplify these teachings and to uphold the behavior standards set forth by their community. Consequently, those who taught were carefully scrutinized both in and outside the classroom; their lives were strictly regulated by community leaders. As public employees, teachers were expected to forego the personal freedoms enjoyed by others for the common good of society. Their function as role models in leading virtuous lifestyles took precedence over their rights as individuals (Harbeck, 1987).

Most of the restrictions placed on teachers' personal lives since colonial times are no longer applied today. Yet many communities have retained their authority to oversee certain aspects of teachers' lives. "Moral turpitude" clauses in teachers' contracts cover a multitude of behaviors deemed unacceptable for teachers, including criminal behavior and other behavior which falls outside the moral norms of the community. These clauses maintain the community's right to scrutinize a teacher's personal life. In a society which stigmatizes homosexuality, gay and lesbian teachers are especially vulnerable to such scrutiny.

#### Lesbians and Gay Men as a Stigmatized Group

Lesbians and gay men are stigmatized in U. S. society. To be stigmatized is to be "branded" or "marked with shame or discredit" (Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1972). Legally, homosexuals are stigmatized as "criminals," religiously as "sinners," and psychologically as "mentally ill." Much of this stigma is used to justify discrimination against gay men and lesbians.

The criminal stigma stems from state sodomy laws which prohibit certain sexual acts; in many states, these acts include any sexual behavior outside of heterosexual intercourse. Although many heterosexuals violate sodomy laws, gay men and lesbians almost exclusively are subjected to the criminal stigma. Both the American Law Institute in 1955 and the American Bar Association in 1973 recommended the repeal of any laws that make criminal private, consensual sexual conduct between adults. Since

1961, 26 states have removed criminal penalties for private sexual activity between consenting adults (Greenhouse, 1986).

Despite these changes, homosexuals are denied legal protection from discrimination in most of the U.S. Wisconsin is the only state that bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Several large cities also have such legislation, but for the most part, gay men and lesbians have no legal recourse against discrimination. Legal discrimination occurs in many areas including employment, child custody rights, housing, and marital rights and benefits.

The AIDS crisis has strengthened the resolve of conservative forces within U.S. society to deny homosexuals, particularly gay men, legal protection from discrimination. Though initially (and inaccurately) publicized as a "gay disease," health officials now predict that AIDS will affect every segment of the U.S. population. Yet the fear perpetuated by misinformation about the disease has resulted in all gay men being targeted for discrimination.

In addition to legal sanctions, homosexuals are sinners in the eyes of many religious traditions. This religious prejudice is rooted in selected biblical passages interpreted as condemnations of homosexuality. Some theologians, however, dispute this interpretation and argue that these passages have been taken out of historical context. Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong (1988), arguing that homosexuality represents "a quite normal but minority expression of human sexuality," states that, "...heterosexual prejudice against homosexuals must take its place alongside witchcraft, slavery, and other ignorant beliefs and oppressive institutions that we have abandoned" (p. 79). Despite such support from religious leaders and conflicting biblical interpretations, many religious groups are adamant in their belief that homosexuality is sinful and unnatural.

Psychologically, lesbians and gay men are stigmatized as being mentally ill. This stigma lingers in large measure because until 1973, homosexuality was considered an

emotional disorder by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Most medical research prior to that time characterized homosexuals as "deviant," "abnormal," and "perverted" (Weinberg & Bell, 1972). A pathological image of homosexuals emerged largely because incarcerated persons and emotionally disturbed individuals in therapeutic settings were most often the subjects of research about homosexuality (Browning, 1984). More recently, when non-incarcerated and non-client samples have been used, psychoanalytic researchers have found homosexuals no less mentally healthy, well adjusted, or emotionally stable than heterosexuals are (Hooker, 1957; Freedman, 1971). In 1973, the APA removed homosexuality from the mental disorder list. Even with the APA's policy change, however, some mental health professionals continue to describe homosexuality as "deviant" and "abnormal" (Bayer, 1981; Lief, 1977).

The stigma associated with homosexuality forces gay and lesbian teachers to remain silent. The historical connection of teaching to moral development, coupled with the fear that lesbians and gay men will molest students or influence them to become homosexual, has made the teaching profession a stronghold of anti-gay attitudes. National surveys indicate that the majority of the U.S. public believes that lesbians and gay men should not be allowed to teach or work with children in the public schools (American Institute of Public Opinion, 1977). As a group, educators were found to have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than the general populace did in studies by Fischer (1982) and MacDonald, Huggins, Young, and Swanson (1973).

"The great hidden minority in education" (Elam, 1977, p. 82), lesbian and gay teachers place their professional livelihood in jeopardy if they publicly disclose their sexual orientation. To keep their jobs, lesbian and gay teachers are forced to keep secret their sexual orientation, a phenomenon typically referred to as "being in the closet" (Kingdon, 1979). As Plati (1984) stated,

There is probably no arena in which the issue of homosexuality is a more controversial or sensitive subject than the public schools. "Coming out" [of the closet] in a society is difficult enough for those who have an emotional or professional support network, but for the gay or lesbian teacher it is usually not even an option. Public apprehension and scorn, student harassment, alienation from co-workers, fear of dismissal and even blackmail force many gay and lesbian teachers to stay in the closet and add to the silent suffering of part of an estimated 10 percent of the population. (p. 6)

### The Lesbian Physical Education Teacher

Like all lesbian and gay teachers who want to avoid jeopardizing their jobs, the lesbian physical education teacher must remain silent about her sexual orientation. Unlike other lesbian and gay teachers, however, the lesbian physical education teacher (and all other female physical educators) is frequently assumed to be lesbian whether or not she publicly discloses her sexual orientation (Guthrie, 1982). Within sport and physical education there is an assumed relationship between femininity and sexuality (Lenskyj, 1986). To be athletic is equated with masculinity, and masculine women are labeled as lesbian. Therefore, athletic women are stereotyped as lesbian.

Women in physical education and sport challenge traditionally male defined gender roles. By defying the social definition of femininity, the female physical education teacher, more than perhaps anyone in the schools, is likely to be stereotyped as a lesbian, and in a society which stigmatizes homosexuality, the lesbian label continues to have personal and professional consequences. Allegations of lesbianism are used to intimidate and harass women in physical education and sport. One female athletic director reported,

...a couple of women who we had called to get them to help us lobby on Title IX had said flat out that they had been told by people on their campuses, "If you start lobbying on Title IX, we are going to make certain accusations about you." So the whole issue of lesbianism and the threat of it was used to keep some of those folks from talking about Title IX and other issues that had nothing to do with life styles or homosexuality. (S. Taylor, quoted in Fields, 1983, p. 18)

As Cobhan (1982) summarizes, the "de facto evidence" that sport is the province of lesbians "will be used as ammunition by those who deny a woman's right to participate in athletics" (p. 179).

Such allegations pose a special conflict for the lesbian physical educator and place her in a particularly vulnerable position. She is involved in a traditionally masculine activity, in which female participants are stereotyped as lesbians, and in a profession which is perceived by many as inappropriate for homosexuals. To disclose her sexual orientation can jeopardize her job and could reinforce the stereotype that women physical education teachers are lesbians, but there are consequences to silence as well. Silence perpetuates the negative stereotypes associated with lesbianism in sport and physical education.

### Homophobia in Sport and Physical Education

Threats and allegations of lesbianism are manifestations of homophobia, which is defined as the irrational fear and/or intolerance of homosexuality (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). Homophobia is a relatively new concept (Weinberg, 1972). Its use by practitioners and researchers marks a shift from defining homosexual behavior as deviant to defining prejudicial attitudes toward homosexuals as deviant.

Homophobia can be conceptualized on two levels: external and internal. External homophobia refers to any belief system which maintains and encourages negative myths and stereotypes about homosexuals (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978). For instance, courts of law which deny child custody to a lesbian mother out of fear that her child's sexual orientation will be influenced by exposure to a "homosexual lifestyle" is a manifestation of external homophobia. Additionally, external homophobia often keeps men and women bound to traditional gender role behavior norms. Although the boundaries of gender-appropriate behaviors have been expanding for both women and men, the norms are far from androgynous; homophobia still functions to make crossing those boundaries risky for both homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Internal homophobia refers to a person's acceptance and internalization of negative attitudes and irrational fears about homosexuality (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978). Internal homophobia affects both homosexuals and heterosexuals. For lesbians and gay men,

internal homophobia is manifested in a variety of ways, from feelings of self-hate and guilt to acts of "passing as straight." "Passing as straight" refers to the conscious attempt by a lesbian or gay man to be seen as heterosexual by others to avoid disclosure of her or his sexual orientation.

Lesbians in sport and physical education often experience both forms of homophobia. Subjected to derogatory innuendos from others, lesbians in sport and physical education internalize many of these negative stereotypes and adjust their behavior accordingly. For instance, physically active women have always been placed in the position of defending their "womanhood" to others, as well as to themselves.

The female athlete feels very unfeminine when she enters the male dominated sports world...What does this do to the women in sport? I can only answer that from my own feelings and those of my friends. It makes me question my own femininity--the very roots of my being. If I am a woman, why do I enjoy sport? (quoted in Hart, 1974, p. 218)

To avoid being stereotyped, many female physical education teachers--heterosexual and lesbian alike--assume what Felshin (1974) called "apologetic" behaviors. These behaviors are compensations physically active women make for their involvement in the traditionally masculine world of sport. For example, to assure the world of their "womanhood," many physically active women may act (and are often publicly described) in ways which accent stereotypic notions of "femininity."

The stereotype frequently associated with females who enjoy vigorous activity poses such a threat that participants bend over backwards to counteract it. Examples can be seen in numerous situations: the blond, bouffant, sprayed hairdos of female track teams, the ruffles on the tennis outfits, the mod apparel worn by many women golfers, the ski togs that flatter the feminine figure, the fancy swim caps and suits, etc. All of these artifacts of femininity assist in reducing the threat of sports participation to the revered feminine image. (Harris, 1971, p. 1)

In actual athletic competition, women may play less assertively and be less willing to demonstrate their full athletic potential for fear of appearing too "masculine" (Lensky'i, 1986). Apologetic behaviors (both on and off the playing fields) are calculated to counteract any questions regarding the sexual orientation of physically active women. For lesbian physical education teachers, these behaviors may protect their jobs.

### Sport from a Feminist Perspective

From a feminist perspective, the homophobic association of lesbianism with athletic women serves an important function in a patriarchal society. Sport and physical education are historically male domains in which women's participation has been forbidden or restricted. In sport, men learn to compete with other men, to compare themselves to other men, to learn male-identified skills and to separate themselves from women by denigrating women and women-identified values. Keeping women out of sport or restricting their participation maintains sport as a special experience for men and keeps women from developing and experiencing their own physical ability and athleticism, both of which can be sources of personal power.

Given that the stigma against homosexuality is so strong and that the stereotypes of lesbians as masculine are so pervasive, the label "lesbian" is an effective deterrent to women's serious participation in athletics or physical education. Stigmatizing those women who persist in serious sport participation keeps them silent and discourages other women from risking stigmatization. This limitation and exclusion of women from sport helps to legitimize current perceptions of masculinity and femininity and to maintain power inequities (physical, psychological, and social) between men and women.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe, from their perspectives, the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers who work in the public schools and the meaning they make of their experiences. Feminism and oppression theory provide the framework for analyzing their experiences. These two perspectives are used because they focus attention on the participants' oppression as lesbians and as women.

Though there is some research about homosexuality and education (Harbeck, 1987; Fischer, 1982; Griffin, 1989; Olson, 1987; Nickeson, 1980; Sciullo, 1984; Smith, 1985), there is no research focusing specifically on lesbian physical education teachers. Guthrie (1982), however, examined homophobic attitudes towards females in

sport, and Beck (1976) studied the lifestyles of "never married female physical educators" in higher education. Locke and Jensen (1970) explored the heterosexuality of women in physical education. A few writers have addressed the issue of sexual orientation in sport and physical education (Beck, 1980; Bennett, Whitaker, Smith, Sablove, 1986; Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Cobhan, 1982; Gondola & Fitzpatrick, 1985; Griffin, 1983, 1987; Hart, 1974; Lenskyj, 1986), but for the most part, the topic of lesbians in physical education has remained an untouched research area.

### Rationale for the Study

This study will help break the silence surrounding the experience of lesbian and gay teachers. Making their experience known is important for several reasons. First, the commonly accepted estimate is that 1 out of every 10 persons in the U.S. is lesbian or gay. This estimate originated in the landmark Kinsey studies in 1948 and 1953 (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Gebhard, 1953). If the professional education community reflects this estimate, then a significant number of teachers are homosexuals. Consequently, to neglect the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers is to ignore a large segment of the teaching profession. Moreover, describing the experience of lesbian physical education teachers will provide a perspective as yet unexplored in educational or physical education research.

Second, breaking the silence about lesbian physical educators will help identify the effects of homophobia within departments of physical education and athletics.

Homophobia affects physical educators regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

Lesbianism in sport is rarely discussed openly; instead accusations and denials are typical. A "loud silence" exists among many physical education professionals which reflects the attitude, "everyone knows, but no one talks about it." This silence intrudes on the quality of professional relationships between male and female and among female physical educators (Griffin, 1987) and contributes to the male/female separatism characteristic of departments of physical education. A structural segregation of male and

female physical education departments generally no longer exists, but the collegial segregation continues. As Beck (1980) stated,

The segregated nature of our own professional preparation backgrounds has established firm biases which continue today to thwart communication and understanding among us. We must ask ourselves why we continue to segregate ourselves by sex or sexual preference. Do women in physical education continue to think of the men as "unprofessional and dumb?" Do the men continue to think of the women as "queer?" We must begin to assess the consequences of our biases in terms of staff morale, curriculum development, quality of student experience, and the quality of our own working environment. If we are unable to communicate openly and honestly with each other, then the issues of sexism, racism, and homophobia will continue to erode our departments. (pp. 129-130)

By breaking the silence, this study can be a catalyst for honest and forthright dialogue about the experiences of lesbians in physical education and the effects of homophobia on the total physical education community.

Third, breaking the silence surrounding the experience of lesbian and gay teachers can help interrupt the effects of homophobia. Homophobic attitudes and actions are often the result of misinformation and lack of information. Describing the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers will help counteract inaccurate information and will provide realistic portrayals of lesbian physical education teachers' lives.

Finally, feminist scholars and physical educators have been slow to develop an analysis of sport, femininity, and sexuality. Describing sport as a "challenge to feminists," Hall (1987) asserted that feminists may be hesitant to embrace sport because it is "characterized by distinctly non-feminist values: fierce competition, a hierarchy of authority, an overemphasis on winning, the dominance of the highly skilled, aggression, and often violence" (p. 333). Yet sport is also identified as a "pervasive and powerful means of patriarchal control" (Bennett, et al., 1986); Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1983) described as "curious...the virtual neglect of the topic [women and sport] by feminist scholars well-known for their powerful and provocative treatments of sexism in all other areas of social life" (p. 19). Feminists are only now

beginning to explore the relationship between women, sport, and sexuality. (See Lenskyj, 1986, and Hall, ed., 1987.)

The conservative nature of sport as an institution may provide some insight as to why researchers in physical education and sport have not focused on the relationship between sport, femininity, and sexuality. A more probable explanation, however, is that homophobia within physical education and sport communities keeps the topic "deeply hidden in the academic closet, almost as if both researchers and respondents fear that they will open a can of worms" (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983, p. 119). The "can of worms" to be opened is the acknowledgement of the lesbian presence in physical education and sport. Proponents of women's sports have blatantly avoided the lesbian issue to secure funding and acceptance from the dominant status quo, and as noted earlier, the academic community has treated the topic with distance and silence as well, relegating it to a "non-issue" status. Boutilier and SanGiovanni's work represents one of the first attempts to address the issue of women in sport from an explicitly feminist perspective. They warned that,

...by failing to come to terms with the lesbian presence in sport we cannot understand a considerable range of issues that are part of the reality of women and sport: the prevalence of homophobia in the athletic community, the fear of being stigmatized, the need or desire "to pass," the process of "coming out," or the place of sport in the lesbian community. (p. 119)

Although lesbians in physical education and sport (as well as heterosexual women) by virtue of their participation challenge traditionally male defined gender roles, one cannot assume that lesbians in physical education and sport identify themselves (or are identified by others) as feminists. In fact, homophobia functions to ensure a disassociation between lesbian physical educators and feminism, and it is partly this disassociation that has hindered a feminist analysis of sport and physical education. By using feminism to complement oppression theory in describing the experiences of lesbian physical educators, this study provides a perspective often overlooked by feminist scholars and avoided by researchers in sport and physical education.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is a review of the literature relevant to a study about lesbian physical education teachers. This literature includes several topics, and the following four will be reviewed in this chapter: (a) political and legal campaigns against gay and lesbian teachers, (b) case law review involving homosexual teachers, (c) research studies about gay and lesbian teachers, and (d) research related to lesbians in sport and physical education. Lesbian physical education teachers share similar experiences with other gay and lesbian teachers. The first two topics provide a backdrop for understanding their specific experiences within the larger socio-historical and legal context of all gay and lesbian teachers. The last two topics reveal two important points: (a) there is no research specifically about lesbian physical education teachers, and (b) there is very little research related to gay and lesbians educators. Of that which has been completed, only three studies document the perspectives of gay and lesbian teachers.

The second section of this chapter presents the conceptual framework used for this research. A study's conceptual framework forms the foundation from which a researcher proposes, conducts, analyzes, and reports his or her research. The conceptual framework used in this study is an integration of two theoretical perspectives: feminism and oppression theory.

Lesbian physical education teachers represent an oppressed minority, and their oppression, as women and as lesbians, is rooted in sexism and heterosexism (the form of oppression that is grounded in homophobia and heterosexual privilege). A feminist perspective frames the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers in the context of a patriarchal society. Specifically, a feminist perspective is used to explain the function of their oppression, that is, why are lesbian physical educators oppressed as women and as lesbians? Oppression theory is used to describe the processes by which

their oppression is actualized, that is, how are lesbian physical educators oppressed as women and as lesbians? Although the conceptual framework is an integration of feminism and oppression theory, the primary focus of the data analysis is on the latter, or the processes by which lesbian physical educators are oppressed.

Two other theoretical models are relevant to a study about lesbian physical educators. Deviancy theory examines the social processes by which groups are labeled deviant. Identity theory explores the social construction of identity. Like oppression theory, deviancy and identity theories focus on process-oriented issues. Overviews of both are presented in this section along with a rationale for selecting the oppression model as the primary framework to be used.

### Section One: Review of Literature

#### Political and Legal Campaigns Against Gay and Lesbian Teachers

The political context of the 1960s and 1970s illustrates the controversy surrounding gay and lesbian teachers. These times were marked by the attainment of civil rights for various groups historically discriminated against, including homosexuals. The successful lobbying efforts of visible homosexual political activist groups resulted in over 40 municipalities in the U. S. adding "sexual preference" to anti-discrimination clauses (Harbeck, 1987). These advances were met with opposition, much of it generated from fundamentalist Christian groups. These groups often singled out gay and lesbian teachers to justify their opposition to gay rights, using moral and biblical arguments to address the question, "Should homosexuals be allowed to teach?" (see the October, 1977 issue of Phi Delta Kappan). During the late 1970s three anti-homosexual legal and political campaigns used fears about homosexual teachers to try to reverse the trend toward acceptance of homosexuality. These three campaigns were: the 1977 "Save Our Children" campaign to repeal employment rights of homosexuals in Dade County, Florida; Proposition 6 (also known as the Briggs Initiative), a state-wide drive in California first introduced in late 1977 to bar

homosexuals from teaching; and House Bill 1629 (the Helm's Bill), a replica of the Briggs Initiative passed by the Oklahoma legislature in 1978.

In January, 1977, commissioners in Dade County, Florida passed an anti-discrimination ordinance in support of homosexual rights. Immediately following its passage, the "Save Our Children" organization, with Anita Bryant as its spokesperson, formed to fight for repeal of the ordinance. A nationally known public figure, Bryant was able to garner considerable moral and financial support; her fundamentalist Christian orientation appealed to the emerging conservative "New Right." Using quotes from the Bible to condemn homosexuality and singling out homosexual teachers as child molesters and proselytizers, Bryant capitalized on negative homosexual stereotypes. Her campaign proved successful. The gay rights ordinance was repealed by a 69% margin of the public referendum vote.

Immediately following this success at the local level, Bryant and the "Save Our Children" forces launched a national campaign to voice their moral and religious concerns about the presence of homosexuals in certain professions, particularly teaching. Their efforts had mixed results. Some cities repealed anti-discrimination statements for homosexuals while others endorsed them (Harbeck, 1987). Despite the losses, one positive outcome for the gay and lesbian community was greater visibility. With exposure came the opportunity to educate the public about the inaccurate and damaging stereotypes propagandized by the New Right. One damaging outcome, however, was that homosexual teachers became the target of anti-gay forces.

The second major political and legal encounter between opponents and supporters of homosexual rights began in California during the Dade County ordinance repeal campaign and came before California voters in November, 1978. Proposition 6, also called the Briggs Initiative after its sponsor, State Senator John Briggs, was presented as an amendment to the California State Education Code. This amendment would prohibit homosexuals from teaching in the public schools. Besides using biblical passages as the

basis for condemning homosexuality, proponents of Proposition 6 argued that as role models, teachers strongly influence their students and that the negative influence of homosexual teachers threatens the nuclear family unit. The amendment had ramifications for heterosexual school employees as well. Proposition 6 stated,

...the state finds a compelling interest in refusing to employ and in terminating the employment of a schoolteacher, a teacher's aide, a school administrator or a counselor, subject to reasonable restrictions and qualifications, who engages in public homosexual activity and/or public homosexual conduct directed at, or likely to come to the attention of, school children or other school employees. (as quoted in Harbeck, 1987, p. 344)

The definition of "homosexual conduct" was interpreted to encompass a wide range of behaviors that would provide justification for job termination. For instance, under this amendment a heterosexual teacher who privately expressed acceptance or tolerance of homosexuality to friends could be subject to termination for advocating, promoting, or encouraging homosexual behavior (Harbeck, 1987).

Initially, polls indicated that Proposition 6 would be overwhelmingly approved. However, as the campaign progressed, numerous influential political figures spoke out against the measure. Their opposition along with the organized efforts of others, including many gay and lesbian activist groups and the California Federation of Teachers, helped to shift public opinion. California voters convincingly rejected Proposition 6 by a two-to-one margin (Harbeck, 1987).

In Oklahoma, a replica of Proposition 6 (House Bill 1629 or the Helm's Bill) was passed through both the State House and Senate legislatures with virtually no opposition and was signed into law by the Governor in February, 1978. The political and cultural climate in Oklahoma at that time was strongly anti-homosexual. For instance, the Oklahoma Senate unanimously passed a resolution commending Anita Bryant (a former Miss Oklahoma) for her work with the Dade County campaign (Harbeck, 1987).

Once the Helm's Bill was enacted, opponents were hesitant to come forward, fearing repercussions. This was especially true for both homosexual and heterosexual teachers

since any public criticism of the bill could be interpreted as advocacy for homosexual rights, therefore threatening their job security. After several unsuccessful attempts, the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) initiated a suit against the Board of Education of Oklahoma City, challenging the constitutionality of the Helm's Bill. In 1982, nearly four years after the bill had been passed, a Federal District Court Judge ruled in favor of the Board of Education, thus supporting the Board's position over the free speech rights of an individual teacher on the issue of homosexuality. This decision was appealed, and the U. S. Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the NGTF, citing the vagueness and broadness of the term "public homosexual conduct."

In 1985 the Board of Education appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court, and by a four to four split decision, the Supreme Court upheld the lower Court's decision declaring the bill unconstitutional. Due to the absence of one judge and the resulting tie vote, however, no legal precedent was set. Consequently, both sides claimed victory. Following the Supreme Court's ruling, Oklahoma lawmakers rewrote their legislation to legalize the dismissal of school employees who have engaged in criminal sexual activity (homosexual acts are criminal in Oklahoma) when it is determined that such activity decreases or hinders their job effectiveness (Harbeck, 1987).

These three legal battles and accompanying political movements are significant for two reasons. First, the Save Our Children campaign, the Briggs Initiative and the Helm's Bill each surfaced the moral and biblical arguments used to influence public opinion against homosexual teachers. Second, to counteract these arguments, a once invisible population became visible. The controversy surrounding the right of gay men and lesbians to teach in the public schools continues and remains unresolved. Approval of gay rights laws has stalled, and no legal precedents have been set to protect the rights of homosexual teachers. For lesbian physical educators, the impact of the late 1970s continues to influence the professional context in which they work today.

## Case Law Review

In a study about lesbian physical education teachers, a review of the case law involving homosexual teachers provides a historical context for understanding their day-to-day realities as a stigmatized group. To understand the decisions rendered in cases since 1950 involving employment rights of homosexual teachers, one must first consider the issue of individual rights in relationship to (a) recent trends in Supreme Court rulings, and (b) the historical context of the teaching profession.

### Recent Trends in Supreme Court Rulings

The 1965 Supreme Court ruling in Griswold v. Connecticut marked the emerging shift of the courts to recognize and protect the personal freedoms and rights of individuals. In this case, a law which would have prohibited the use of contraceptives by both married and unmarried persons was declared unconstitutional on the grounds that it violated one's constitutional right to privacy. This shift toward supporting individual's rights was affirmed in the 1973 Roe v. Wade case in which the Supreme Court declared restrictions against abortion unconstitutional. In this landmark case the Court supported a woman's right to decide whether or not to terminate a pregnancy.

The late 1970s and 1980s have been marked by a conservative shift in U.S. politics and society, and recent Supreme Court rulings mirror this conservative trend. In the 1986 case of Hardwick v. Bowers the Court upheld a Georgia sodomy law, thus, reversing the strong legal trend to protect sex in private, between consenting adults, from the state's control and regulation. The ruling in this case is significant with respect to the employment rights of homosexual teachers. If the sodomy law had been declared unconstitutional, then the Court would have ruled in favor of individual privacy. As a result, private sexual behavior could no longer be prosecuted as a "criminal" act, and therefore, the argument for terminating homosexual teachers because of criminal behavior could no longer be used. This decision was a critical blow to the advancement of homosexual rights. "For the gay rights movement, this is our Dred

Scott case," stated one gay activist, referring to the 1857 Supreme Court ruling in which slavery was declared constitutional and blacks were categorized as non-citizens (Rohter, 1986, p. A19). The actual impact, however, of the Hardwick v. Bowers decision on the employment rights of homosexual teachers remains to be seen.

In Webster v. Reproductive Health Services (1989) the Court decided by a 5-4 vote to uphold a state's right to restrict abortion. This decision undermines the precedents established for protecting individual rights in the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision. The ruling in Webster is one more indication of the Court's conservative trend. Many critics consider this trend to be a major setback for "unpopular or unrepresented" groups and criticize the current Court for "giving up its most important responsibility: protecting basic rights from the tyranny of the majority" (Jacoby, 1989, p. 27).

#### Individual Rights and the Historical Context of Teaching

The historical context of the teaching profession provides another frame of reference for understanding the case law involving homosexual teachers, especially with respect to individual privacy arguments. The teaching profession has historically been identified with moral and religious development. Teachers have been expected to lead virtuous and exemplary lives both professionally and personally and to relinquish for themselves the individual rights enjoyed by others. In many ways these expectations still exist. As Beale (1972) stated,

One of the most restrictive forces is the determination of parents that their children be influenced by only the highest type of character... They want the teacher to help mold in their child virtues they lack. With great sincerity they believe a teacher should be a public servant who "serves" the community through an upright, exemplary life and whose influence will give their children the characters they themselves aspired to and failed to attain. (p. 407)

When any teacher is dismissed, "immorality" is most frequently listed as the cause. Within the category of immorality, sex-related improprieties are singled out as the most common reasons (Davis, 1972).

Designated as public servants and role models, teachers have been subjected to the public's investigation and regulation of their occupational and private behavior. Since schools are often considered the cornerstone of moral structure, many parents and school leaders view such investigation and regulation as the school community's responsibility. When the right of the community to set standards conflicts with an individual teacher's rights, the community's position takes precedence (Harbeck, 1987). Until the late 1960s, the judicial system consistently supported this position: the common good of society has priority over individual teacher's rights.

As personal freedoms extended to more segments of U. S. society in the late 1960s, the Courts began to rule that "employment in teaching could not be conditioned upon the surrender of constitutional rights" (Harbeck, 1987, p. 68). This trend is demonstrated in rulings handed down since 1950 involving the employment of homosexual teachers, but these decisions were not necessarily predictable from one case to the next. Several writers have reviewed litigations involving the dismissal of teachers accused of being gay or lesbian (Fleming, 1978; Ghent, 1977; Scholz, 1979; Sciallo, 1984), but Harbeck's 1987 study presented the most extensive analysis of this case law history. The following is a synopsis of the 39 appellate court decisions she reviewed.

The court decisions analyzed by Harbeck (1987) fell into four categories: (a) 20 percent (8 cases) of the litigants were accused of having sex with students; this litigation focused on criminal culpability, (b) 26 percent (10 cases) of the cases were initiated because of criminal conduct related to arrests for lewd sexual conduct, (c) 33 percent (13 cases) were brought to court because the litigant's sexual orientation was discovered through rumor or a non-criminal incident, and (d) 20 percent (8 cases) arose because the teacher publicly asserted that he/she was homosexual. The first two categories characterize litigation involving homosexual educators during the 1950s and 1960s, whereas the final two are more representative of cases brought to court during the 1970s and 1980s.

It is important to acknowledge that most instances of teacher dismissal related to homosexuality probably never reach the courts. Fearing public exposure and loss of future employment in the schools, many gay and lesbian teachers fired from their jobs choose not to dispute their dismissals in court. The following discussion of cases involving homosexual teachers that were brought to court should be understood in this context.

#### Sarac v. the State Board of Education: Homosexuality as Immoral

Sarac v. the State Board of Education (California) typifies the Courts' rulings in litigation involving the dismissal of homosexual teachers during the 1950s and 1960s. Thomas Sarac, Jr. was arrested in 1962 for public solicitation of lewd acts. The charges were later reduced to disorderly conduct to which Sarac pleaded guilty. The California State Board of Education declared him unfit to teach in the public schools and revoked his teaching credential on the grounds that committing a homosexual act represented immoral and unprofessional conduct. Sarac appealed this revocation, and in 1967 the Appellate Court ruled in favor of the State Board of Education. Describing homosexual behavior as "contrary and abhorrent to the social mores and moral standards of the people of California " (case transcript as quoted in Harbeck, 1987, p. 192), the Court found sufficient cause to declare Sarac unfit to teach because his homosexual behavior demonstrated an inability "to impress upon the minds of the pupils the principle of morality" (California Education Code as quoted in Harbeck, p. 192).

#### Jarvella v. Willoughby-Eastlake City School District of Education: Rights of the Individual Recognized

The legal shift of the Courts to rule in favor of the rights of the individual over the those of the school community began with the 1967 case of Jarvella v. Willoughby-Eastlake City School District of Education (Ohio). In this litigation, "immoral conduct" was not assumed to cause harm to the school community. This perspective demonstrated the court's attempt to strike a balance between community and individual rights. This

ruling differed significantly from that of Sarac in which homosexuality, in and of itself, was considered immoral and constituted sufficient grounds for dismissal. Jarvella, whose actual sexual orientation was not made public in this case, was dismissed from his high school teaching position because he had written and sent several letters of a sexually questionable nature to former male students. They came to the attention of the school district because one of the former student's mother found them and notified school authorities. Although Jarvella was reinstated, he was later dismissed again when the letters were leaked to and published in the local press.

In this case, Jarvella was presented as an exceptional teacher. The Ohio Court of Common Pleas ruled in Jarvella's favor, citing his excellent teaching reputation and noting that the letters, by themselves, did not pose significant harm to the school community and should be considered protected speech under both the U. S. and Ohio state constitutions. The Court ruled that "there had been 'unwarranted intrusion' into Jarvella's personal freedoms, and that these freedoms were not suspended merely because of his occupational employment as a school teacher" (Harbeck, 1987, p. 199).

#### Morrison v. State Board of Education: Landmark Criteria Set

Landmark criteria regarding the dismissal of homosexual teachers were established in the 1969 case, Morrison v. State Board of Education (California). Morrison's life teaching diploma was revoked because a former male sexual partner, a teaching colleague, reported their relationship to a school authority. This homosexual relationship was deemed immoral and constituted unprofessional conduct and moral turpitude under the California Education Code. The California Court of Appeals ruled against Morrison, who then took his case before the California Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled in his favor, declaring that labeling conduct immoral did not necessarily justify dismissal. The case served as a test of the nexus between Morrison's conduct and his duties as a teacher. The Court upheld the Board of Education's right to probe into a teacher's private life, but any inquiry had to be relevant to and restricted to

one's teaching responsibilities and the Board's concern about possible harm to students. The landmark criteria established in Morrison included the following: (a) "the status of being a homosexual was insufficient grounds for job termination," (b) "standards of procedural due process would be required of employers in job termination situations," and (c) "the private conduct of individuals did not automatically disqualify them from school employment unless it affected job performance" (Harbeck, 1987, p. 220).

Although considered a major victory in establishing individual rights for homosexual teachers, the Morrison case did not mark a change in the Court's condemnation of homosexuality. By failing to define homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle (a consistent trend), the Court upheld the community's right to define homosexuality as immoral (Harbeck, 1987).

#### Case Law Trends During the 1970s and 1980s: Unpredictable Outcomes

With the 1970s came the repeal of sodomy laws in many U. S. states, and these repeals significantly affected the arguments used to support the dismissal of homosexual teachers. Previously, criminal behavior was equated with immoral behavior, thus providing school authorities with just cause for dismissal. However, in states where sodomy laws were repealed, homosexuality now became a social rather than a criminal issue. This change was marked by several pro-gay rights advances. For instance, in 1972 the District of Columbia became the first city to prohibit employment discrimination against homosexual teachers, asserting that the ability to teach is not affected by one's sexual orientation, in and of itself, and that homosexuality as a lifestyle is protected under the U. S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. In addition, homosexuality was deleted from the American Psychological Association's list of mental illnesses in 1973, and in the following year, the National Education Association adopted a non-discrimination position that included sexual orientation.

The typical case law scenario of the 1970s involved male and female litigants whose sexual orientation was made known to school officials through rumor, publicity, or

political action rather than through criminal behavior (Harbeck, 1987). Following Morrison, homosexual rights advocates expected significant progress in establishing privacy and employment rights for homosexual teachers. This expectation, however, was not consistently met as the Courts increasingly chose to avoid ruling on the employment status of homosexual teachers. For instance, the Court assumed a strong pro-gay position in the written opinion for the 1974 case of Acanfora v. Board of Education of Montgomery County (Maryland), yet the final decision favored the Board of Education. The presiding judge ruled that homosexuality does not automatically interfere with job performance and stated that:

...the time has come today for private, consenting, adult homosexuality to enter the sphere of constitutionality protectable interests. Intolerance of the unconventional halts the growth of liberty. (case record as cited in Harbeck, 1987, p. 263)

As significant as this pro-gay opinion was, the Court still failed to take a precedent-setting stance about the employment rights of homosexual teachers, ruling that because Acanfora had not stated that he was gay when hired, his teaching contract was invalid.

Reflecting the anti-gay climate of the late 1970s, the Supreme Court's refusal in 1977 to hear the case of Gaylord v. Tacoma School District No. 10 (Washington) undermined the progress made in Morrison. In this case, the lower Court upheld the Tacoma School District's right to dismiss a teacher solely because of his sexual orientation. Termination was justified on the grounds of immorality; this ruling reverted back to traditional beliefs equating homosexuality with immorality.

Similar outcomes occurred in other litigation. During the late 1970s, the Courts ruled in cases like Aumiller v. University of Delaware (1977) to uphold a homosexual teacher's First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and association. Harbeck (1987) attributed the unpredictability of outcomes to the fact that the Courts were being asked to resolve a major social controversy that went beyond the employment rights of homosexual teachers. She asserted,

The intense conflict over the employment rights of homosexuals as educators stems from the intersection of three important social issues that have undergone tremendous changes recently: homosexuality, the family, and the rights of teachers...Stopping lesbians and gay men from teaching school is equated with stopping the tide of change in traditional cultural values around the family, children, and heterosexuality, and the school teacher who loyally inculcated these social beliefs. (p. 392)

The Courts ongoing reluctance to resolve the issue of homosexual teachers characterizes the case law of the 1980s. In 1985 the Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal of a bisexual guidance counselor (Rowland v. Mad River Local School District, Montgomery County) who lost her job as the result of privately disclosing her bisexuality to co-workers (Flygare, 1985). As noted earlier, the Supreme Court's 1985 split four to four ruling in NGTF v. Board of Education of Oklahoma City provided no legal precedent. Although these case outcomes mirror the conservative shift of the judicial system, Harbeck concluded that today a gay or lesbian educator is more likely to win a job retention case if: (a) she/he has tenure and an excellent teaching record, (b) her/his students are older, and (c) there is little or no hint of sexual impropriety. If these conditions are present, attempts by school authorities to remove gay and lesbian teachers are less likely to be successful.

In summary, Harbeck (1987) asserted that despite recent case outcomes and the Supreme Court's ruling in the 1986 Hardwick v. Bowers sodomy case,

...the case law on homosexual employment has been fundamentally altered by the acceptance of the Morrison nexus requirement between behavior and job responsibilities. Even if community upset has been aroused, teacher dismissal must be based upon proof of the individual's impaired ability to perform his or her job, otherwise, the homosexual educator will prevail. (p. 451)

She also stated that future litigation involving homosexual teachers is likely to favor the teacher's rights. What remains to be determined, however, is if the U. S. Supreme Court will finally address the issue of constitutional rights for gay and lesbian educators.

Lesbian physical educators who work in the public schools live daily with the threat--perceived or real--that they may be fired if their sexual orientation becomes known. Although Harbeck (1987) argued that gay and lesbian educators today are in a

stronger position legally, the case law reveals the precarious position in which gay and lesbian educators are placed. Appreciating their political and legal vulnerability is vital to understanding their day-to-day realities.

#### Research Studies about Gay and Lesbian Teachers

From a research perspective, little attention has been given to the topic of gay and lesbian educators. Four exceptions are Harbeck's (1987) analysis of the case law involving homosexual teachers, Griffin's (1989) empowerment study with gay and lesbian educators, Olson's (1987) survey study of homosexual teachers, and Smith's (1985) interview study examining the experience of lesbian and gay teachers. The other research includes Sciallo's (1984) documentation of his own legal struggle to be rehired after losing his teaching position because his sexual orientation was disclosed, Fischer's (1982) study about educators' attitudes toward homosexuality, and Nickeson's (1980) comparative study of homosexual and heterosexual teachers on certain professional and personal dimensions. Although not focusing specifically on homosexuality and education, Fogarty (1980) interviewed one public school teacher in her study about professionally employed lesbians.

The purposes of Griffin's (1989) study were to describe the experiences of a selected group of gay and lesbian educators and to empower these educators through collective reflection and action. Fifteen educators participated, and in addition to the two researcher-facilitators based at the university level, this group included teachers from pre-school to high school settings. The interview data revealed that the 13 public school participants experienced isolation, fear and frustration as gay and lesbian educators. None were publicly out at school, but all had revealed their sexual orientation to some members of the school community. Decisions about when and how to disclose their sexual orientation were made on a case-by-case basis.

The empowerment aspect of this study included: (a) the interview, (b) the participants' construction of their own profiles from the interview data, (c) the sharing

of profiles with the participant group, (d) monthly meetings of the participant group, and (e) collective actions. The collective actions included participating together in a gay and lesbian pride march and forming a local organization for gay and lesbian educators. Following these activities, the participants reported having a better self-understanding of their identity as gay and lesbian educators and a desire to integrate more fully their gay/lesbian and educator identities. The significance of this study is two-fold. First, it solicited the perspectives of gay and lesbian educators, and second, the methodology represents a new and politically oriented approach to studying the experience of gay and lesbian educators.

The significance of Olson's (1987) study was the number of gay and lesbian educators who were surveyed. Her respondents included 97 gay and lesbians who were currently teaching or had been teachers in the public schools. Of the 25 percent who had left teaching, more than half did so partially because of their sexual orientation. Over 80 percent of all the respondents had disclosed their sexual orientation to at least one other person while teaching, most often to another teacher. The surveyed gay and lesbian teachers reported hearing numerous negative stereotypes associated with homosexuality from individuals within the school community, and these stereotypes affected them both personally and professionally. The respondents reported experiencing feelings of anger and resentment. Some teachers felt compelled to keep their sexual orientation hidden while an equal number felt forced to "come out." The professional consequence reported most often was that homosexual teachers had to lead double lives. When asked about strategies for surviving the prejudicial treatment they experienced as gay and lesbian teachers, the respondents reported the following: (a) seek out other homosexual teachers, (b) stay "closeted," (c) ignore innuendos and deal only with direct confrontations, and (d) maintain a professional attitude and be an excellent teacher.

The purpose of Smith's (1985) interview study was to describe the perspectives of four homosexual teachers. Using a symbolic interactionist perspective, Smith presented profiles of each teacher and drew four major conclusions about their shared experience. First, the four teachers spent a disproportionate amount of time being good teachers. Second, if their homosexuality were to be discovered, they believed that superior performance was one way to protect their job status. Third, the four respondents were student-centered in their teacher duties rather than administration-centered or community-centered. Finally, each of the respondents suffered personal and professional conflict regarding their identities as homosexuals and teachers.

Sciullo (1984) presented a history of lawsuits filed by homosexual teachers as well as his own personal account of being fired (and subsequently rehired) from a community college teaching position. His account highlighted the professional and personal stigmatization faced by lesbian and gay teachers in attempting to legally secure their right to teach.

In Fischer's (1982) questionnaire study, teachers, administrators, and undergraduate education majors held more negative than positive attitudes toward homosexuality. In addition, these educators were less accepting of homosexuality than the general populace was in the 1973 study by MacDonald, et al. Of the different subgroups of educators used in Fischer's study, school administrators, male educators, and older educators had more negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

Nickeson (1980) compared gay and heterosexual teachers on various professional and personal dimensions. Using a sex-role inventory, a teachers' characteristics measurement, and structured interviews with 30 gay and 30 heterosexual teachers, she found few significant differences between the two groups. With the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, gay teachers scored higher on both the feminine and masculine scales than did the heterosexual teachers, thus presenting a more androgynous profile. Gay women teachers scored higher on the masculine scale than did heterosexual female teachers

whereas gay men teachers scored higher on the feminine scale than did heterosexual male teachers. With respect to these differences, Nickeson concluded that, "Gays do not necessarily exhibit fewer qualities of their own sex; they simply have incorporated other role behaviors as well" (p. 96).

No significant differences were found between the gay and heterosexual teacher groups on the Teachers' Characteristics Schedule. This measurement was used to compare differences about attitudes toward pupils and school personnel, religion and religion based authority, openness to change and liberal attitudes, social and personal adjustment, dedication to teaching, and validity of responses. The personal interviews revealed only one difference between the two groups: gay teachers did not think they could influence the sexual orientation of their students. In her discussion, Nickeson (1980) concluded that, "...no sensible reasons prevail for denying gays the opportunity to practice their teaching profession while having to hide their sexual orientation" (p. 108).

Fogarty (1980) included a lesbian public high school teacher in an in-depth interview study of professionally employed lesbians. Fogarty specifically addressed the "passing as straight" phenomenon among lesbians in their work role. For the public school teacher, concealing her sexual orientation was considered a "non-decision." As she stated,

Well, all you have to do is listen to what is being said in the public about, you know, Anita Bryant goes on her crusade about condemning homosexuals who teach our young minds and that sort of thing. I don't know if it's a real decision [passing as straight] that I made consciously or just something that I continue to do out of fear for my job. (p. 68)

As with the other lesbian professionals that Fogarty (1980) interviewed, the public school teacher distanced herself from her colleagues to avoid making her sexual orientation known. This teacher equated "being out" to colleagues with jeopardizing her teaching career. "It has a rippling effect...it wouldn't be just that school district. It would be any other teaching job" (p. 75).

A positive sense of self was common among all the women; however, each felt compelled to lead a "double life." Fogarty (1980) maintained that "hiding, even when one is successfully passing, imposes a substantial psychological burden" (p. 76). The fear of discovery, the negative reactions anticipated if one's sexual orientation is made public, the alienation and isolation from co-workers, and the denial of oneself and one's feelings about a significant other were common concerns among the lesbian professionals she interviewed.

From these studies, only a beginning picture can be sketched about gay and lesbian educators. The Griffin (1989), Olson (1989), Smith (1985), and Fogarty (1980) studies each revealed that gay and lesbian educators experience living in two worlds. In the school setting, they engaged in a variety of behaviors which were used either to conceal their sexual orientation or to protect their professional livelihood if their sexual orientation became known. The other studies suggested that even though few differences existed between heterosexual and homosexual teachers on certain personal and professional dimensions, legal and educational systems were non-accepting of homosexuals as teachers. The most significant conclusion to be made from these studies is that more research is needed, especially research that documents the perspective of gay and lesbian teachers and empowers them as a group to effect change. Both in terms of content and method, the completed research only begins to explore this topic area.

#### Research Related to Lesbianism in Physical Education and Sport

There is no research focusing specifically on lesbian physical education teachers, and only three studies were found that directly or indirectly address the issue of lesbianism in physical education and sport. The prevailing cultural norm within physical education and sport is to deny a lesbian presence, and the lack of research is a clear indication of the silence surrounding this sensitive topic. Of the three reviewed studies, only Guthrie's (1982) study directly addresses the issue of homophobia in sport and physical

education. The other two (Beck, 1976; Locke & Jensen, 1970) hint at the topic of lesbianism without specifically naming it.

The subjects in Guthrie's (1982) study were 463 female college students who fell into four categories: athletes/non-physical education majors, athletes/physical education majors, non-physical education majors/non-athletes, and physical education majors/non-athletes. Using measures to determine their degree of homophobia and negative stereotyping along femininity-masculinity dimensions, Guthrie arrived at five major conclusions: (a) homophobia is prevalent among this population, (b) female non-athletes are more homophobic than female athletes, (c) female athletes are more homophobic than female physical education majors, (d) female non-majors were significantly more homophobic than female physical education majors, and (e) female physical education majors were perceived to be more masculine and homosexual than female college students in general. Besides being the first of its kind in physical education and sport, Guthrie's study is significant because of her focus on measuring levels of homophobia. This represents a relatively new approach in homosexual research.

The purpose of Beck's (1972) questionnaire study was to describe the personal and professional lifestyles of never married women teaching physical education in institutions of higher education. Of the 107 respondents, the majority lived alone (57%) or with one non-related female (35.5%). With respect to sexual preference, only six respondents acknowledged being involved in a homosexual relationship. This number must be accepted with caution for two reasons. First, those respondents living alone were not asked to identify their sexual preference, and second, respondents reported apprehension in naming their sexual preference. This apprehension was captured in one respondent's candid comment.

I hope and pray that a publication of this sort [the dissertation] will not be revealed to the world that most physical educators or other career women are found to be homosexual, because if [this study] comes out that way, then all the non-

homosexuals will be thrust into the same "pot." It would be extremely finger pointing here in my smaller community--one could be classified "homo" simply by a revelation of a published article. It would be loss of a job--no question about it--small town people are aware and suspicious--not BIG cities. (as quoted in Beck, p. 307)

Although the primary purpose of Beck's (1972) study was not to explore the issue of sexual orientation among female physical educators, her data revealed this as an integral component in describing their personal and professional lifestyles. Whether they identified themselves as homosexual or not, never married female physical educators "continue to feel the rejection of society, a stigma of abnormality, a need to defend with rationalizations the lifestyle chosen" (Beck, p. 307). Even though Beck danced around the issue of lesbianism (the word "lesbian" is conspicuously absent throughout her dissertation), her study represents a first step in acknowledging and affirming the lesbian presence in physical education and sport.

Locke and Jensen (1970) surveyed female undergraduate physical education majors about the perceived levels of heterosexuality of women in physical education. Although the majority of respondents perceived themselves to be heterosexually oriented, unfavorable stereotypes concerning the perceived low levels of heterosexual activity among women in physical education were reported. These unfavorable stereotypes referred to the assumed asexuality of some female physical educators. These women were described as "preferring not to marry" and as having no "personal or social interest in men" (p. 33). The authors assumed women were either heterosexual or asexual. No direct mention of lesbianism was made, but one can speculate that lesbianism was an underlying issue, whether or not the authors intended it to be. For example, the authors described these stereotypes as reflective of the asexuality of some female physical educators. Asexuality, however, is often used as a front by lesbians to conceal their lesbianism. By withholding information about their sexuality and sexual activity, many lesbians often portray themselves as (and are presumed by others to be)

asexual. Like Beck (1976), the authors failed to directly identify the underlying issues in assessing the heterosexuality levels of female physical educators, but given the date of publication, this study still represented a significant and controversial undertaking. This research was a classic example of the denial surrounding the acknowledgement of a lesbian presence within physical education.

These three studies each in their own way demonstrate the homophobia present within physical education and sport environments. Physical educators are reluctant to acknowledge a lesbian presence in physical education and sport (as evidenced by the lack of research on the topic). The significance of the present study can be more fully appreciated when juxtaposed with this historical avoidance of acknowledging and studying the lesbian presence in sport and physical education.

### Section Two: Conceptual Framework

Identifying a conceptual perspective for a research study serves three purposes. First, it provides the researcher with a framework from which to begin making sense of her or his data. In this sense, it is used as an initial guide for data analysis. Second, it helps the reader to understand how a particular researcher defines reality and views the world. Third, it ties the present study into previous research on related topics, highlighting both similarities and differences in perspective and approach.

Feminism and oppression theory provide the basis for the conceptual framework used in this study. Feminism sets the context for examining the experiences of lesbian physical educators within a patriarchal society while oppression theory describes a theoretical process by which lesbian physical educators' experiences can be understood. A brief overview of various feminist perspectives is presented, followed by a more in-depth presentation of oppression theory. The focus of later chapters (Chapters V and VI) is to describe the processes by which lesbian physical educators are oppressed, and therefore, primary attention in this chapter is given to outlining oppression theory.

## Using a Feminist Perspective for Context Setting

Given the specific context of their experience as women and as lesbians living and working in a patriarchal society, a feminist perspective is needed to fully examine the function of their oppression. Patriarchy is "an enforced belief in male dominance and control" (Pharr, 1988, p. 8), and a feminist analysis of sport as a patriarchal institution is important in understanding the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers. Sport is preserved as a male domain when women and men are limited to traditional gender roles. Labeling as lesbian those women who venture outside the boundaries of socially accepted gender behaviors also perpetuates male control in sport and physical education.

### The Assumed Relationship Between Gender Roles and Sexuality

Women in physical education and sport defy traditionally male defined gender roles, thus challenging what Ponse (1978) labeled the "principle of consistency" of sex-related identities. Sex-related identities include: (a) sex assignment--the biological/genital designation of male or female, (b) gender identity--the experienced sense of maleness or femaleness, (c) gender role--the learned behaviors of masculinity or femininity, (d) sexual object choice--the gender of persons toward whom a person directs his or her sexual feelings and activity, and (e) sexual identity--one's social and/or personal identity as heterosexual, homosexual or lesbian, and bisexual. These identities:

...are presumed in our society to relate in a congruent and coherent manner...For example, a biological female should experience her gender identity as essentially female and should have a feminine gender role identity. Her sexual socialization should direct her toward men as sexual object choices, who would be similarly consistent in their sexual-related identities, and her sexual identity should be heterosexual. Disruptions of the principle of consistency in the area of sexual object choice--that is, when the sexual object choice is deemed incorrect or deviant--typically lead to conjectures about gender role and gender identity. (Ponse, 1978, pp. 27-28)

The reverse is also true: disruptions in the area of gender role (the degree to which one learns, assumes, and demonstrates the characteristics considered "masculine" or

"feminine" in a particular culture) lead to assumptions about one's sexual object choice and sexual identity. A female who crosses the boundaries of what is socially accepted as "feminine" is often stereotyped as "man-like." In an environment where homosexual stereotypes flourish, to be "man-like" is, therefore, equated with being a lesbian. This perception, coupled with the belief that sport is a male domain, leads to the assumption that women seriously involved in sport are lesbians. "We seem to see sport as a field for men and homosexual females" (Hart, 1971, p. 64).

### Feminist Perspectives

Feminist theory provides numerous frameworks for understanding the function of socially prescribed gender roles and the sanctions against those (especially women) who break accepted and assumed "rules" of sexuality. Jaggar and Rothenberg (1984) identified five feminist perspectives: conservatism, liberalism, traditional Marxism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism. Conservatism rests on the belief that women's oppression is biologically determined whereas liberalism roots it in unfair discrimination. In contrast to traditional Marxism which bases all oppression in the class system, radical feminism defines women's oppression as the fundamental oppression. A socialist feminist argues that gender and class oppression are inseparable.

Of these five perspectives, the socialist feminist perspective best complements the oppression model used in this study. As Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1983) maintained in their selection of socialist feminism as a theoretical base for studying women and sport, "By recognizing the interaction between sexism and other social forces--classism, racism, heterosexism, ageism--[socialist feminism] affords greater flexibility in formulating the problems and potential solutions to overcoming the oppression of all women" (pp. 16-17).

Radical feminism, however, also provides useful insights into the dynamics between gender and sexuality. From a radical feminist perspective, one's sexuality is the central political issue, rather than a secondary or private matter; women's oppression is rooted

in male control of sexuality (Jagger and Rothenberg, 1984). Charlotte Bunch (1984) stated, "Lesbianism is a threat to the ideological, political, and economic basis of male supremacy. The Lesbian threatens the ideology of male supremacy by destroying the lie about female inferiority, weakness, passivity, and by denying women's 'innate' need for men" (p. 146). Rich (1984) defined the institution of heterosexuality as a "beachhead of male dominance" (p. 120); lesbianism and heterosexuality are viewed as socially constructed, not innately defined realities. The relevance of the radical feminist perspective to this study is the focus on sexuality and the underlying assumption that "one's sexuality is always a political issue, whether or not one is conscious of its political implications" (Jagger and Rothenberg, 1984, p. 384).

Using either a socialist or radical feminist research perspective avoids what Kitzinger (1987) labeled the depoliticization of "gay affirmative research." Kitzinger asserted that research labeling homosexuality as pathological no longer represents the dominant psychological approach to studying homosexuality. Replacing it is "a model of lesbianism (and male homosexuality) as a normal, natural and healthy sexual preference or lifestyle, and the issue of pathology has shifted to the diagnosis and cure of the new disease of 'homophobia' " (p. 33). The sick homosexual is replaced with the sick homophobe.

Kitzinger's (1987) argument is grounded in the current debate between those who view homosexuality as an "essential" (or biologically determined) identity versus those who view sexual orientation as socially constructed. She asserted that the essentialist interpretation of lesbianism within psychological research renders it "politically innocuous" because change is relegated to the individual, attitudinal level alone. Person-change is emphasized not system-change. For example, the eradication of homophobia is contingent upon one's equating lesbianism and male homosexuality with heterosexuality: each is considered a natural, normal, and healthy expression of sexuality. The underlying assumption is that lesbians and gay men do not threaten the nuclear family or

other societal arrangements of the status quo. According to Kitzinger, this approach distracts "attention from the socio-political and institutional aspects of lesbian oppression and the lesbian threat" (p. 39).

Kitzinger (1987) argued that this approach fails to question the patriarchal structure of society, and she proposed that lesbianism (as well as male homosexuality and heterosexuality) is socially constructed. Naming it as socially constructed gives power to the argument that the personal is political. "By contrast, liberal humanist theory postulates the existence of a private atomized 'inner self' rooted in infantile-libidinal conflicts or unconscious motivational features, and, in its clinical conceptions, perpetuates the salvanist notion of the person saving herself regardless of society" (p. 62).

Both the socialist feminist and radical feminist perspectives view sexual orientation as socially constructed. In this study they will be used in the context of oppression theory to explore the dynamics of gender and sexuality within the descriptions of lesbian physical education teachers' experiences.

### Oppression Theory

Oppression is a systematic social phenomenon based on the differences between social groups that involves ideological domination, institutional control, and the promulgation of the oppressor group's ideology, logic system and culture on the oppressed group. The result is the exploitation of one social group by another for its own benefit, real or perceived. (Jackson & Hardiman, 1988, p. 5)

Within an oppressive society, persons in social group "A" hold a set of negative beliefs about people in social group "B" and act toward people in social group "B" based on those beliefs. "These beliefs and actions are supported, sanctioned, enforced, and empowered by cultural ideologies and institutions and result in a privileged existence for social group 'A' and a limited existence for social group 'B' and the dehumanization of both" (Harro, 1983, p. 1). As Jackson and Hardiman (1989) asserted, to grasp the nature of oppression is to understand it both as a condition ("a still snapshot of a moving picture", p. 4) and as a process ("a system of domination with many interlocking parts,"

p. 5). A dynamic definition of oppression looks at the context of oppression (individual, institutional, socio-cultural), the awareness of oppression, and the mode of its application (behavior and attitude). The primary focus of oppression research is not the isolated act of discrimination or harassment directed at members of a subordinate group, but rather the system of domination within a particular societal context.

This definition of oppression has been used as a conceptual framework for understanding the unequal relationships between many different social groups: whites and blacks, rich and poor, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual. This multi-social group analysis is metaphorically described as the umbrella concept of oppression. As Jackson and Hardiman (1989) stated, "The umbrella metaphor...serves as a reminder that the various manifestations of oppression are not in competition with each other, but are part of the same family. One...is not more serious or more central than any of the others" (p. 3).

Social oppression occurs when the following four conditions are present in society:

1. The oppressor group has the societal power to define and enact reality.
2. There is psychological "colonization" of the oppressed group, whereby the oppressed internalize their own oppressed condition and collude with their oppressors.
3. Genocide, harassment, discrimination and other forms of differential and unequal treatment are institutionalized and systematic.
4. Individual members of both the oppressor and oppressed groups are socialized to play their roles and see those roles as normal and correct. (Jackson & Hardiman, 1988, pp. 5-6)

One's social group membership, whether ascribed by birth or assumed, influences a person's socialization process and shapes her or his view of the world. For instance, in this society males and females are socialized to think and behave differently. These differences reflect their understanding of reality and their different social group membership.

Memmi (1965), Freire (1972), Baker-Miller (1976), Goldenberg (1978), and Jackson and Hardiman (1988) have contributed greatly to the development of oppression theory. Common labels for social groups "A" and "B" include the colonizers and the colonized (Memmi, 1965), the oppressors and the oppressed (Freire, 1972), and the dominants and the subordinates (Baker-Miller, 1976). Using Baker-Miller's terms, Harro (1983) synthesized from their works and that of others a list of common characteristics for each social group. The characteristics of the dominants will be described as they relate to heterosexuals. To demonstrate the applicability of the oppression model, the characteristics of subordinates will be illustrated with respect to various subordinate social groups.

Harro (1983) cited five characteristics of dominant social groups: (a) Dominants are perceived as being "normal," (b) they are the "namers" of society and subordinates, (c) dominants know little about themselves, (d) they know little about subordinates, and (e) dominants are "privileged."

1. Dominants are perceived as normal. To be a member of a dominant group is to be equated with normalcy. As Baker-Miller (1976) stated, "the dominant group is the model for normal human relationships" (p. 9). The case of heterosexuality vs. homosexuality demonstrates this point perhaps more clearly than any other dominant and subordinate social group membership. The most common stereotype held about lesbians and gay men is that they are abnormal. Heterosexuality is culturally and socially valued in this society, whereas, homosexuality is not. As abnormal members of this society, lesbians and gay men are subjected to various legal, social, and religious sanctions.

2. Dominants are the namers. By representing the norm, dominants are the the namers of society and subordinates. For example, heterosexuals are labeled "straight," a term implying virtuousness, while lesbians and gay men are called the derogatory names

of "queer", "butch", "faggot", and "dyke." Labeling one's experience as "normal" and another's as "abnormal" is another illustration of this point.

3. Dominants know little about themselves. The processes by which lesbians and gay men "got that way" are of great interest to many social and psychological researchers. Considerable research has examined the life histories and psychological profiles of lesbians and gay men to search for answers to this question. The question rarely addressed, however, is how heterosexuals become heterosexual. From the perspective of dominants, this question is considered unnecessary since they are considered "normal."

4. Dominants know little about subordinates. As Harro (1983) stated, "Most dominants have never perceived a need to know more about subordinates. The culture we live in is a dominant-oriented one, and all one needs to know to survive are the ways of the dominant" (p. 12). The media provides a good example of the heterosexually oriented nature of this society. Few images (especially positive ones) of lesbians or gay men are portrayed in mass media, and as a result, gays and lesbians are invisible. The information dominants do have about subordinates is usually based upon stereotypes, myths, and misinformation.

5. Dominants are privileged. The dominant group "usually holds all of the open power and authority and determines the ways in which power may be acceptably used" (Baker-Miller, 1976, p. 9). This power entitles them to certain privileges that subordinates are denied. A heterosexual's right to marry, teach, or be a parent is not questioned on the grounds that she or he is heterosexual. The extent of heterosexual privilege is best illustrated in the numerous ways lesbians and gay men are discriminated against in the public and private sectors of this society.

Harro (1983) characterized subordinates as (a) powerless, (b) stereotyped, (c) knowledgeable about dominants, (d) dependent upon dominants for reward and punishment, and (e) outsiders by virtue of isolation and invisibility. To illustrate the umbrella concept of oppression, that is, how different oppressions (racism, sexism,

ableism, etc.) are connected to each other and are mutually reinforcing, examples from various subordinate groups will be used to illustrate these five characteristics.

1. Subordinates are powerless. As noted, dominants control the open power and authority in society. Consequently, subordinates are, in fact, powerless or made to feel powerless. The sense of powerlessness occurs on various levels: individually, socially, and institutionally. Individually, subordinates are made to feel inferior to and different from dominants. As a group, their past and present cultural significance and contributions are denied or unacknowledged. Institutionally, their powerlessness translates into legal, social, and economic discrimination. The experiences of Blacks in U. S. society provide a vivid illustration. Whether by being forced to sit in the rear of the bus, left out of traditional history books, or denied the right to vote, Blacks have a long history of being excluded from positions of power.

2. Subordinates are stereotyped. Each subordinate social group has their own list of negative stereotypes. For instance, women are stereotyped as weak and passive, Blacks are stereotyped as lazy and dumb, Jews are stereotyped as pushy and tight with money. Stereotypes serve two functions: to keep subordinates powerless and to keep dominants ill-informed. Many subordinates internalize these stereotypes. This not only affects their self image; it also helps perpetuate the stereotypes and puts subordinates in a position of supporting the system that oppresses them. For example, some gay men and lesbians internalize the stereotype that they are mentally ill and, consequently, choose to seek professional help. Dominants use stereotypes to deny subordinates access to power. Few women and persons of color achieve leadership positions, partly because they are stereotyped as being incapable of handling such roles.

3. Subordinates are knowledgeable about dominants. Since the world of dominants represents what is normal and good, it is a world both subordinates and dominants know. For instance, historical accounts are dominated by the accomplishments of white males, and present day media (in the form of television, movies, and books) presents primarily

a white, heterosexual, male perspective. For subordinates, however, knowledge about the dominants' world goes beyond who or what is portrayed in the media. As Baker-Miller (1976) noted, subordinate groups are forced to concentrate on basic survival. "Subordinates know much more about the dominants than vice versa...They become highly attuned to the dominants, able to predict their reactions of pleasure and displeasure" (p. 10). The gay teacher who wants to keep his job must learn how to "pass as straight" to avoid questions about his sexual orientation.

4. Subordinates look to dominants for reward and punishment. The dominant world is the valued world. The qualities valued by dominants are portrayed as the most desirable. Subordinates, then, look to dominants as role models and respond to their distribution of reward and punishment. The phrase, "she thinks like a man," (which in a dominant world is meant as a compliment) illustrates this point. A professional woman has "made it" if she can demonstrate that she can operate in a man's world (Baker-Miller, 1976, p. 75). The subordinate ends up colluding with the very system that oppresses her in the first place. As a result of this phenomenon, subordinates experience what Freire (1972) called the duality of their innermost being where to be is to be like the oppressor (p. 33).

5. Subordinates are outsiders by virtue of isolation and invisibility. The knowledge this society has about subordinates is limited and clouded by negative stereotypes. Fear of rejection causes some subordinate groups to remain invisible. Labeled by society as "deviants," many gay men and lesbians choose to "stay in the closet." Instead of risking discrimination and degradation directed at many gay men and lesbians who have "come out" publicly, many prefer to remain isolated and hidden. One consequence is that by remaining invisible, they have little power to change the stereotypes that keep them outsiders.

The nature of the isolation and invisibility experienced by subordinate groups takes on different forms. For example, physically disabled persons have no choice about their

isolation and invisibility. They are kept isolated by the architectural design of buildings, streets, and vehicles. Their limited access to the public world of able-bodied dominants keeps them invisible and keeps dominants ignorant of their experiences, needs, and abilities.

In addition to oppression theory, two other conceptual perspectives are relevant to a study about lesbian physical education teachers: deviancy (or labeling) theory and identity theory. All three conceptual perspectives have been used to understand gay and lesbian experiences. These three models reflect a different conceptual perspective, and therefore, a different way of viewing the world. The following overview of deviancy and identity models is included because concepts from both are used in the data analysis. The oppression model, however, is the primary framework used in the data analysis, and a rationale for selecting the oppression model over the other two is presented.

#### Deviancy as a Social Construct

Early perspectives on deviancy assumed an inherent characteristic in those individuals identified as deviants which distinguished them from non-deviants. The focus of research during this period was correctional in nature. In other words, the purpose was to find a cause and cure for deviant behavior (Gibbs, 1968). The following definition by Becker (1963) marked a shift from these initial ways of conceptualizing deviancy.

...social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviancy and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as "outsiders." From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act that person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender." (p. 9)

Within the newer perspective, deviancy is not considered inherent but socially defined instead: "...deviant behavior is behavior that people so label" (Becker, 1963, p. 9). This change in focus is reflected in the development of labeling theory. The interest of social scientists shifted from the behavior of so-called deviants to the social reactions and interactions that originally produce the deviant label. "The critical variable in the

study of deviance...is the social audience rather than the individual person, since it is the audience which eventually determines whether or not any given action or actions will become a visible case of deviation" (Erickson, 1962, p. 308). The labeling of deviancy is constantly negotiated. As Schur (1971) stated, "At the heart of the labeling approach is an emphasis on process; deviance is viewed not as a static entity but rather as a continuously shaped and reshaped outcome of dynamic processes of social interaction" (p. 8).

Lemert (1967) classified deviancy into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary deviance represents an initial deviant act that arises in a variety of social, cultural, and psychological contexts. Primary deviancy may be socially acknowledged and defined as "undesirable," but the deviant act itself has marginal implications for the status and psychic structure of the person involved. In other words, the original act may be labelled as deviant but considered within the boundaries of normal social behavior. The person is not stigmatized as deviant, nor is she or he subject to punitive or corrective measures. Moses (1977) used the example of the employee who gets drunk at the annual office party. Although the full-time "drunk" is labelled deviant, under the particular social context of an office party, the once-a-year "drunk" is not.

Secondary deviance differs from primary deviance in that the individual is labelled deviant by society. She or he is subjected to "stigmatization, punishments, segregation, and social control" (Lemert, 1967, p. 40). An individual's deviancy becomes central to one's life and self-definition. Social scientists interested in secondary deviancy study the effects of the deviant label and the strategies used by so-called deviants to mitigate the consequences of their stigmatized identity (Goffman, 1963; Becker, 1963). Homosexuality falls into the category of secondary deviance, and considerable research has examined the identity management techniques of lesbians and gay men (Fogarty, 1980; Henkin, 1984; Moses, 1977; Sagarin & Kelly, 1975; Weinberg & Williams, 1974).

With respect to visibility, Becker (1963) classified deviancy into two categories: pure and secret. Pure deviant behavior is "that which both disobeys the rule and is perceived as doing so" (p. 20). Secret deviance represents the case in which a deviant act is committed, but it goes unnoticed or is not acknowledged as a violation of the rules. Pure and secret deviance are similar to Goffman's (1963) classifications of stigmatized identity: discredited and discreditable. The discredited individual is the known deviant while the discreditable person is the unknown deviant.

Lesbians and gay men fall into both classifications of deviance. For example, the gay man who walks down the street holding hands with his partner is perceived as a pure or discredited deviant. As a visible deviant, he is subject to the isolation and punishment deemed appropriate by society. On the other hand, the lesbian who wants to protect her job and successfully conceals her sexual orientation at work would be, according to deviancy theory, identified as the secret or discreditable deviant. Unless her co-workers find out or unless she goes public, she is treated as if she were heterosexual. Because one's sexual orientation cannot be detected by appearance, and because lesbians and gay men are stigmatized and discriminated against in this society, the majority of lesbians and gay men conceal their sexual orientation and, therefore, would be considered to be secret or discreditable deviants.

### Identity Theory

Identity theory, an outgrowth of various perspectives within social psychology (including the study of deviancy and labeling), provides another framework from which to study the experiences of lesbians and gay men. Weigert, Teitge, and Teitge (1986) traced the concept of identity back to Erikson's ego development work during the 1950s. The use of identity as a theoretical base is relatively new, and Weigert, et al., presented their work as an initial attempt to formalize identity theory. The following is their definitional understanding of identity:

...We see identity as a social reality; indeed, as a social reality that is continually produced within and by the experience and interaction of individuals. The specific object of analysis is identity as a human social production.

As a totally social production, identity is a humanly constructed, defined and sustained meaningful object...It is both totally social and uniquely personal; it results from varying degrees of appropriation by self and/or bestowed by others. The dramatic quality of life flows in part from the endless negotiations of identities as self attempts to appropriate identities that others do not bestow, or others attempt to bestow identities that self does not appropriate. (pp. 30-31)

This negotiation between self and others demonstrates the socially constructed nature of identity; a critical underlying assumption about identity development is that "society is prior to and shapes the individual" (Weigert, et al., 1986, p. 35).

In applying identity theory specifically to homosexuality within an occupational context, Weigert, et al. (1986) proposed the homosexual dilemma: self-realization versus social realization. This dilemma reflects the dissonance most homosexuals experience in a society that assumes and values heterosexuality. For those gay men and lesbians who conceal their sexual orientation for social acceptance (defined by Weigert, et al., as "public respectability") within the work setting, social realization is achieved at the expense of one's self-realization. In this society, self-realization--achieved by being open about one's homosexuality--typically results in societal rejection. In the workplace, this rejection may take many forms including personal harassment and job termination.

The homosexual dilemma is conceptualized as an identity matrix which features four conditions of dissonance and consonance: (a) self-realization and social estrangement, (b) self-estrangement and social realization, (c) self-realization and social realization, and (d) self-estrangement and social estrangement (see Figure 1).

Four central propositions illustrating the interrelationships among self and social identities emerge from this matrix:

1. The greater the emphasis on both social realization and self-realization, the more positively consonant the identity of the respondent.

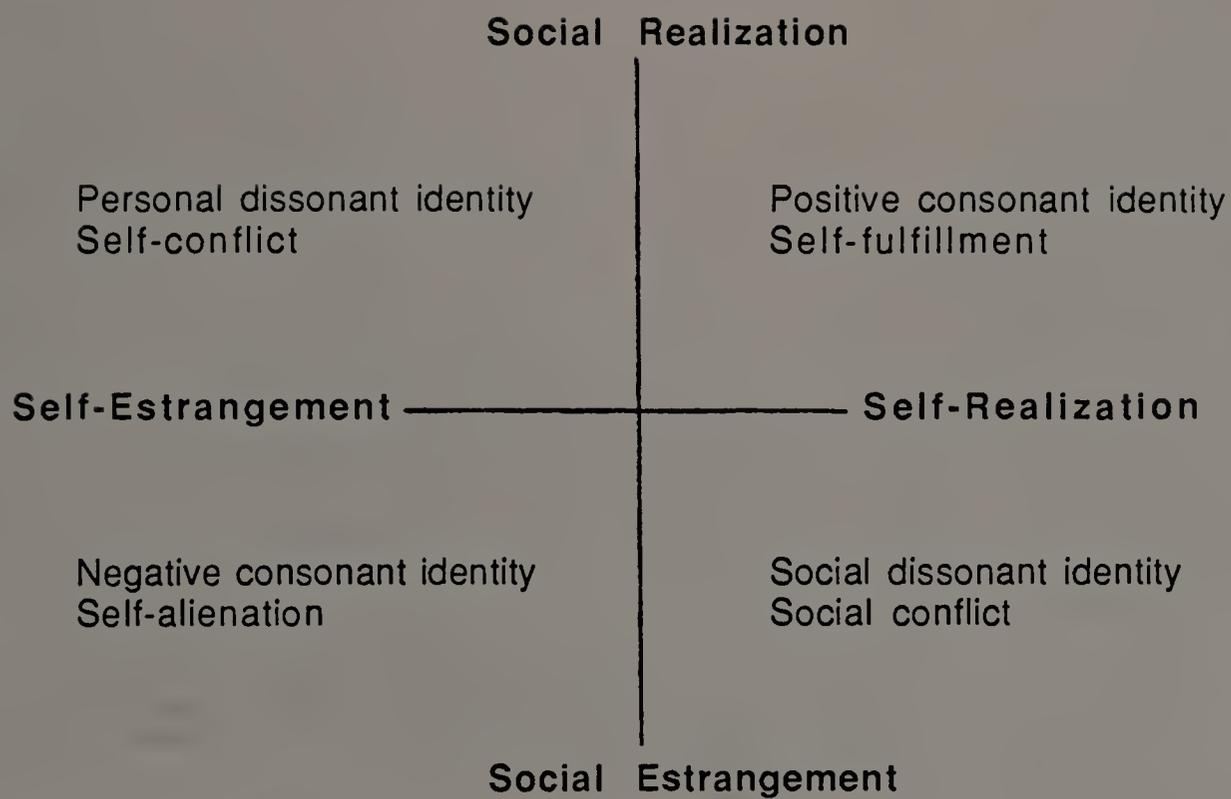


Figure 1. The Homosexual Dilemma: An Identity Matrix.

Note. From Weigert, A. J., Teitge, J. S, & Teitge, D. W. (1986). Society and identity. New York: Cambridge University Press.

2. The greater the emphasis on self-realization with indications of social estrangement, the more socially dissonant the identity of the respondent.

3. The greater the emphasis on social realization with indications of self-estrangement, the more personally dissonant the identity of the respondent.

4. The greater the indication of self-estrangement and social estrangement, the more negatively consonant the identity of the respondent. (Weigert, et al., 1986, p. 88)

From these propositions, Weigert, et al. (1986) define four possible outcomes of the identity-integration effort: self-fulfillment, social conflict, self-alienation, and self-conflict (p. 89). Examples as applied to lesbian physical education teachers are provided.

1. Self-fulfillment, in which an individual is self-realized and socially realized. The lesbian physical educator whose sexual orientation is known and accepted both professionally and personally experiences self-fulfillment.

2. Social conflict, in which the positive effort for self-realization is accompanied by higher levels of social estrangement. The lesbian physical educator who has a large network of lesbian support persons outside of school but feels a need to maintain a heterosexual cover at school and to distance herself personally from professional colleagues experiences social conflict.

3. Self-alienation, when the individual experiences high proportions of both self- and social estrangement. The lesbian physical educator who conceals her sexual orientation but whose attempts to pass as heterosexual are unsuccessful experiences self-alienation.

4. Self-conflict, where the search for social realization incidentally creates conflict through self-estrangement. The lesbian physical educator who discloses her sexual orientation only to a few selected individuals to protect her heterosexual cover (and resulting social acceptance) at school experiences self-conflict.

The kinds of understandings gained from applying this identity model are similar to yet differ from those understandings acquired from using a deviancy framework. Both frameworks are grounded in a social constructionist perspective, but the central focus of each differs. The deviancy model is primarily used to understand the social processes by which homosexuals are labeled deviant, whereas the identity model is concerned with understanding how gay men and lesbians experience and respond to that labeling. Although each can be used to explore the techniques used by gay men and lesbians to manage their stigmatized identity, the identity model avoids the negative labeling (i.e., deviant) of gay men and lesbians.

### Selecting the Oppression Model

The deviancy, identity, and oppression models could all be used to understand the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers. The understanding one gains of those experiences will differ, however, depending upon which framework is used. My decision to use the oppression model centers around the following issues.

#### 1. Who names whose experience?

The deviancy model identifies two social groups: the deviants and the non-deviants. Social group membership is determined by what is socially and culturally defined as "normal." Deviants do not identify themselves as deviants. Rather, the deviant label is attached to them by non-deviants, and the process of labeling involves value judgements about what is considered normal and what is not. Within the deviancy model, therefore, non-deviants are the namers of deviants' experience.

Within both the identity and oppression models, gay men and lesbians name their own experience, and these frameworks avoid value judgements made regarding what is "normal" and "abnormal." Research using the oppression model, however, assumes a political context which is missing from the identity model. To describe the experience of lesbian physical education teachers as an oppressed minority changes the perspective from which to view their experience.

## 2. Who or what is defined as the problem?

Within the deviancy model, the deviants and their deviant behavior are identified as the problem. Within the oppression model, the societal processes by which oppression operates and the resulting conditions of oppression are defined as the problem.

Oppression is, therefore, viewed from the context of individual, institutional, and socio-cultural factors. In terms of lesbian physical education teachers, gender socialization, heterosexism (the form of oppression naming heterosexuals as dominants and lesbians and gay men as subordinates), and homophobia are identified as the problem.

## 3. What differentiation is made between the gay male and lesbian experience?

Gay men and lesbians share similar experiences in a society that stigmatizes homosexuality; yet gender socialization ensures a difference in how they experience that stigmatization. The deviancy and identity models do not readily account for these differences whereas the oppression model does. Incorporating a feminist perspective into the oppression model further delineates the lesbian experience from the gay male experience. This differentiation is crucial in understanding the experience of lesbians within the traditionally male domain of sport.

## 4. What is the social impact of research that uses the deviancy, identity, or oppression models?

The positivist paradigm insists on "objectivity" in scholarly research. Statistical and methodological techniques are used to eliminate or control for subjective factors, such as the value perspective of the researcher. Naturalistic or qualitative paradigms, however, differ in perspective and are based on the assumption that scholarly research is not a value neutral endeavor. As Popkewitz (1981) stated, "Far from being neutral, social science is an act of social affiliation and commitment" (p. 3). Any product of research reflects the values, opinions, and theoretical perspective of the researcher. Research based upon the deviancy, identity, or oppression models is no exception.

When applied to understanding the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers, the deviancy model supports and perpetuates the labeling of lesbians as deviants. Some might argue that social researchers using the deviancy model to understand deviancy with respect to lesbians and gay men are, themselves, neutral about homosexuality and are primarily interested in studying the processes by which deviancy is defined and operationalized. The shift from defining deviancy as inherent and pathological to defining it as socially prescribed supports this perspective. However, studying lesbians and gay men as deviants places them in the same category as other groups labeled as deviant, such as drug addicts, convicts, or rapists. Intended or not, a kind of "guilt by association" occurs, and with it comes all the negative connotations the deviant label carries.

Choosing the oppression model as a conceptual frame in describing the experience of lesbian physical education teachers represents a value perspective. This type of research falls into Popkewitz's (1981) category of critical science. Critical science provides researchers with a way to understand and to respond to changes in Western society and the social problems associated with those changes.

A critical social science is, at root, normative and substantive as well as formal. It is concerned with uncovering the ideological underpinning of existing social relations, to enable man's [sic] consciousness of "self" as a social being to be extended and his participation in social affairs to be realized in an authentic way...The function of critical theory is to understand the relations among value, interest, and action and, to paraphrase Marx, to change the world, not to describe it. (Popkewitz, 1981, p. 15)

The identity model succeeds in framing the experiences of gays and lesbians within a socio-cultural context without assigning negative labels. Yet by definition, it cannot be considered a form of critical science since its primary purpose is to simply describe the experiences of gays and lesbians from a socio-psychological perspective. Using that information to change the political context of their experience is not seen as a concomitant goal.

The stated purpose of this study is to describe, from their perspectives, the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers. Identifying this group as an oppressed minority and using the oppression model as a conceptual perspective from which to make sense of their experiences reflects an underlying goal of this study: to be a catalyst for dialogue and change.

#### Relevance of the Deviancy and Identity Models to this Study

Although not chosen as the primary conceptual framework, both the deviancy and identity models provide useful information for this study. For example, examining the strategies employed by lesbians to manage their stigmatized or so-called deviant identity is particularly relevant to research about lesbian teachers working in the public schools. Also, the identity model poses the homosexual dilemma: self-realization versus social realization (Weigert, et al., 1986); the identity-integration matrix (presented earlier) highlights the consonance and dissonance experienced by lesbians in relation to their occupational identity. Given their relevance, concepts from both the deviance and identity models will be used in the data analysis.

In summary, the oppression model in contrast to the deviancy and identity models provides a different way to understand the experiences of lesbian physical educators. Within the oppression framework, experience is understood (a) from the perspective of the individual, (b) in the context of a larger social analysis, and (c) with the intent of encouraging social change. The value perspective assumed by the researcher is reflected in this goal of understanding the phenomena of social oppression.

#### Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the literature relevant to four areas: (a) political and legal campaigns against gay and lesbian teachers, (b) case law review involving homosexual teachers, (c) research studies about gay and lesbian teachers, and (d) research related to lesbians in sport and physical education. In addition, feminism and oppression theory were presented as the basis for this study's conceptual framework.

The specific feminist perspectives to be used for examining the experience of lesbian physical education teachers were presented. Oppression theory was reviewed and contrasted to deviancy and identity theories.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### Introduction

To describe the experiences of lesbian p.e. teachers and to understand the meaning they make of their experiences, a phenomenological interviewing technique was used. Taken from the work of Schuman (1982), the specific interviewing format employed was formally developed by Seidman, Sullivan, and Schatzkamer (1983) and consisted of three, in-depth open ended interviews. The goal in these interviews was to have the participants reconstruct their experience and reflect on its meaning. An underlying assumption of this approach is that the meaning people make of their experience is "crucial to the way they carry out their work" (Seidman, et al., 1983, p. 638). One focus question guided each 90 minute interview. The three interviews were generally conducted over a two to three week period.

The focus question for the first interview was, "How did you come to your present work?" In this interview the participant was asked to provide a historical context for describing her experience. Information about growing up as well as about becoming a lesbian and a physical education teacher provided the contextual background for this study.

The participant was asked in the second interview to recreate the concrete details of her day-to-day experience. In other words, what is it like to be a lesbian physical education teacher? The participants described their present lives in and out of the school context as related to their identities as lesbian physical education teachers.

The focus question for the final interview was, "What does your work mean to you?" The purpose of this interview was to have participants reflect on the meaning of their experience. In this study, the focus was on how the participant made sense of her experience as a lesbian physical education teacher.

## Participants

The participants in this study were public school physical education teachers who identified themselves as lesbians. Twelve elementary and secondary teachers were interviewed. In selecting participants, I was interested in obtaining as diverse a group as possible. I believed that a diverse group would show more powerfully the commonalities as well as the differences in lesbian physical educators' experiences.

The 12 participants in this study ranged in age from 25 to 50 years old. Five were in their 20s, four in their 30s, two in their 40s, and one in her 50s. Eleven were white, and one was black. The majority of the participants identified themselves as coming from middle class backgrounds; of the others, two were from upper middle class, one from lower middle class, and one from working class backgrounds. (Their parents' occupational status was the criterion used to determine their class background.) Four of the participants identified themselves as catholic, and the rest were protestant.

Seven of the teachers were teaching in suburban schools, while three taught in rural schools and two worked in urban settings. Five teachers taught at the high school level, and three taught at junior high or middle schools. One teacher taught physical education to grades K-8, and another taught grades K-12. One teacher exclusively taught adapted physical education for a large school system. Another participant served as the athletic trainer for a high school in addition to her regular teaching duties. Five of the participants were currently coaching a girls' athletic team, and all but two had coached at some point during their tenure as teachers.

## Access and Protecting Anonymity

Access to participants was gained in two ways: (a) via personal contacts of the researcher, and (b) from participants themselves, a technique called snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Any person or participant who suggested a teacher to be interviewed was asked to make the initial contact with the potential participant. If the

potential participant agreed to discuss the possibility of being interviewed, I then contacted her directly by phone.

The initial phone contact was followed by a face-to-face meeting with the potential participant to explain the interview process in more depth and to present the consent form. This meeting was important for three reasons. First, it allowed me to introduce myself and the study. As part of my introduction, I chose to identify myself as a lesbian who had taught physical education in the public schools. Second, this meeting was used to explain the consent form in detail. Finally, this meeting provided each participant with an opportunity to judge first hand their initial trust level for me as the researcher.

Before the first interview, the participants signed a consent form which outlined the general purpose of this study, their rights as participants, the uses of the materials gained from the interviews, and steps taken to protect anonymity (see Appendix A). At any time during the interview process, a participant had the right to withdraw from the study. In addition, participants could have withdrawn their consent to have excerpts from their interviews used in any printed materials or oral presentations if the researcher was notified within two weeks after the final interview. None of the 12 participants exercised either of these rights.

In a study of this nature, protecting the anonymity of participants was an important priority. The steps taken to protect anonymity were outlined in the consent form and reviewed during the initial meeting. To clarify the risk assumed by the participant, I made a clear distinction during this meeting between "protecting" and "guaranteeing" anonymity. The specific steps taken to protect their anonymity included:

1. No one living or teaching within the immediate area of the University of Massachusetts was interviewed.
2. The location of the interviews was a safe place designated by the participant (usually the participant's home).
3. No more than one teacher from each school was interviewed.

4. With the exception of my dissertation chairperson, I did not discuss or reveal any identifying particulars about the participants, such as names or teaching locations. This exception was made, because in weekly debriefing meetings with my chairperson, I found it necessary at times to reveal some particulars about the participants. However, the possibility of this type of disclosure was made clear to the participants before the interviews began.

5. Each interview was audio-taped, and the transcriptions of the tapes was completed by me.

6. Pseudonyms are used in the transcripts for all identifying particulars.

7. All consent forms and audio-tapes are kept in a safety deposit box. An agreement was made to return the tapes to the participants or to destroy them once the dissertation is completed and accepted.

The care taken in gaining access to participants, the use of a detailed consent form, and the explanation of steps taken to protect anonymity each contributed to establishing trust in the interview process. These three measures were also used to establish equity in the participant/researcher relationship. It is critical to address the concept of equity in research that involves considerable risk for the participants. In many research studies, the balance of power between researchers and their "subjects," as they are traditionally called, heavily favors the researchers. As subjects, individuals may lose their personal identity, and the impact of the research process on them is not addressed or is considered outside the realm of the researcher's responsibility.

The underlying guideline used to work for equity in this study was to treat each participant with dignity, respect, and care. As a researcher, (a) I acknowledged the risk they were assuming by being interviewed, (b) I informed them about the interview process as much as possible in both the initial meeting and the consent form, (c) I outlined the steps taken to protect anonymity, and (d) in this document, I am presenting the interview material in their own words. As the researcher, I select the passages from

the transcripts to be shared, and therefore, it is my responsibility to present the interview material in a way that is fair to the participant and to the context of the three interviews. By using the actual words of the participants, I reduce the risk of their stories being misinterpreted and misrepresented. The bottom line was to treat them as participants, that is, active, willing players in a process, rather than as subjects, or passive subordinates at the mercy of the researcher.

#### Data Management and Analysis Steps

Each of the three 90-minute interviews conducted with each participant was audiotaped, and complete transcripts were entered directly onto computer disks. Multiple copies of the transcripts were made with one copy stored on a separate disk for safekeeping and another used as a working copy. Repetitions and accidents of speech along with sections that might misrepresent the participant's meaning if taken out of context were deleted from the original transcript. Sections that were clearly extraneous to the focus of the research were also deleted. The purpose of data reduction was to make the transcripts readable and manageable. Once the original transcript had been reduced, two printed copies were made. One working copy was used for making further reductions and for analysis, and the other remained intact for contextual reference.

The working copies of four participants' transcripts were initially coded using two categories suggested by Whyte (1984): (a) actors and their relationships, and (b) events and salient topics. The objective was to organize the data with respect to "who did what with whom, when, and where" (p. 119). From these two broad categories, numerous subcategories emerged. From these subcategories, those that related specifically to the research question were used as a guide for further reduction of the initial working copies. Excerpts from the second working documents of the participants' transcripts were then coded by these subcategories. A form was devised for each of the three interview transcripts to index the coded excerpts (see Appendix B). This method was used on only four participants' transcripts. The remaining eight participants'

transcripts (already in a working copy form) were first reduced to a second working copy, subsequently coded by the original subcategories and then indexed. Subcategories were added to and refined as the data analysis progressed. This abbreviated coding process was used to streamline data management. The major data management and analysis steps are documented in Appendix C.

### Profiles and Themes

The interview data was analyzed with two purposes: one, to present profiles of selected participants, and two, to present themes of experience among the participant group. Profiles emphasize the contextually bound uniqueness of each participant's story while common themes reveal the junctures of their shared experience. The underlying purpose of the data analysis was not to make generalizations about the experience of lesbian physical education teachers. Rather, the goal was to present profiles and themes (in the actual words of the participants) so readers can make connections between their own experience and that of the participants. Using the actual words of the participants instead of paraphrasing communicates more directly the meaning they made of their experience.

### Profiles

The individual profile represents a self-contained, in-their-own-words narrative detailing each participant's experience as a lesbian physical education teacher and the meaning she made of her experience. A profile is more than an expanded anecdote. "People's stories--their reconstruction of factors in their life, their bringing order to events, characters and themes--convey knowledge and provide a path to understanding that is grounded in the concrete details of experience" (Seidman, et al., 1983, p. 665). Presenting data in profile form is especially critical at this time because of the silence and denial that surrounds lesbians in physical education. These profiles represent voices that have not previously been heard.

Seidman, et al. (1983) suggested four criteria for selecting participant interviews to be profiled: (a) comprehensiveness of the material indexed in each of the three interviews, (b) level of concrete reconstruction of the participant's experience, (c) issues of potential vulnerability for the participants, and (d) relationship to the total interview series that a profile could convey (p. 665). In this study, issues of potential vulnerability for the participants are especially important to address. A key concern was presenting enough "thick" contextual description to make a profile meaningful and transferable without jeopardizing the anonymity of the participant. If a participant's stories could easily be traced back to her, these stories were not included in the profile. Judgements about vulnerability were made with the assistance of the dissertation chairperson.

### Themes

Lesbian physical educators who work in the public schools share common experiences by virtue of living and working in a heterosexually-oriented society. The intent of identifying themes of experience is not to make generalizations about lesbian physical educators; rather, the commonalities of their experience can be used to make a broader social analysis. For example, the participants' shared experiences as lesbian physical educators illustrate their position as an oppressed minority. The themes that emerged from the data are framed in the context of oppression theory. As with individual profiles, using the participants' own words in presenting common themes best conveys the participants' meanings and establishes the credibility of the themes identified.

Although each interview focused on a predetermined question, the participant directed the interview by sharing experiences and stories she felt were relevant to the interview focus. Consequently, each participant was not asked the same questions and did not share the same information. To have asked each participant to respond to a set list of questions would have violated the design and integrity of the interview method.

My primary focus for each series of interviews was to understand the meaning each participant made of her experience. During the interview I avoided asking a participant to compare her experience with another participant's experience. For example, I did not ask participants #10, 11, and 12 to react to comments made by participants #1, 2, and 3. I intuitively became aware of emerging themes as more interviews were completed, and to some degree, this awareness may have influenced the nature of later interviews. However, I delayed the formal analysis until all interviews were completed to preserve the main objective of the interview process.

Trends or patterns among the participants must be understood in the context of the methodology used. For instance, every participant did not share what they would do if confronted by an administrator about being a lesbian. Therefore, to propose a theory about how this group of lesbian physical educators would react in that situation would be inappropriate. At the same time, relevant information was revealed by those who spoke on this topic, and this information is included in Chapter V. As a general guideline, a topic was considered relevant if it was addressed by at least half of the 12 participants.

#### Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

All researchers are faced with a dilemma in convincing readers of what Lincoln and Guba (1985) called the "trustworthiness" of their research. The criteria traditionally used to judge the trustworthiness of research originate from quantitatively oriented research paradigms. Since the theoretical assumptions underlying qualitative research differ from those underlying quantitative research, assessing the internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity of a qualitative study are not appropriate. As Lincoln and Guba proposed, however, criteria that are appropriate for assessing qualitative research should be used. Consequently, Lincoln and Guba have introduced credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as alternatives to criteria traditionally used in judging the trustworthiness of quantitative research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested two responsibilities of the researcher for assessing the credibility of the researcher's findings: (a) to carry out the study in a way that enhances the probability of the findings being accepted as credible, and (b) to demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having the human data sources approve them (p. 296). Lincoln and Guba listed several strategies to establish credibility, and the nature of phenomenological interviewing incorporates many of them. Ones used in this study were prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, and member checks.

1. Prolonged engagement: Interviewing participants for 90 minutes on three separate occasions protected against distortion resulting from the novelty of being interviewed. Over the two to three week span during which the interviews were conducted, both the participant and the interviewer had time to become comfortable with the interview process, to adjust to each other, and to develop a trusting relationship.

2. Persistent observation: The purpose of persistent observation is "to identify those characteristics and elements of the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). One focus question guided each 90 minute interview, and this design provided the participant and myself with sufficient time to cover in detail topics that emerged. In addition, topics could be revisited in the second or third interview to gain more detail.

3. Peer debriefing: Transcripts and tapes from the first two participants' interviews were analyzed by the dissertation chairperson with respect to the methodological design of the interviews and interviewing technique. In addition, weekly meetings with the chairperson were used, in part, as a place for me to discharge any personal reactions or feelings about the interview process and to test working hypotheses that were forming. Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) cautioned against using dissertation committee members to fill the role of peer debriefer, I believe in this

instance, given the sensitive nature of the topic and my concern for protecting anonymity, the committee chairperson was an appropriate choice.

4. Member checks: Informal member checks were achieved in this study in three ways. First, the length of each interview (90 minutes) and the time span between interviews (generally one to two weeks) provided both the researcher and the participant with opportunities to verify perceptions or understandings. Second, at the beginning of each interview I asked the participant to share any reactions or additional comments regarding the previous interview. Third, in both the presentation of profiles and common themes, the participants' words are used as a means to credibly represent their meaning.

Transferability in qualitative research parallels the concept of generalizability in quantitative research. Although qualitative researchers down play the notion of generalizability of findings as intended in quantitative studies and reject the existence of one objective, law-like reality, they do believe that under certain conditions, the transferability of findings to other contexts is possible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that these conditions exist if the researcher has engaged in theoretical or purposeful sampling (which is intended to maximize the range of information gathered) and has provided a "thick" description of the context.

1. Purposeful sampling: For this study, I intentionally sought a diverse group of lesbian physical educators to interview. Given the sensitive nature of this research and the risks involved in participating, many individuals who would have added more diversity chose not to be interviewed. Yet the 12 lesbian physical education teachers interviewed represented women of various ages, races, and social class backgrounds who taught in rural, urban, and suburban schools.

2. Thick descriptions: The methodological design of the interviews ensured that the personal context of each teacher was detailed. For example, the intent of the first two interviews was to describe the personal and professional contexts for understanding

their experience. The data gathered is presented in two ways: profiles of selected individual teachers and descriptions of common themes among the teachers. The individual profiles and common themes are presented in a way that provides a "thick" contextual backdrop.

The emergent nature of qualitative research designs makes the replication of any study extremely difficult if not impossible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that in qualitative research the dependability of results should be established not reliability. To establish dependability, the qualitative researcher "seeks means for taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change" (p. 299). The three means they suggested researchers employ are use of overlap methods (a kind of triangulation process), stepwise replication (the use of multiple research teams), and inquiry or process audits.

1. Overlap methods and stepwise replication: These two strategies were not incorporated into this study. Since the primary objective of phenomenological interviewing is to understand the meaning participants make of their experience and not to verify their statements against field observations or document analysis, this kind of triangulation was not appropriate for this study. With respect to stepwise replication, doing research within the framework of a dissertation made the use of more than one researcher impractical. One role of the dissertation chairperson, however, was to oversee and cross-check my analysis of the interview data.

2. Inquiry audit: To some degree, the design of this study is replicable, but given the interactive nature of interviewing, different researchers might arrive at different data or interpret the same data differently. Therefore, to establish dependability I have documented each step of the research process, including methodological decisions made during data collection and analysis (see Appendix C).

Confirmability in qualitative research is comparable to objectivity in quantitative research. The focus, however, shifts from the investigator to the data; the qualitative

researcher's concern is whether or not the data are confirmable. In other words, recognizing that qualitative research is not value-free and that the qualitative researcher plays an interactive role rather than a neutral role, can the product--the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations--be attested to and supported? Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested establishing confirmability by means of the confirmability audit. Similar to the inquiry audit, the confirmability audit traces the data collection and analysis steps. Each finding should be traceable from the analysis back to the raw data. As Lincoln and Guba proposed, the "bottom line" of any analysis must be supported by the data.

The dissertation proposal served as a major preliminary source of documentation for the confirmability audit. This detailed proposal contained a statement of the problem, a literature review, a methodology preview, and an initial plan for managing, analyzing, and presenting data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) listed other materials to use in documenting the audit trail, and those that were used in this study are in parentheses: raw data (complete transcripts), data reduction and analysis products (working transcripts), data reconstruction and synthesis products (selected profiles and common themes), process notes (written log), materials relating to intentions and depositions (consent form), and instrument development information (written log). The committee chairperson served as an auditor to review the the audit trail and to assess confirmability.

By using the procedures which contribute to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the trustworthiness of this study has been supported. The next section represents yet another way of demonstrating trustworthiness. I have addressed some of the epistemological issues underlying this method of research. In addition, I have outlined my assumptions about doing research and delineated the personal assumptions and perspectives I, as a researcher, brought to this study.

## Epistemological Issues and Assumptions

While interviewing provides the best access to understanding a participant's lived experience, researcher interpretation is still present, as it is in every form of research. Qualitative researchers take on a subject/subject relationship to what is being investigated (Smith, 1983). Researchers are an integral part of the research process, not detached observers. By the act of entering a situation, researchers become part of that situation and influence what happens there.

Interviewing, like all forms of qualitative research, is an interactive process between researchers and participants. Researchers always interpret what they see in relation to how they view the world. Attempts are made to limit and acknowledge researcher bias in interpreting data, but researchers can never divorce themselves from the process of understanding a particular situation. The questions researchers ask, the manner in which they ask them, and the dynamics present between the interviewer and the person being interviewed all affect what happens in an interview. In addition, how researchers present interview data reflects the active role researchers play in an interview.

To deny this contributory role is to hide behind the illusion of objectivity. As Schuman (1982) stated, "In an empirical work that involves human beings, the whole notion of objectivity is important for this reason: It is something the researcher should never claim" (p. 4). The clearer researchers can be about their own assumptions about reality, the better the reader will be able to understand the data presented. The following sections present: (a) my assumptions about defining reality, and (b) my assumptions about the experience of lesbian physical educators.

### Assumptions About Defining Reality

My assumptions about defining reality correspond to those underlying qualitative research. Reality is contextually bound, changing and flowing with each actor's life experiences. No single set of "truths" exist which explain all human behavior.

The meaning one makes of experience is intricately bound to what Schutz (1967) called one's "living present." To understand one's "living present," a researcher must look beyond the present and gain "a certain amount of knowledge of the actor's past and future" (Schutz, 1967, p. 27). To capture this is to capture what Weber (1947) labeled motivational understanding.

The purpose of obtaining knowledge of an actor's past, present, and future is not to explain or give reasons for certain behaviors, (i.e., "I did this because of this.") Rather, the purpose is to understand human behavior in relation to an actor's total life. By doing this the researcher avoids interpreting life experiences as a series of discrete, unrelated acts. The philosopher William James (1909) wrote, "We live forward, we understand backward; to understand life by concepts is to arrest its movement, cutting it up into bits as if with scissors" (p. 109).

Understanding human behavior is different from explaining it. Many philosophers have named this difference, and their poetic insight into understanding human behavior serves as a foundation for qualitative research and my own assumptions about defining reality. Their words give meaning to this process of examining one's "living present."

In the pulse of inner life immediately present now in each of us is a little past, a little future, a little awareness of our own body, of each other's persons, of these sublimities we are trying to talk about, of earth's geography and the direction of history of truth, and error, of good and bad, and of who knows how much more?  
(James, 1909, p. 286)

For James, it is the "pulse of inner life" that one seeks to capture with motivational understanding. For the French philosopher Sartre (1963), it is the spirals of life that one contemplates.

This surpassing is not an instantaneous movement, it is a long work; each moment of this work is at once the surpassing and, to the extent that it is posited for itself, the pure and simple subsistence of these deviations at a given level of integration. For this reason a life develops in spirals; it passes again and again by the same points but at different levels of integration and complexity. (p. 106)

Finally, for Bergson (1946) the spirals of life play like a melody.

It is, we were saying, indivisible and indestructible continuity of a melody where the past enters into the present and forms with it an undivided whole which remains undivided and even indivisible in spite of what is added at every instant, or rather, thanks to what is added. (p. 71)

I am interested in understanding the experience of lesbian physical education teachers. To understand the meaning they make of that experience I must grasp what cannot be seen in an instant and search for meaning in the pulse, spiral, or melody of life. This is the essence of qualitative research and represents the distinctive view of the world I, as a qualitative researcher, assume in order to understand the social context of human behavior and experience.

#### Assumptions About the Experience of Lesbian Physical Education Teachers

My own life experiences or "living present" influence how I see the world and how I "do" research. I entered into this study with certain assumptions about the experience of lesbian physical education teachers.

1. Female physical education teachers (especially those who are not married) are stereotyped as being lesbians.
2. Lesbian physical education teachers are forced to keep secret their sexual orientation at work. They are not open with colleagues about their personal life.
3. Many lesbian physical education teachers try to pass as heterosexual or asexual at work. They live in two worlds, employing one set of interpersonal behaviors appropriate for school and another set appropriate for home.
4. There is a large number of lesbians in the field of physical education, but not all unmarried physical education teachers are lesbians.
5. Lesbian physical education teachers do not talk with each other about being lesbian. There is a unspoken knowledge of each other's sexual orientation but little sharing about their experiences as lesbians takes place.

6. Being a lesbian affects a physical education teacher's sense of self. On a personal level, being a lesbian affects her life choices. On a professional level, being a lesbian affects how she does her job.

These assumptions (recorded before conducting any interviews) are based primarily on my experience as a lesbian in physical education. Both as a graduate student and as a professional, I came face-to-face with the silence and denial surrounding the lesbian presence in physical education and sport. I completed my undergraduate work in women studies at a liberal, non-traditional institution in New England. I saw pursuing a career in physical education as a way to combine my commitment to feminism with my love of physical activity. This was the Title IX era of the late 1970s, and support of girls and women's participation in sport was gaining strength and momentum. My undergraduate experience, however, contrasted sharply with my induction into physical education. I found the overall context of physical education and sport to be relatively conservative and full of mixed messages for girls and women. On the one hand, females were being strongly encouraged to be proud of their athletic abilities, but on the other, we were subtly and blatantly being reminded not to relinquish our so-called feminine qualities. As a graduate student in physical education, I encountered numerous lesbians--undergraduate and graduate students as well as professors--who were very closeted about their sexual orientation yet who socialized within cliques of other "gay" women. Within these cliques, being gay was assumed but not discussed. On the rare occasions on which being a lesbian was discussed, the term "gay" was preferred over the more political label "lesbian."

As a public school teacher, I chose not to disclose my sexual orientation to colleagues or to students within my school. Although I had promised myself not to deny my sexual orientation if confronted by an administrator, I was not prepared as new professional to be public about my lesbianism. From my perspective, the consequences appeared to outweigh the benefits, and for two years as a public school teacher, I led a double life.

The strain and contradictions associated with those two years, however, were primary factors in my decision to leave public school teaching and to return to graduate school. As a lesbian physical education teacher, I had not survived in the public schools. Consequently, I chose this dissertation topic to study those who were surviving.

My purpose in presenting these assumptions is not to go about confirming or unconfirming them. Rather, my intent is to inform the reader of experiences, perspectives, and assumptions that I brought to this study.

#### Following Chapters

Chapter IV presents the profiles of eight participants. These profiles focus on the day-to-day realities of being a lesbian physical educator and the meaning the participants made of their experiences. Chapter V examines the major themes of experience that emerged from all the interview data. A conceptual model of the participants' meaning-making process is also outlined. The final chapter reviews the major observations that can be made about the experience of lesbian physical educators who work in the public schools. The participants' experiences are then discussed in the overall context of feminism and oppression theory, and this chapter concludes with some final reflections.

## CHAPTER IV

### SELECTED PROFILES

This chapter presents the profiles of eight participants. The participants' stories focus on the day-to-day realities of lesbian physical educators and on the meaning each participant made of her experience. These 8 participants were selected to be profiled from the group of 12 participants for two reasons. First, the material from their interviews met the criteria suggested by Seidman, et al. (1983) for participant profile selection (see Chapter III), and two, the profiles of these eight participants demonstrate the uniqueness of their experiences and their diversity as a group. The underlying goal of presenting profiles is to present contextually rich descriptions so readers can make connections between their own experiences and that of the participants.

The eight profiles are ordered by the grade levels taught by the participants. Toni King teaches grades K-8 while Susan Carlson and Mona Taylor teach at the junior high and middle school levels, respectively. Pam Luciano and Jody Porter teach grades 7-12, and Caren Williams, Jackie Thompson, and Alice Baker teach at the high school level. These eight participants teach in rural, suburban, and urban schools, and they range in age from 24 to 50 years old.

Themes common to all 12 participants will be discussed in Chapter V. Many of these themes are reflected in the eight profiles presented.

#### Toni King

Toni is 34 years old, white, and teaches in an urban school, grades K-8. She was 16 years old when she had her first lesbian relationship.

When I first started teaching, my assignment was to teach strictly primary grades, and I traveled to two different schools, plus I spent one day teaching swimming. Mark and Maggie were the other two phys. ed. teachers there, who I, to this day, have

maintained probably one of the best friendships of anybody in the whole school system. I can remember Maggie saying when I first came, "Oh, God, what a jock." But it turned out that we had a very close working relationship. And it was great, but I maintained my facade, my cover.

They didn't know anything about me. I'm sure they formulated their own opinion. By the look of me, I'm pretty physically fit, and I'm not prim and proper. I'm a blue jeans, sweat shirt kind of person, and that's just me. And I'm not going to change that to put up a front at school. That doesn't mean that I'm not going to be neat and take care of myself, but I'm not going to come in a kilt and nice little pointed sneakers and fit the role. So, I don't know what kind of opinion they formulated of me. Maggie wasn't certain whether she was going to get along with me, because I think she did classify me as "Joe Jock." I don't know if "Joe Jock" means "Joe Jock Gay," or whether it was just "Joe Jock" coming from [the university].

Maggie's brother is gay. And Maggie and I have spent some time, not necessarily dwelling on the issue or talking about her brother, but Maggie's pretty liberal in her thinking. I have never to this day ever sat down and said to Maggie that I am gay, but I think there's probably no doubt in her mind that I am.

I remember Maggie saying something once to Mark something about Sam who was one of the special ed teachers who is also gay. I thought Mark was going to hit the ceiling. Mark was like, "Oh, Jesus Christ, what are you talking about? Oh, Maggie, come on. He can't be a fag." The way that he reacted in that situation almost makes me believe that probably to this day, I don't know what his feelings are [to] why I'm not married, but I think Mark would probably be the first to stand up with his fists clenched ready to fight anybody that said that I was gay.

I think having a closeness to Mark that there was no way that he would even associate myself [with being gay]. But I was not about to stand up and take a stand and say, "Well,

what's wrong with it? Why are you getting so bent out of shape, Mark?" I just kind of sat back and laughed to myself, thinking, "If they only knew."

There was always a fear that somebody would really pursue what I did [on the weekends]. I would say I got together with friends. It was always friends. It was always plural. "I got together with friends." "I went out to a bar," and God forbid anybody would ever question what bar I went to. I'd have a couple of names [of straight bars] I'd pull out of my pocket.

I remember one incident [with] Bill Keene [my boss], who was almost like my second father. He's just a great guy. I used to drive an old [car], and I remember one morning it was freezing, in the middle of winter, [and] it wouldn't start. I had called him, and he said, "Well, just hang tight. Tom Perry and I will come out and jump start your car." So, it's like, oh, God, here comes my boss, coming to my living situation. I'm trying to think what roommates are going to be home. You immediately start checking the walls and making sure that every little bit of evidence can be taken away just in case. So, he shows up, and I'm there. My roommate at that time who was living there, Betsy, was there. And it was really funny. She had given Sylvia, [my other roommate], and I, two goldfish. They were just in these little tiny bowls, and on the bowl she had written a little thing on one of those label stickers and stuck them on the outside. Both of them made reference to being gay. "Hi, my name is Matilda. I'm a gay fish, and I'm going to be your friend." It was funny at the time when we got it, and of course, little Matilda got neglected in the search of trying to clean up the house. I remember Tom came in to the living room. And I just saw Tom kind of feeling uncomfortable first of all, being in somebody else's house. He looks over, walks over to see the fish. And I'm like, oh, Christ, here we go. I'm watching his reaction. Bill is talking a mile a minute and here's Tom with his arms folded, looking at these goldfish, reading what is it says. And I'm thinking, oh, my cover's blown now.

[I was] really scared, thinking, oh, this is it. It's all over. My mind was just going 90 miles an hour, and I just had myself being called into Bill's office and on the ropes and fired because of these stupid goldfish that were sitting at my house. But nothing ever came of it, so it just kind of blew over, and that was it.

There was no change in the way that he talked or dealt with me on a professional or a social level. Not that there was really that much in the beginning, but that was one time that I can remember that I was really like, oh, God, here we are, you know, nervous times. They know [I'm gay].

I would go to school, and it was kind of [a] separate situation. You would leave that environment of a bunch of gay women trying to frantically get ready for work and almost like once you got in your car, you were a different person. You were by yourself, you were going to an environment that was very much different from what you had just left in your living situation. And I played the role. I was good. From the moment I walked in, I was professional. I was a good teacher. I stood my ground. I felt strongly for what I stood for as far as my professional philosophies. But, I didn't let my personal life affect my teaching that much.

We did have a group of teachers at the [school], women that used to get together. For some reason, I was included. And that's another situation [where] I felt uncomfortable. They were all either married or living with a man or had been married and have a ton of kids, or engaged and have their wedding date planned, etc., etc. And here was Toni in this whole group.

It was just kind of a mutual group of people through friendship in school that would get together on a monthly or bimonthly basis to go out and have dinner. I enjoyed going out with this group, but I felt uncomfortable for several reasons. One being my sexual preference being gay. I always felt uncomfortable, not that I thought everybody was looking at me and saying this and that. Attire--I was always digging deep to try to find something. You could count on one hand the number of skirts and dresses that are

hanging up in my closet. I always knew that they would always be kind of dressed up, depending on where we were going, so the attire was always an issue. And just social background. I'm coming from just a very middle class environment in [the mid-west] where my mom's menu, you knew it by heart, and we didn't spend a lot of time or money going out to eat. I'd go into these Mandarin restaurants with them, and I couldn't even read the menu, so I'd always sit next to Maggie, 'cause Maggie would kind of take me under her wing. I enjoyed going out, but there was always a barrier that I had to cross. One of those three things. And I was always hoping that nobody ever really talked to me and said, "Well, are you dating anybody?" And there was never really a time that anybody would delve too deeply into my background. I was always thankful for that, but I could never figure out whether it was really because maybe deep down inside they knew.

I [assistant] coached for quite a few years, and eventually I took over the head coaching position for a couple of years. There was this one kid, Mary Ellen. I knew that she knew where I was every moment of every practice. I would kid around with Mary Ellen, and I can say that there was a little special place in my heart that I felt for her, but I tried to keep it in perspective. And then there was another kid my second year as head coach who was a senior. The same kind of thing [happened]. Jamie would approach me. She had a lot of problems at home. Her father was an alcoholic, and she would [say], "Miss King, can I talk to you?" And I just spent hour on hour, sitting and talking to Jamie and helping her through a lot of situations even just with talking to her. And once again [I] had that same kind of feeling, that closeness, but also keeping my distance.

Jamie got back in contact to me after her senior year, and she spilled her guts to me. She told me she was in love with me, and she had been. She had evidently spent many emotional evenings and days and weeks and months on end not knowing how to deal with this. Keeping it inside, not knowing who to talk to, and so eventually she came back to me. And boy, I'll tell you, I choked on my coffee that day.

I just didn't know what to do. I told her that I was flattered first of all. And I told her that in fact I was gay. She asked me. She knew that she had these feelings and attractions toward different women. She knew that she had that in the past, but not until she really had an association with me did something really come out to the point where she was really feeling something. And she was struggling with what she was feeling. I knew that there was no way I could sit there, looking across the table at this kid and say, no, that I wasn't gay. I couldn't do it. And I didn't want to. I knew that Jamie was having a lot of emotional problems herself, so I knew that I had to be very up front and honest with her. And I was. And I told her, yes, in fact, I was gay and that I had been for a very long time. And that I was flattered by her feelings, but there was just no way [I was interested in a relationship with her].

I have a situation right now going on in school that's very difficult. We have a young gentleman who's in the 7th grade who is really struggling with his sexual identity, not preference, his identity. I think he is a transvestite outside of school. And he is just that short of being one in school. Teachers have seen him after school in the afternoons with pumps, dress, pearls, the whole nine yards strutting around. He hasn't worn a dress to school, but I need to take lessons from him on how to put make-up on. He's let his hair grow, and now he's got his hair kind of in a little bouffant and bobbypins, and it's long, and he styles it. It's interesting watching the kids dealing with him. They're like, "You faggot," when Tim walks by. But the thing is they have gotten used to it, and I think he's functioning in our school. Sometimes I instigate a lot of the humor concerning Tim up in the teacher's room as far as just saying, "Have you seen Tim's outfit today?" I don't know why I do it. It's not that I'm making fun of him, but I feel very sorry for him. I wish I could help him, but I'm probably the last person that he needs to talk to. [In] my dealing with him, I've done a lot of ignoring. Tim has not been prepared for gym with me for months. He's flunking, but I don't pursue it.

I just find it much less of a hassle to ignore and let him sit up in his little world, and do what Tim's doing. And that's really too bad. It presents more of a problem. If I get Tim involved which I have, the kids don't want to be on the same mat with him. They don't want to be near him. They don't want to have to touch him. I feel badly. I'm so professional in other approaches, and I've just kind of closed my eyes and turned my head to this.

If somebody would dwell on Tim and pick on Tim, I would certainly stand up in his behalf. And I have. I have made comments, or I have disciplined. I would never let a situation get out of hand with Tim. But sometimes the "faggot this" and the "faggot that" that you might hear from a corner and not really even be able to pinpoint who said it, I'll let slide.

Bruce [another P.E. teacher] and I taught at the swimming pool together and got very close. We never really sat down and said, "I'm gay and how about you?" But, we just kind of came to that mutual understanding. Like one night he said he was going to one of the very obviously [gay bars]. So from that time on, we'd spend a lot of time talking over the phone or we'd get together. Like I've run a fundraiser and Bruce's run one for two years straight, so we got together to go over the thing one afternoon. He took me to some gay men's bar, and we sat there and had beers and discussed our school work. It was kind of funny sitting there with what was so professional, our school work, and sitting in a gay bar having a beer with him. We've buddied up on a couple of occasions like weddings within the department. Bruce came, and I came. We end up sitting next to each other, and we go to the reception and just had a hell of a good time dancing. And of course, I had kids asking me later, "Miss King, who was that guy that you were with?" And I just kind of laughed and said, "Oh, he's one of the other phys. ed. teachers." "Are you guys going out?" Here's Bruce and I kind of laughing to ourselves. We kind of served each other's purpose for the day. But that's another thing. I know that if I would ever have a time that I really felt like I needed to have the company of a male, I know that I

could call Bruce and say, "Bruce, I have a dinner coming up at school, and how would you feel about going?" I know he would do it. And he could probably do the same thing for me.

For once in my life, I have actually stopped to think about putting these two things that are so important in my life together and trying to make sense of what it means to be gay and to be a phys. ed. teacher on top of that. Being gay in itself is something I don't necessarily know that I have chosen, but nonetheless, I have made a decision as far as pursuing my desires of a partner, that being a female. Just in that, I'm taking a big risk in life. On top of that, being a teacher, where you're supposedly molding the minds of these young students that you're working with and being in the public sector where you're just so constantly in contact with people. It's a people job from the moment you walk in greeting the fellow teachers to the moment at 8:15 when that first class of 4th graders comes down through the doors. There's so much stigma behind the kind of people that are working with kids. And, in that respect, you almost have to be more undercover.

When I leave this house and when I say good-bye to my lover and friend, Vicki, and I move on to my job, I do in fact kind of put on a different facade, a different face. They're interrelated, but they're separate. And they have to be that way. My love of sports, being a kind of a little jock and being a little athlete probably helped lead me to the position I'm in as far as pursuing and going through college and getting my degree in phys. ed. And I don't even know how much that's related to being gay. Not all gay women are good athletes. Not all phys. ed. teachers that aren't gay, that are heterosexual are good athletes, either. But I'm kind of constantly fighting a battle, because I think there's kind of a stigma behind phys. ed. teachers. I don't know what the percentage [is] of women phys. ed. teachers that are actually lesbians, but that's kind of one of those battles that you're constantly fighting.

I certainly don't do anything on a day to day routine that either accentuates that I am gay or that I'm not. I don't walk in with a skirt and a blouse everyday and have this other

image that is quote, "should be an image of a teacher coming to work," but then I don't go to the extremes. I'm not real super jock or mannish in my mannerisms in dealing with the kids. But [the stigma is] always there. There's no doubt about it.

My personal life becomes intertwined with my professional life, and it's almost a necessity. It has to be. If you're going to even relate, if you're trying to get to some rapport with the teachers that you're working with, you're going to have to reveal to them at some point in time things that are important to me. Not that I am publicizing that I am in fact involved with a woman, I certainly wouldn't do that. But I still don't go through these extremes, like situations of denying that a woman is a very important part of my life. I'm not denying that there is somebody purchasing a house with me. So, it's kind of tough. You kind of walk a fine line of how much you want to reveal to these people. And it's funny. Like the kids, they may come in and especially the younger kids, because they're so innocent. I'm Mrs. King, Miss King, Mr. King. A second grader can almost bring me to my knees in my thinking, like, "Miss King, do you have any kids?" And it's like, "Oh, well, no." "Do you have a husband?" Usually my response is, "Not yet," because I guess I always want to just leave them with that little feeling, that possibility. Maybe I have a tendency not to get too over friendly or warm to my students. I always kind of keep this little front up, and sometimes I think the front is in sternness. Not that I am a stern teacher, but I hold that front a little bit to kind of keep everybody at arm's length. So that maybe they don't want to pursue too much my personal life.

[When I respond, "Not yet," it] kind of makes me feel like that there's two sides of me. I don't necessarily want to stand up and start marching around the gym with a pro-gay sign, but in a sense, I don't want to have to lie, but it's just easier to give them that little bit of information that just lends to [them having] reasonable doubt or wondering about where I'm really heading. I'm almost 35 years old. That's another thing. When you're younger and you're still bouncing around your 20s, [being unmarried is] something that you can maybe justify more. Each year that I go back, and I'm still Miss

King, I'm wondering what's it's going to be like when I'm in my 40s or even my 50s. Am I going to be the old maid phys. ed. teacher? I might be.

I just wonder if the generation gap is going to get to such a point that as I get older and the kids that are coming in are getting younger, am I going to get this stigma, "Oh, the phys. ed. teacher, she's an old fart, and she's never been married." I'm hoping that I will be keen enough in my awareness as I am now. Not much gets by me with these kids. But I do feel down the road that I am probably going to get that kind of a title given to me, and maybe it won't be left at that.

Right now, on a day-to-day basis, there's not really an overlapping [of personal and professional], except in me, there's an overlapping in me, but as far as surface people on the outside looking in, there is no overlapping. And if in fact, God forbid, that I would be confronted, I honestly don't know what I would do. It would have to depend on who it was. If it were somebody that I felt comfortable with, like if my immediate boss in the phys. ed. department who is a woman approached me in that way, I may be open minded, but to talk to my administrator at my elementary school who is also a woman, there's kind of a barrier between her and I anyway in our dealings. We're just kind of strictly do our jobs. I probably would deny it with her. It would depend completely on who was asking the question. But even at that, I would be scared to death, because there's such a stigma behind a teacher. You just a need a word here or there, and there could be a whole movement to get rid of somebody, and they probably could get rid of you pretty easily.

If it [were] colleagues in the physical education department that I'm very close to, if I was ever confronted with somebody that I felt comfortable with, I'd probably be pretty open. But then, other people, no. I mean I would probably lie right through my teeth.

Even through the heart aches or the pain or the scareness of what being gay means to not only my profession but my family, that's my decision. I am the person that I have to live with, and I have to do what makes me happy no matter what kind of confrontations or situations are going to arise. There have been many in the past that have made me feel

uncomfortable. There are many I know to come in the future, but I have to stand strong in my beliefs and my feelings. I love the woman that I'm with now, and there's just no way in hell that I can change that, that I want to change that. I could if I wanted to, but I don't want to. A few years ago, I probably couldn't have said that. The battles that I may be foreseeing in the future, they probably frightened me to death, and maybe they even do now, but I'm willing to take that risk now because I know what it's like to experience a woman's love.

[Being gay] means having the strength in your character to be ready for all of the situations that could arise by being gay, but it's also experiencing a feeling, a love, a closeness, a sharing that in my opinion, only a woman can give. And hopefully feeling strong enough in your beliefs that you're willing to stand up and not necessarily publicize a sexual preference, but knowing that I feel strongly enough about the lifestyle that I'm leading that I will stand tall if in fact something arises that I'm going to have to confront. I'm hoping that that won't happen. I'm kind of taking a back seat thinking, lay low and go on a day to day basis and don't make waves. But if push comes to shove, and there has to be a decision made about what's going to happen, I'm going to stand behind what I am, and right now I'm not a physical education teacher that is gay, I am a gay woman who is a physical education teacher. Not many years ago, I probably couldn't have said that. Not that my profession was taking priority over my life, but I think with age, you start to develop a stability. When I really think on all the loves I had in my 20s, if I stayed with somebody for a year or two years, it was a monumental task. Now as I have moved into my 30s, and maybe, hopefully, have never settled enough to the point where I'm boring, but I think my life is settling. I am pursuing the things that make me happy, and right now, the thing that makes me happy is Vicki. And our life together.

I have to be a little bit cautious because of what being gay means in my profession, but then again, I don't feel like I need to get up and wave a banner. But if somebody doesn't do it, when is it going to get done so that the equal rights are there for all people?

I wish that society would allow things to open up more, but I am not at the present time or probably in the future or even in my lifetime willing to take that risk right now to help expedite things.

I have a lot of trouble with [the word lesbian]. And I really honestly don't know why. To use the word gay is so much easier for me. But sometimes when I think about being a lesbian, I kind of visualize, this is awful, so I shouldn't say it, but I kind of visualize these bull dykes marching [around] with their tattoos and chains, holding their wallets in their back pockets. Maybe I visualize that kind of an interpretation to that word, and I don't think I portray that image. Maybe I am denying the word because I don't want to have that association. It sounds evasive what I'm saying because I'm not really sure if that's what I feel. But I said it, so I must have some feeling.

I find myself in that middle, that kind of non-radical kind of lifestyle where I am going to make the least amount of waves and if it means putting on that different face when I leave my home and what's comfortable to me and going to work to what's professional and what is, quote, "accepted behavior" for me or what I should be doing as a phys. ed. teacher of young kids. I accept that there is a separation in my life and that to make things easier, the least amount of overlapping that happens is going to make things easier. But then again, there is a lot of overlapping from even social events and things like that where you have to either attend alone or not attend at all. So there is going to be constantly a relationship between my life, my personal life and my professional [life].

I'm an okay person. No matter who's looking at me. Whether it's my colleagues at work or my friends from my personal side. I'm Toni King for Toni King. I'm not Toni King because I'm a teacher or because I'm gay or because I'm a gay teacher. I am the person that I am, and how I deal with both of those issues is how I deal with my life. And I think I do an okay job at it. I honestly do. I can say that I can be very comfortable in dealing with either group. But then again, there are situations that I felt very

uncomfortable. But overall, I can feel pretty comfortable in both of my lives, and that's what it is, both of my lives.

### Susan Carlson

Susan is currently teaching in a suburban junior high school but has taught at the K-12 and college levels. She is white, 29 years old, and had her first lesbian relationship in college.

I'll just share some of my thoughts in terms of being a lesbian p.e. teacher and the lifestyle, the role that takes on. I don't believe, for me, there is a place to be a lesbian, an out sort of lesbian, in the actual school setting. I feel good about where I am personally at this point in time. I do go out to bars. I do socialize with a lot of lesbians. However, in the school setting, I don't have a place for it. And I find my personal and my professional life very separate, with very little overlap. [With] the teachers in the school, my personal life is pretty private. Which also limits sharing in terms of getting to know people. That becomes difficult, and that has been something that has lacked in my life. I guess I should say only this year, because I have taught with other lesbian p.e. teachers, and that has been very satisfying, very rewarding.

I taught with a lesbian p.e. teacher [at the high school], and that was heaven to have that support.

Traci and I had known about each other for quite some time. We were good friends to begin with. Then we ended up getting a job for four years teaching together which was very supportive and very rewarding to have that contact and to share your personal life with each other that we hadn't been able to do with other teachers.

Traci and I had our own office. We also both coached after school. And then we carpooled home together. So we really spent a lot of time together, and it was nice to

casually talk to one another during the day about things and not have to lead a secretive type of life.

When I first started teaching, I was gay at that point, and this is when I was just becoming aware of it and feeling pretty good about it. Still [I was] a little bit closeted in the relationship that I was in. I wasn't out and people didn't really know about me. In school dealing with students, I never made up stories, but there was a boundary there that [students] didn't ask about my personal life. Even with coaching.

After I left the high school, I lost my job and left Traci. I was picked up by another school system and was able to be office mates and work with another lesbian P.E. teacher, Lori, which again was heaven. We carpooled in together. We taught together. We both went through very difficult times during that year and to this day, we say if we didn't have each other, neither one of us knows if we'd even be around. 'Cause we were both in very intense relationships that basically dissolved during that time.

I don't believe anyone else in the school even thought that we were gay. We didn't live real private lives, but we were always together. It made it safe, and it made it nice.

[Other teachers] would typically make statements like, "You two are together all the time?" And we'd go, "Oh, yeah." And then their next comment would typically be, "You two must go out and just have a great time at night," or "You two must drive guys wild." I guess that was in how we presented ourselves that we were basically just fun loving people that were high energy, and we didn't need to live roles of anyone else, or it wasn't important to have a date on a Saturday night.

We'd joke and blow it off and say, "Oh, yeah. We do. We really do." So we played that a little bit.

I think we play [that game] constantly. At least, I think I do to some extent, and I think Lori does to some extent. I don't think all lesbian p.e. teachers do. And I don't think it's right or good. It's just probably the way that she and I do it. To take a statement like

that, "Hey, you must drive the guys nuts," we'll ride it. "Oh, yeah, we really do."

Actually none of that needs to even be said.

We wouldn't have to take it to that extent and say, "Oh, yeah, we really do." We could just disqualify the statement totally. But, I don't know. It's just the way that I do it.

[When] my relationship with Terri [my partner of five years] was dissolving, for the first time in my life, I couldn't get a grip on things. I lost probably 20 lbs. So there were some noticeable things that were going on. Teaching, I loved. I was still high energy. As a matter of fact, I hated for the day of teaching to end, because I really put all my energy into it. I hated leaving school at 3:30 and coming home. I'd live to wake up in the morning to go to school. I was at a point of just saying, screw it. Why am I hiding this? People kept saying, "Susan, what is going on? Are you O.K.?" Even my family was saying, "Susan, do you have cancer? Talk to us." And I just at that time didn't feel that I wanted to share it with my family, but I remember at one point I was very close to a guy, the art teacher in this school system. I was in an activity [on the] softball field. I remember him coming out one day specifically and saying, "Susan, I'm sick because I really think my wife is cheating on me. I think my wife is going to leave me." And I remember turning and looking at him and saying, "Larry, I understand that. My wife just left me." And I remember saying it like that, and I remember him looking at me and him saying, "Are you gay?" And I said, "Yeah. And I'm going through hell." And since then we have developed a great friendship.

I felt great about sharing it with him. It was just very safe. He sat down, he started crying. He said, "I think my wife is leaving me." And I looked at him, and I started bawling.

The next thing you know the two of us are embracing out on the field. The kids are looking at us thinking like the two of us are having an affair. I mean the world's crazy.

Also a music teacher was lesbian, and she picked up on something that I had been going through. She didn't know that I was gay. But [she came] up to me and said, "Look, I

want you to know that I am a lesbian, and if you want to talk to me, I will understand."

So, I developed two pretty neat friendships in that building with those teachers.

I have taught kindergarten through college. Certainly at the elementary level, there isn't any threat and [being a lesbian] doesn't even become an issue with students. At the junior high level, it doesn't either, particularly. Kids bring up the word "gay." I find it really exciting to try to challenge them as to what that means or what it means to them. And most of the time, they're not even really sure of it.

Other than, "This sucks," or, "That sucks," the other most frequently used word is, "This is gay." Everything's "gay" in junior high school. Most often when anyone uses the word gay, I talk to them, and I ask them, "What does gay mean?" It's really interesting to listen to their definitions. As a matter of fact under my blotter on my desk, I have a piece of paper saying definitions of gay. And when somebody gives me a new definition, I write them down. Because I just find them really interesting. They range from it's just geekish, it's something from being like nerdy to two guys that love each other. But it can be anything in between. A lot of lesbian p.e. teachers would sort of shy away from that stuff, at least ones that I know. If somebody says gay, you sort of just turn your head and make believe you didn't even hear the word. I love finding out what they're thinking. So for me, that's really exciting.

At the high school age, it becomes a little more interesting in that there are some students that are either questioning themselves about being gay or are actually very involved. That becomes touchy in terms of how you want to deal with it. I remember having a high school student come to me and say, "Look, I am involved." She was involved with another girl. "I need someone to talk to. I know you'll understand, and I've heard about you." I remember listening to her and never volunteering any information and never confirming any of her beliefs, but just trying to understand what all of that meant for her and the struggles she was going through. 'Cause I think it's so difficult on one hand, not having role models to say, "Look, you're a lesbian, and that's O.K.," and on the

other hand saying, "Whooh, there isn't a place for this in teaching." I think there are people [like] myself that go through that contradiction of where is the balance?

I was just waiting for her to talk to me. I knew that would happen. My thoughts ranged from, "Hey, I don't even want to touch this with a 10 foot pole. If she even brings it to me, I'm just going to say, 'Hey, Carol, sorry. You're going to have to find somebody else to talk to,'" to actually saying when it happened, "I understand that you're really struggling with this, and I can try to hear you out. I don't know if I can help you in any way, but I can listen."

I asked her questions about her relationship with this woman that she was with, and if it was good for her, if she enjoyed it. If she was happy. If she really cared for the person. If the person really cared for her, what parts of it that were difficult, how it felt other kids knowing.

I knew what I was saying to her and what I wasn't saying to her. If she had ever said anything to her mother about me being a lesbian, I'd [say], "I don't know where you got that information from. Obviously your daughter's in pain, and I was listening to her, but none of that is accurate." So I was pretty clear about that by the time it happened.

I think forever there's been the stereotype that a single p.e. teacher is a lesbian. When I was in high school you would think that, but I think myself and friends, we really never knew what that meant. Kids today are much more aware. That assumption still exists, and kids today are bold enough to confront. I have been asked on two occasions this year by 8th graders, "Miss Carlson, you're single, and you don't quite fit the mold. You're not quite like Miss Samanski or Miss Felton. Are you like one of them? Are you a lesbian?"

[They asked that] right out, bold as brass. With one of the students, I responded partially because of the way she was and said, "No, I am not." With the other student at a different time when she asked basically the same question, I said, "What difference would it make? Would that matter to you?" And then she and I got into a conversation of why is

there an assumption that just because I'm single, and I am a p.e. teacher that I would be a lesbian, and what difference would that make? "Am I a good teacher?" "Yeah, you're the best teacher." "Well, then what would any of that matter to you?"

"Well, because it's gross. Two men or two women aren't meant to love each other." And I said, "Well, don't you love your friends, your female friends?" "Yeah, but it's different." "Well, how is it different?" "Well, I wouldn't have sex with them." So some of them are pretty much in touch. With ones that I can have conversations with, I'll take them as far as I think they can take it. But these [students] at a very young age are putting p.e. and lesbian together.

"That's just the way it is. All gym teachers are queer." "How do you know?" "My mother told me." Her mother told her. It's like that's common knowledge: P.E. teachers are queer. "Miss Carlson, are you over 30?" "Nope, I'm 29." "Oh, you're alright, you're still safe." If you're over 30 and you're a p.e. teacher and you're single, you're a lesbian.

The only part where [being a lesbian] interferes for me is in relation to other teachers and in drawing limits in developing friendships. And that has always been O.K. for me to draw a line in terms of friendships.

This is the first year that I am in conflict with becoming a pretty good friend of a [teacher] who is straight and does not know anything about me. This is after eight years that it has actually interfered. But only because the personal and professional have overlapped a little bit in terms of developing a friendship.

The worst part is being so secretive to the point where I am with this new person, Elaine. It is a friendship right now that is based on lying, 'cause I do lie. She'll ask me, "Who [are] you seeing? Don't you ever see anybody?" And I say, "No, I'm not seeing anyone." I don't ever make up that I'm dating anyone or anything like that, but instead of saying I'm going to [a gay bar] dancing on a Saturday night, I will just leave it that I've

gone to [the city]. That's hell for me. It's hell. And I haven't had to do that ever in all my years of teaching until right now.

I think when you take it out of the school and you start overlapping the personal and the professional that it becomes a little bit of a risk.

I am very comfortable the way it's at right now. I feel good in telling the few people that I've told. Like [other lesbian teachers] will think that's suicide. I shouldn't even have taken those steps. Maybe it's because [the people I have come out to] never come back on me that it's been O.K. I am going to tell Elaine. If we have a year long friendship, which is probably all our friendship will ever be, that's fine, but I can't live with lying anymore. And if that's what it's going to take, then that's O.K. But I don't care to live my life any differently. If things come up with kids, I confront them. But I don't need to make some big declaration that I am a lesbian. I don't need that for me in my life. And it's fine not sharing any of my personal life. That's fine. I have other outlets for that, other people in my life.

One of my major thoughts when I first consented to doing [these interviews] was why lesbian p.e. teachers and was there a difference? And I guess that question is answered in one of two opposite ways for me. No, I don't think there's a difference. I don't think I live my life in school much differently than most heterosexuals I know. People don't share their personal involvements, their marital problems, their different crises in their life. So I would have to say that I don't really think there is a difference. On the other hand, the only part that I think there is a difference is that it becomes difficult to be in a system created by society with certain norms of being heterosexual. And there are times when it's limiting to do what I sometimes try to do. Sometimes if a joke is made, I try to draw attention to that. And sometimes that's limiting to how much you can say and how much you can't say. So for me, I try to keep my personal and my professional separate, and that is O.K. for me. And I don't think that being a lesbian, I have any different influence on a person or a student than a heterosexual would. I think

the difference that I would make with a student would be because of me and my differences, not being a lesbian.

I can't do faggot jokes or gay jokes. People that joke about AIDS, I mean where are you coming from? So, you walk into a teachers' room and they're telling jokes about AIDS. I can't tolerate it. They know now. I walk into the teachers' room, and they'll say, "Watch out. Here comes Susan. Don't tell that joke."

So I asked, "Hey, do you really think it's necessary to joke about AIDS? Do you know enough about AIDS? Do you understand and do you know that it's not a homosexual issue? That anyone can contract it? And do you know about AIDS?" "Well, two faggots getting it on. That's how you get it."

I mean the mentality. And they pass it on to their kids. I mean AIDS jokes are a thing of the school system.

I was sitting with Lori [once] in a teacher faculty room filled with people. We're sitting at a table, and it was after Ben Lawson won the marathon. I had taught Ben Lawson when I taught school and I coached the girls' team when he was on the guys' team. So I know him pretty well. So they're talking about Ben Lawson. There are probably 30 people in this conversation. This one woman says, "He's such a tremendous athlete, but it's just really too bad that he's gay." And I remember I jumped up. Lori is looking at me, she's ready to hyperventilate. I could see her face just go like, "Sit down and shut up." But I said, "Now what makes you say that? Are you making this statement based on fact? Are you assuming that he's gay? How can you just come off and say, 'but it's too bad that he's gay?'" "Well, I know people who know him," and I said, "O.K., so you're trying to tell me that this is based on fact. Now what makes it then too bad? Is he less of a world class runner because he's gay?" I remember Lori sitting there like ohhh, and I couldn't let it slide, [because] I had been with Ben Lawson for four years of high school, and it was almost like a protection of him as a person and also the whole gay issue.

We got into kind of a good conversation about it, and it was dropped. I don't know if any teachers talked anything about it after.

[Lori said later,] "Don't you know when to shut the hell up?" And it was weird, because I felt great jumping on it immediately, like as soon as I heard it, I just started talking. And then there was a moment that I got a twinge of, oh, what am I doing? When I realized like, "There are 30 eyes on you, Susan. And you have committed yourself to responding, to taking on this issue. Now how the hell are you going to do it, girl?" And I could feel Lori right at my side. I knew she was ready to hyperventilate.

I know gay people, and they know me, but it doesn't become part of my teaching setting. It's very separate. I've seen a number of people at bars. There's a certain respect for one another in terms of not sharing that information with other colleagues and teachers. I would like to come to a point in my life to be really out there, personally and professionally. I think in my personal life, I'm pretty much out there, but there is a difference in my professional life in terms of what I share as a lesbian p.e. teacher.

I have a lot of people in my life, a lot of friends, going out places, going to concerts, going to gay marches. But in school, I don't bring it into the school. If somebody says, "Susan, how was your weekend?" "Yeah, it was fine." "What'd you do?" "Not too much." Because I don't care to share. But I think young kids need lesbian role models. I certainly know if I try to make a connection from my past and thinking I was the only person in the world that was gay or going through that, I think they do need role models. And I would love to see the time come when it was all O.K. And perhaps at that time, I would jump on the bandwagon. Right now, I'm just saying, I don't know if that would happen. But I don't think my teaching would be any different. I do not think that what I present to kids, how I talk with kids, how I interact with kids would be any different.

[Keeping my personal and professional lives separate] is by choice. It's very much by choice.

If the system changed and said it could be different, then I could see myself taking a step, but until that time, I am a victim of the system.

I am making a choice to be a victim of the system. I know that's what I'm doing. I know how far I step with things. I know how I have a different personal and professional life, how those are separate. If someone I taught with, like say when I taught with Traci or Lori, if something ever happened where it came out that they were lesbian, and let's say their job was on the line to be fired. Let's say something crazy happened, and it was lesbian related. There is no doubt in my mind that I would absolutely come out and say that I am a lesbian p.e. teacher. I would absolutely come out in support of that, even if it meant losing my own job. That would be fine.

I won't deny it. If something came up because of me, depending upon what it was, how far they took it, I would have no problem saying that yes, I am a lesbian.

I don't care to offer any information. But if something happened, I wouldn't deny it. Because I think as an educator, I am good, I am sound, I am good for the kids.

I feel good about what I do. And I've felt in my years of teaching okay where I am personally and also how I deal with kids. And it has very little relevance whether I'm homosexual or heterosexual. If they want to put a label on it, well, that's fine. I'm not going to deny that I'm a lesbian. I won't offer.

I can make sense of my life. I mean we're all a product of our socialization. Somebody who's prejudiced can look back on their life and say, I am prejudiced because I grew up in this way, and I was exposed to this, and I was treated like this, and I was conditioned like this, and these are my experiences. I can look back at my life as being a lesbian and say, I am a lesbian because of this, this, and this. I was brought up in a family where I learned that love had no limits. I desired intimacy in my life. I loved to explore and learn. I got involved with athletics and sports. I liked qualities in women more than qualities in men. I have surrounded myself with women in my life. And it has been set up that way. So, yes, I can make sense of my life, and say I am what I am. But I

think that I could do it differently if that was my choice. I don't want to [do it differently] any longer. I don't care to.

Therapy [has] allowed me to look at my past and to try understand where men were presently in my life, where women were. We talked some about getting out of education, because if my choice is to be with a woman, if I were in a position right now to be with a woman, and I've made a commitment in my mind that this woman is the woman I want to spend the rest of my life, I would set things up to be out, both personally and professionally, but I would have to change my professional life in order to do so.

I feel like if I am with a woman, I want to be in a committed relationship forever. I still have this ideal. I don't know if it will ever happen, but I do have an ideal. I believe it will happen at some point. And with [women] being my choice, I would like to live in a fairy tale world. I would like to get married [to this woman], I would like my family to know about it. I would like to be professionally secure and in a place where that could be part of my life, and everybody knows it. I would like to tell the whole damn world.

### Mona Taylor

Mona, white and 50 years old, has been teaching for 27 years; all but 5 have been at the same suburban junior high school. She lives in her hometown with her widowed mother; she and her partner have been together for 14 years. Her first lesbian relationship occurred when she was in her late 20s.

I don't know if [being a lesbian] made any difference in my relationship with the teachers, but I knew enough that you didn't go around telling people that you were a lesbian. And I don't know when that message came through to me. Apparently, that was kind of instinct over the years that this isn't exactly what people do. You're supposed to have a husband, you're supposed to have children, you're supposed to play the role which

I didn't fit, but somehow I figured it out that you weren't really supposed to talk about that.

I had some problems right around '71, '72, '73. I can't pinpoint the year, but there was an incident in school that forever changed my relationship with students. And I have never recovered from it. I had a student teacher, and I don't know for sure if she's the one that started this or not. I'll never be able to prove it. On several occasions, I had observed her putting her hands on kids, and one day I walked out the back door, and she had a kid pinned on the ground in a full Nelson with a hockey stick across the back of their neck. I was pretty mad about that. One thing led to another, and finally I had her removed from student teaching. She asked me if she could come back and see some of the students, and I told her no. Now whether she saw them on the side or not, I don't know. But I began to hear kids talking back and forth so that I could hear them alluding to the fact that I was lesbian.

You could see the whole bunch of them standing together, and one would be looking at the other, and they would be pointing, and they'd be snickering, and they'd say just loud enough so you could hear. They'd make certain innuendos. Instead of confronting them, I didn't, because confronting them would probably confirm their suspicions, so I did not do that.

I used to get telephone calls at all hours of the night, and they were kids on the phone calling me up. It wasn't one call a night. It sometimes was three or four, and sometimes it was like 12 and 1 o'clock.

I could never figure out which one it was. "Oh, do you want to come over and sleep with me?" Things like this. They'd hang up, and they'd call again. I went so far as to have the telephone number changed. I went so far as to have the telephone number unlisted. And this went on for the two years that that bunch of kids were there.

That was really rough. Because then I'd go into school the next day, and they knew that they were calling me up, and that I was in really bad shape, and they [were like], "Ah-ha, we got her." And you're right. They did. They definitely did.

I always felt it was my responsibility to supervise the locker room. My office is right there, like everybody's office is in the locker room. And I'd walk up and down. It never dawned on me that [students] were thinking that I might be just there to watch them or look at them, because that's not the way I felt. I mean these were kids. I'm old enough to be their mother. I almost quit teaching then. I almost threw in the towel. I was really upset. I spent a lot of time crying.

I'd find my name written on the walls, "Taylor is a lezzie." I used to have very good rapport with kids. I could talk with them, they'd come into my office, and they'd sit down. I'd have a whole bunch in there lots and lots of times. After that happened, they didn't come into my office anymore. I didn't make any attempt to talk to the kids anymore. I taught my class, they left. That's the last I heard of them until the next time they came into me.

I'd teach just the skills I had to teach. I'd give just the amount of corrections that I had to give. There's all kinds of body language that you can use, the tone of voice that you can use. They aren't stupid, the message gets across to them. I just kind of pulled away from them. I stopped doing intramurals after school. I used to do intramurals for every single season. I stopped doing things like that. I stopped chaperoning any kind of field trips.

It definitely affected my teaching. I was depressed. I didn't want to be with anybody. I didn't go down to the teachers' room. On the times that I was free, I sat in my office, and I brooded. My humor was terrible. I was impossible to live with. I would have given anything to be able to get out of the job and do something else. Then they left, and there was kind of a residual effect to it. A few kids picked on it for the next couple of years, and that's why I was so paranoid, and I'd go in every morning, and I'd look at the

walls and wash the walls. Finally, apparently since I've gotten older, this has somehow tapered off, and I don't see it anymore. Although I'm still paranoid enough to check the walls.

There was one other incident, not with kids, this involved the principal. I can still see the scene. The secretary was sitting at her desk. One of the English teachers was standing at the counter with me. I had asked the secretary about something, and she didn't know. The principal walked out of his office into the front office, and [the secretary] asked the principal, "Is Mona," and quick as a wink, right out of his mouth, [the principal said], "A lesbian." I felt like I had been kicked in the stomach. The English teacher's mouth just kind of dropped open, and there was a pregnant pause, and I just said, "Not nice." And I left. Because I could feel the color come up.

Because it was true, to really confront him would make a bad situation worse, I thought, so I just walked out. And I never forgave him for that, either. I did my job, and I had as little to do with him as possible.

Then you have the problems with the jokes in the teachers' room. My own reaction to that is to pretend that I'm busy, and I'm writing something, and I don't hear what's going on, or I'm not paying attention, or I'm talking to somebody else.

You can always be talking to the person next to you while out of your other ear, you're hearing what's going on in this little corner. So you pretend that you don't hear, and you're very interested in your conversation with the person next to you. I'll wait a reasonable amount of time, and then I'll leave. So it isn't too obvious. You know, I've had to do something, I have to make a phone call. It's an escape. I know that.

I think I'm the only one on the staff that's not married. I'm the only one. One's divorced. But the rest of everybody either has a husband or a wife and children or young children or grown up children. Some of them are grandmothers. And I'm the only one that's not married. You see, so already you've got the finger of suspicion.

Whenever there's [something about gays in the newspaper], I lay low for a couple days afterwards, because I know that that's going to be the topic of conversation, and because I'm not out, I can't defend myself or anybody else.

The boys are into calling each other "faggots" or, "He's queer." I pretend I don't hear those. I try not to make a big deal about it. Kids are into name calling, no matter what they use, they're into name calling. If it's not that, it's something else.

I usually [am] peace at any price. Up to a point I'm like that, but when I really feel something is definitely wrong, other than this one issue, then I'll speak out about it. If I feel like somebody is being downtrodden or ridiculed or picked on, I'll do something about it, but this issue, no. I ignore any comments I hear the kids make.

When you're young, you relate pretty well to students. As you get older, it changes. They're looking to young people to relate to. It's like having in some cases their grandmother teach them P.E. But the age from like 30 to 40 is tough when you're a P.E. teacher, 'cause here you are, you're 30 years old, you're still not married, you're 35, you're still not married. There must be something wrong with you now. Therefore, you must be gay if you're not married. Of course, they pick up on it, and if you are, it bothers you. At least, it bothers me. It doesn't bother some people, but it bothers me. Because they think there's something wrong with it. It's something to laugh at, something to make fun of, and I don't think people should laugh at or make fun of people regardless. It's like laughing at somebody that has one eye or has an ear missing or limps or has a short leg. None of it is funny. Nobody is so perfect that you have the right to make fun of somebody else.

The past four or five years have been the best four or five years since I started. Everything's been on kind of an even keel. I'm comfortable with the program, I'm comfortable with the people I work with. I don't have any problem going down to the teachers' room and talking with them. I don't feel like, oh, my God, I'm a lesbian. I have

to hide in my office and not be seen. I don't feel that way. I feel comfortable going down there and sitting with whoever happens to be there when I'm free and talking to them.

I feel now a little bit more like I can kid with the girls, you know, needle them a little bit in a fun way. Not in an offensive way. And they respond to that. Because it's letting down the barriers a little bit like, "Oh, god, she's human after all." I really don't want to be seen as somebody that is on their case all the time. I really would like to be friendly with them and have a nice and easy relationship. And I'm working on it. I think it's going to take time.

I do enjoy what I'm doing. I like to teach. What I don't like about teaching is all the stuff that you have to do and what you have to put up with. But I like the kids, I like to be with them. I like to go to work. Every day is different, every class is different, every kid is different. And it certainly isn't your 9 to 5 [job] making triggers at [a] firearms [factory]. But there are certain isolated incidents, that kind of overshadow all the positive things that have been going on. And those particular incidents, well, they almost finished me off. They really did.

I've always thought of myself as a p.e. teacher. I've never labeled myself as a lesbian p.e. teacher. I don't know why that is. As far as I'm concerned, I'm a p.e. teacher who happens to be lesbian as I suppose many of us are. We have been tagged with that. Certainly, you're subjected to some sort of innuendo and kind of left-handed snickering and ridicule. Although it isn't really very overt, but you hear cracks about p.e. teachers.

It makes me very angry to think that [people] think there's something wrong with being lesbian. That does make me angry. It makes me angry to be subjected to ridicule and to be discriminated against which is really what they're doing. But I don't have the nerve to speak out either, so you kind of have to sit there, and take it or leave. In most cases, I withdraw, and I go someplace else in the building, or I find something that I have to do.

I'm one thing in school, and I'm something else outside of school. I happen to be a teacher in school who teaches physical education, and when I go home, when I'm out of school, I'm a different person that does all kinds of different things. I'm not into telling where I'm going or who I'm going with or what I'm going to be doing simply because I do everything just about with Sylvia, [my partner].

I have [wondered] why more p.e. teachers [are] lesbians than not say English teachers, science teachers or whatever. And I don't know what makes one person lesbian and one not. I think a lot of us were tomboys when we grew up. We liked to play games and sports and happened to be pretty good at it. And I don't know that maybe it was a way out or an outlet for them to continue to be involved in sports by becoming p.e. teachers. I don't know.

I don't know what makes them [lesbian]. I can't tell you whether it's genetic, I don't know. Or whether it's social exposure, or whether it's the relationship the parents have with the child. Or whether because they're tomboys and because they like to play sports, and society looks on the girls as being feminine little creatures that make beds and wash dishes and cook, and it's not acceptable to get hot and sweaty and dirty. I don't know. I really don't. I have thought about that though. I mean how did I end up or any of the rest of us end up [this way]?

Back in the '50s, women did not have the opportunities that they have nowadays. So you taught, you were a nurse, or you were a secretary, or you got married and had kids. Basically that's what your choices were. We didn't know what was going on out there in the rest of the world. We didn't know there were other opportunities that women could do. I don't think at that time that there were that many opportunities. So you chose to teach. You were good at sports. Okay, so what am I going to do with it? Well, I can teach p.e. So that's the avenue I took. I never thought at that time when I entered college that gym teachers are all lesbians. I didn't know that. And I didn't become aware that a lot of them were until a long time after I graduated.

If everybody would say, "Hey, it's okay. We accept you the way you are. We love you just the same," that would be one thing, but it isn't. And to me, that's very important that I am not accepted, "I" meaning all of us, I am not accepted. That we are the object of ridicule. I can see nothing good about that. Because there's more of them than there are of us, and I can't ever see us being accepted by society. You can go in to any school, and you can sit in the teacher's room, and you'll hear cracks about the queers. I think that's going to go on forever. But you see, I'm not willing to go out and fight for us either. If you don't like something than do something about it, but I'm not doing anything about it.

It makes me very angry to think that [people] think that there's something wrong with being lesbian. I don't see anything really particularly abnormal about me. I mean I'm a perfectly productive member of society. I have something to contribute. I just don't happen to follow their social rules of who you should go with or who you should see or who you should sleep with. And that bothers me. I mean everybody's different. So why can't you accept me as I am, instead of ridiculing or making fun of or discriminating against. I can understand now how the Blacks feel, because in a way that's what's happening to me and everyone of us. It's not socially acceptable to be gay or lesbian or homosexual or whatever. And people are not broad minded. I'm just not strong enough to stand up to that, to defend it.

I feel powerless and defenseless, because I can't speak out. Because if I do speak out, I'm going to be unemployed. I don't know whether that would happen or not, but you see, I'm not willing to take that chance.

I would be able to accept myself more easily if I felt that society accepted me, which I don't think they do. I'm a woman that happens to like to be with other women. I like to do things with them. I don't like to go to bed with a lot of them. I'm pretty monogamous. It's just that I enjoy their company. I enjoy being with them more than I enjoy being with men.

It would just be nice to be accepted. It would be nice to say, "Hey, I'm a lesbian." And they'd say, "Hey, who cares?" I don't feel that it's ever going to happen.

### Pam Luciano

Pam is a 24 year old white woman who is in her second year of teaching. She teaches at the secondary level in a suburban school where she is also the athletic trainer. Her first lesbian relationship occurred when she was in college.

This is my second year teaching. I'm at the high school two classes teaching regular phys. ed. Then I go to the junior high school and teach adapted phys. ed. and elementary and junior high phys. ed. The junior high people have no idea at all [that I'm gay]. I get along with them great. They always wonder why I don't have a boyfriend, but then they assume, I guess, that I'm just so busy, 'cause [I'm an athletic trainer], and I really don't have time for that, supposedly.

The high school staff is three other women, one full time guy, and the AD teaches one class. [Of the women], one I don't get along with at all. She doesn't even talk to me, 'cause I got the job over her friend. Another one teaches health and phys. ed. She always is trying to back stab people. The third one is the same way as her, except she's kind of friendly. But the guys, I get along with great. The AD, he's in charge of me for athletic training after school. The guys hate the three women. [They] call one of them the "dyke."

I'll be sitting down with the guys having coffee, and they'll be calling one the "dyke," and I just sit there. At first, I used to kind of stick up for her, and say, "How do you guys know? You have no idea. Why don't you just leave her alone." Now I don't even stick up for her, because they're the type of people if one of those three women ever found out I

was gay, that would be it. They would use it against me. They're not supportive at all. They can't stand me.

In my after school things, I have Sam who's the AD and this guy, Joey, who's the equipment manager. So the three of us are always together, 'cause we always have to be at the same place all the time. Joey's this big huge guy, but he's like a real teddy bear. He used to tease me once in a while about being gay. And Sam never said a word. Well, Sam and I went one day to pick up some equipment, and he asked me if I was gay. The person who I was seeing, [Carrie], was from the [same town], and he asked around and found out that she was gay. So he just assumed that I was 'cause I was always with her. And he asked me, so I told him, "Yeah. It's no big deal." He wasn't really pissed off or anything, he just goes, "Wow, I can't believe it. I can't believe it." He's married. He has two kids. Two kids like my age. And I didn't see why he kept saying, "I can't believe it. I can't believe it." Come to find out, he likes me. He wants to go out with me. He's my boss. So that was a big deal.

He caught me off guard. I didn't know what to do. I was going to deny it, you know how that just runs through your head, "Oh, just say no." It was like, no, why should I? 'Cause I've never lied to him before, why should I now? So I didn't. 'Cause I figured he wouldn't say anything. 'Cause he had hired me and that would make him look like a fool, according to his standards. He said he had no problems with it 'cause it really had nothing to do with anything as long as I was professional. He said the only way he would ever fire me is if I wasn't being professional. And ever since then, we've never had a problem.

He said that all he cared about was he didn't want the three women to find out. All he asked is that I kept Carrie away from the high school so they wouldn't find out. He said, "If one of the women ever found out, they'd use it. They'd go right to the school committee and say you're an unfit teacher." I was really afraid that they'd find out. If they [went] to the school committee, then everyone in the town would know. I would

have to move to Iowa or something to get away from it. And that was what I was really afraid of. 'Cause I [have] cousins in the town. I thought, oh, God, then it will get back to my parents, and I'll be killed.

The head of phys. ed., he's a real nice guy, but he has about as much tact as a steam roller. He's young. And he has his doctorate, but you'd never know it. He always says to me, "I have no patience with backstabbers and faggots and queers." It's like you want to say something, but I don't, 'cause he's the type of guy if you say something like, "What do you mean? That has nothing to do with anything," he'd keep going on and on. Once I said something like, "They're people, too." And he just kind of looked at me, so I dropped it right away, 'cause he could get me fired, too. I just didn't want to have to deal with him. This is what I have to deal with all day in my job.

Sometimes, one of the guys will ask me what I was doing on the weekend. If I went out, where I went. I throw out a few [heterosexual] clubs that I used to go to. I really don't say too much. One teacher was taking a whirlpool one day and asked me if I had a boyfriend. He said something like, "Oh, you must have a boyfriend, right?" It was one of those questions you could say no, but he would think something was wrong with you. I was like, "Yeah. He lives at home, but we don't see each other that much, 'cause he's at home, and I work all the time. We only see each other on weekends."

I have to really remember what I'm saying so I say the same the next time, so I don't contradict myself. You'd love to tell him, "My girlfriend's a trainer." Tell him about Carrie, but I can't. Especially the kids. Kids are different, though. I'll tell [the junior high kids] stuff about Carrie, but just change the name. They'll ask how long I've been going out with my boyfriend, and I just say, "Oh, for a year," and be talking about Carrie, but they won't have a clue 'cause for them, it goes in one ear and out the other. But I always use this guy who's a friend of mine from home. He's gay. I always say that I see him off and on. He always tells me, "Just call me if you need a date to go to something. So you have a guy around."

The kids at the high school, I showed them [the] watch Carrie got me for Christmas. "Yeah, my boyfriend got me this." But they don't ask if he comes in. The high school kids, I get along with fine. They don't have any idea.

You get to the point, this is awful, but you start to pick out kids that you think are going to be gay. You start to peg them. Like [I have one] student trainer, the girl is always hanging around. She's a senior. Okay athlete. I used to see her in the gym doing the shot put. You know how you peg kids, this is awful, but you peg them. Like, "Oh, that kid's going to be gay. I don't want to be near her." [I] kind of panicked.

I was afraid that the kids might start thinking that something was going on. I was afraid people would start asking questions. I didn't know if people thought she was gay. Isn't it awful, but she's not fat or anything, but she's really built, and she throws the shot put and she'd been lifting a lot, so she looks, I hate to say this, you know how typical? She has real short blond hair and she looked like someone you would see in the bars. But that's awful 'cause it's like stereotyping people as being typically dyke. But that's what she looked like.

So I never went near the kid. And then she got hurt, she pinched a nerve in her neck. She brought in a doctor's note, and the doctor wanted her to get massages every day. I was like, oh no. So I always had the doors wide open. I always made sure there were about five kids in the trainer's room. I was real paranoid. I had to massage [her] neck and shoulders. It was for about three weeks, and I was paranoid every single day.

She's constantly saying stuff about gay people. Real negative comments. Like, "Oh, that kid's a fag. Oh, she's probably a dyke." She'd always bring it up when there was no one around. And she's going to go to [state college], so I kind of felt like I had to say something to her so she wouldn't go down there and make a fool out of herself cutting gay people down. I sat her down, and we just talked about it one day. I said, "When you go to college, especially in phys. ed., you might meet some gay people. What are you going to do? Tell them they're a dyke to their face and have them punch you in the face?" "Yeah,

I don't care. I'm going to tell them they're gay and they're jerks." I tried to reason with her, but you know how they say they people that scream the most are the ones that turn out to be the biggest gay people? She's definitely going to be gay, but from the time she gets there till the time she comes out, I hope she doesn't find out I'm gay. 'Cause I don't know what she's going to do.

I don't know if she'd come back and tell the kids at the high school. "Oh, Pam's a dyke." And that's what I'm afraid of, 'cause if the kids ever found out, I would really have to leave. Especially as a trainer, the girls are never going to come to me. Especially if they had a groin injury, they would never come in. And then guys, being guys, they'd be like, "Oh, there's that dyke."

The junior high group uses the word "gay." The high school kids [do], too. They don't really direct it toward people though. I view it as just another word in their vocabulary, just like another slang. I think to make a big deal out of it, you're setting yourself up.

It's just a word to use. To say, "What does that mean?" or start talking about gay people, that would start bringing questions like, "Why is she so bent out of shape? It's just another word."

I don't want to have to deal with that, saying something to them. I just don't want them to even think, [to] have any questions [about me].

There's this kid in school, I think she's a senior. She really looks familiar, but I can't place her. That's why I'm thinking I saw her in a [gay] bar. She was walking by once, and Sam said, "She's a dyke." I was like, "No, way. Really?" He said, "Yeah. She's gay. I know for a fact." The kid always looks right at me when I walk by. She's not into athletics, so I don't have to deal with her, thank God. She's not in my class. I get all nervous every time I see her, and I always see her at the end of second period 'cause she sits right in the front row, right in front of the door. And she always looks up and stares right at me.

I don't want the kid to know me. I panic 'cause I don't want to be associated with her. She's like a real loner. I'm probably paranoid. I really feel like she's looking right at me every time I see her.

My first year, there was this kid on the softball team, Sheila. She was from a real screwed up home. She lived with her mother and her brother. And she was a real nice kid. Her friend who graduated like the year or two years before her, she looked just like a guy. I thought she was a guy the first few times I saw her at games. It was like, "Oh, is that Sheila's boyfriend?" They all just laughed. I guess she lives with Sheila and her mother and her brother. And supposedly they were both gay, and they were together. And I was like, "Oh, wow, that's neat." And I always like wanted to bump into [Sheila] at the gay bars. I still look for the kid.

I knew she wasn't the type of kid that would turn around and say, "Hey, the trainer's gay, too." Plus she's out of school, but she doesn't hang out with any of the kids. She'd always go right home. She was never real friendly with the other kids. She was a real smart kid, 'cause she kept to herself.

I get real nervous, especially [with] the sophomores. I have this one class of sophomores. [The girls are] real touchy. And this one kid will come up and put her arm around me and start walking out down the hall with me. And I get real nervous when they do stuff like that. 'Cause I don't want them to have a clue or even be suspicious, 'cause as soon as they do that, it's kind of like, oh god, now they're going to think I have this girl hanging on me, they're going to think there's something going on. I don't know. Stupid little things, but you just think that people are going to think that there's something going on 'cause this kid's hanging on me.

The boys I get along with great. They're real neat. Probably 'cause I went to [football] camp with them. They're all like your big brother.

You know how you would expect them to say, "Oh, yeah, all female athletes are dykes." I've never heard a comment like that before. Somebody said something once

about one of the high school kids. "Well, she's probably gay, she's a dyke." And I really cut him down. I said, "Oh, what she'd do? Shoot you down for a date or something?" Everyone else laughed at him. But they used to fool around a lot in the training room when they're waiting to get taped pretending they were gay. Then they'd laugh about it. I never said anything. I'd laugh with them and tease them.

One of them would be getting taped and the other one would be sitting behind him, and he'd lie back on the kid and say, "Your turn, honey, to get taped." The other kid's like, "Get out of the way you fag." I'd kid with them like that. One of the kids hurt his wrist, and he's one of the kids that always teases about fags. And I said, "Oh, what's this? From going like this too much?" [Making a limp wrist gesture.] And the kids were laughing.

I always made sure that I wore a dress at the [athletic] banquet, so they wouldn't say that I always wore pants. Typical gym teacher or something.

I do think about [being gay at school] a lot. Especially in our department, [the guys are] always cutting down one of the three women for some stupid thing they've done. Sam and I team teach, and for a while, the kids thought that there was something going on between the two of us. They still do, I think. I almost don't want them to stop thinking that 'cause then they're going to start thinking of something else. So, at times, it's almost comfortable that they think that something is going on. If they only knew.

This guy at work is like going to ask me out any day now, so I try to avoid him. He's cute, and you know kids can tell what's going on. He left roses on my car on Valentine's Day. He leaves notes all over my desk. It's like I don't want to have to deal with this.

It's a compliment, I guess. But you almost feel like why don't I want to go out with this guy? He's a nice guy. What's wrong with me? Why can't I just be quote, "normal" like everyone else? Things would be a lot easier. Why don't I just go out with him a couple of times? If [people at work] had any questions, they will think everything's okay, and I'm just like them. But I just have no desire to.

One of my athlete's mother is a lunch lady. She always says, "Oh, you're so active. Do it now, while you're young, and you're not married. That's great. And go out with your friends and have fun." Whenever I say I'm going away anywhere, it's always with my friends. Like February vacation, I was going away skiing. [The kids] automatically asked if I was going with my boyfriend. I said, "No, I'm not married." You know, the old morals. "I'm not going to go away with my boyfriend before I'm married."

I went out with this one guy, because there were never any guys coming to work, and I never mentioned any. And I was starting to get a little paranoid. This guy was a hockey official. So, I was like, "Yeah, sure. Come on, meet me at work." So people would see there was someone around. But that was it. It's kind of like I'd like to meet a nice guy just to see what it was like again. I just think it would be easier. But I don't know.

Just recently, I've been starting to look down the road a little bit, and I kind of like don't want to be gay the rest of my life at all. It would be so much easier, actually, I don't know if it's an easier way, but it'd be so much easier being straight.

Like at work. No one would question anything. At home, no one would question anything. You can have kids. You'd have a family. You'd have people to fall back on.

When I hear the word lesbian, all I can think of is those people, "diesel dykes." Big construction boots, leather jackets, and [they] just look like guys. If they weren't wearing earrings, you wouldn't know the difference. Those type of people, that's what I think of. That's the only way I can describe it. It's real hard core people.

It's like you're afraid that someone is going to associate you with them.

I don't know that many older women in their 50s that are gay, but the few that I know, they're alone and they live by themselves. [They] have their animals, pets. Their dog's like their kid? It just doesn't look very promising to me, getting older. 'Cause most people when you're older, your family takes care of you. They may not take care of you, but at least they're around.

One of my friends, Maryann, how did she put it? Every once in a while she tried to jump to the other side, she started dating a guy a little bit.

We both were talking about how it would be easier to be straight. But you wouldn't be happier necessarily.

All the guys I had been out with, they were okay, but I never really wanted to be with one of them. I never really was in love, I guess is a way of putting it. And I don't know if it's 'cause everyone else was gay, but I wanted to try it. That was like how I thought when I was first coming out. That I wanted to try it, and see if it was different. And it was fun.

It was not easy, but I felt more comfortable with women, a lot more comfortable being with a woman than a guy. And I could be myself more. Just generally more comfortable, and I was a lot more happy. I always figured I could always go back to being straight.

This guy who I used to go out with in high school--we've always been real close friends--he's getting married in another month. A lot of kids are getting married, having kids. My best friend from high school has a little girl now. It's just weird, 'cause it's so different. It's real different. You feel like you're in another world. I went to Catholic school. My five year reunion was like the ozone or something. It was like I was living on another planet, 'cause all those kids went to college to get married, and a lot them had families. They'd pull out their wallets with the pictures of their kids. I couldn't tell them anything of what I'd been doing 'cause none of it was the same as them. And what was important to me, it was like nothing to them, any of them. It's different.

[Being gay has] been a choice up to now, but now I'm really starting to think that I don't want it to be that choice. I'm starting to almost like change my mind.

I guess what I'm saying is that I'd really like to start seeing a guy again just to see what would happen. I don't know what would happen. Maybe that way I'd be like, no, I don't want to go out with them, I'm definitely gay. I'm real confused right now. And

maybe that would be a way that would help me understand that I am gay and that's the way it's going to be. I don't know.

Five years down the road what I hope to be doing is not teaching. It's having my own business, some sort of sports medicine clinic. Or some private club. Owning something like a house. And being with someone. I just haven't figured out who that someone would be or whether they would be male or female. Being with someone. And just being kind of like settled down. That's my ideal.

### Jody Porter

Jody is white and 45 years old. She teaches and lives in her hometown. She was married for over 20 years and has two children. Her daughter attends college, and her son is in ninth grade at the school where Jody teaches. She had her first lesbian relationship when she was 39.

[About three years ago] when I came back to school after I had told my husband that I was a lesbian, there was supposedly a rumor around town that Jeannie and I were involved with each other and that I was a lesbian. And none of this was true at that point because we really weren't involved. It wasn't until that following spring that my divorce went through, and Jeannie and I did become involved.

Life as a phys. ed. teacher that fall and me knowing that I actually was a lesbian, I think made me quite a bit different because I think through the years, I had been very warm with people. Like I easily hugged someone. But I found myself being very careful about that, because I figured everybody was watching me. So I just held back on that. I wasn't the warm person that I was before. I was really careful.

My daughter at the time [of my divorce] graduated that June so she was off to college. She was not involved in anything that went on here, but my son was going into the 7th grade. And I was concerned about him. But I did know that both of my kids are very

outgoing personalities, and they were very popular and in the limelight. [Chad's] father helped at that time to say that I wasn't any different. [My son] loved me, and now that he knows this about me, that doesn't make anyone different. And that I can't control what people say about me, and he can't control what people say about me or about him. In the 7th grade a kid on the football team started pushing him and said, "You're mother's a lezzie." He just kind of ignored it. What I did when he told me about that was I went up to the kid the next day, and I just was extremely nice to him. This is the same strategy I used any time I heard anybody had said anything about me.

I just feel like the best way is when somebody acts that way to you is go up and just talk to them, so that they know that you're basically a nice person. You don't have green skin and four eyes and all this. You're just a normal person. And the more they get to know you, the more they get to like you, hopefully, then the less they're going to say bad things about you. That's my way of squelching some kind of a rumor. And most the time it works. It doesn't always work, but most the time for me it happens to work. So that squelched that incident as far as my son's concerned.

During [the winter season of that year] all the [softball] kids kind of turned on me and said they weren't going to go play softball that spring. And I was bewildered. I couldn't figure out what the heck it was. They said it was because I yelled at them, and they didn't want to go out and have me yell at them. But what I think really happened at that point was--no one in town still talks about it--but I am absolutely positive that they picked up this rumor that I was a lesbian. [The students] were going to punish me and maybe get me out of the system somehow. I kind of think that's what happened.

It hurt a bit because I felt like I was really close to that group of kids before this time. That's why I couldn't understand why they turned on me. Said I yelled at them. I didn't yell at them. It was like them making up something that wasn't true so there had to be something else. That was a big incident that year. This whole thing about those kids all came up in a meeting between the three of those students, some of their parents,

athletic director and the principal to get to the bottom of why they decided this whole group wasn't going to go out for softball. But there was never any mention about my being a lesbian or gay or anything else that ever came up, so it was all quiet. Which I think is rather interesting.

[If they did say something about me being a lesbian,] I would have asked them where they got their information and proof for one thing. I would say something to the effect of, "My sexual preference is actually none of your business. Even if I were a lesbian, my performance here at school and how I act with the students here and my professionalism should prove as a good track record. And far as my sexual preference, it should have nothing to do with this, and it's none of your business." I'm pretty sure that's how I would have dealt with it at that time. I would have denied [being a lesbian]. Definitely would have denied it. But I also would have said it was none of their business whether I was or wasn't. I don't think that's anyone's business anyway. People in a heterosexual situation don't talk about their sex life, and I don't think it's necessary in a homosexual situation to talk about that kind of thing, who you have sex with. It's not the same as being a pervert where you go around and do something to their children. As a physical education teacher, certainly you're in a locker room, you're there, you're with these kids all the time, but that never has entered my mind as anything sexual. I've never had any sexual feeling at all being around the girls in the locker room. I've never had them.

Later in that spring of that same year after this incident happened with those kids, on spring vacation Jeannie and I went to Provincetown. We were walking on the streets, and we went into a nice restaurant. And we're sitting there having dinner and in walked a father of one of these [softball players] with a date of his. We looked at him and said hello, and he said hello. About a week or two later, these kids that were graduating from school had class night. And in the will of class night, they announced that they left the [the] friendly phys. ed. teacher [and her friend] a one way trip to Provincetown. I [was not] at this thing. And when [I] came into school the next day, several teachers came up

to [me] and apologized for what had happened. At first, [I] said, "What happened?" Then it was explained what happened, and they said this never should have gotten by the advisors. "We don't know how it did, and we're upset about it." The students had said something about [another teacher] and another woman teacher at the same class night. And he was terribly upset about it and wanted to push for a lawsuit and tried to get me to do the same thing. And I just said, "No, it's not worth it. I can't control what they say about [me]." I wouldn't want to make a big deal about it. I thought that was almost like admitting guilt at that time, so I just didn't want to. But the vice principal came up to me and put his arm around me and said, "We still love you, Jody." And now what he meant by that, I'm not sure. To this day this man is really friendly to me. He's really a nice guy, and I respect him, and I know he respects me as a teacher. So I don't know if he was saying, "We still love you anyway whether you are or you aren't." I think that's kind of what he was thinking, but again, that's my interpretation of what he said.

[After that class night] I wasn't afraid. And I wasn't embarrassed. I remember feeling my heart jumped. Maybe that is fear or surprise or something like, wow, what is this? And then after hearing what happened, I was really attuned at that point to say the same thing I had said to my own kids, that you can't control what everyone says about you. If you're proud of yourself and you're happy with yourself and what you've done and you feel everything you're doing is fine, then you can't control what anyone else says about you. And I'm pretty sure I was so strong and firm in my own conviction then because I knew I had to do that with my two kids.

There's a couple of kids that have been a problem. It's blown over right now, but they're like low-life kids. They hang around up town all the time. They have a poor family life, so they're just not home at night like most kids. But it was last year. Any time we'd go up through town, we'd hear these guttural sounds. Somebody would yell out, "Hey lezzie." We'd go up to the store, and we'd hear it coming from someplace, and we pretty much suspected who was doing this. But we didn't have any proof of it.

One day, I was sitting outside the local pizza place in the car, and Jeannie had gone into the restaurant. They were basically saying this to Jeannie, not to me. They called out, "Hey lezzie." It was this one girl and two other girls with her. So I watched them, and I got out of the car, and I walked across the street, and I called the girl by her name. I said, "Becky, come here." She looked, and then she turned around. So I in a sense threatened her, you know, that she was fooling with the wrong person right now. And if I heard that from her again, she would be dealt with severely. Every time after that I saw her in school, I just gave her this real bad look. I didn't say anything to her. I just stared her right in the eye. I didn't take my eyes right off of her, even if she looked. I made her eyes turn away. And I haven't heard anything from her since.

An occasional "lezzie" might be written on our car when it's uptown, if there's a lot of dirt on it. It comes from one of these kids. Other than that, there have been no problems. No adult problems at all. I've gone on in the community. Jeannie used to say I was supposedly like the pillar of the community, because I always have been involved in different things. I've just done a lot of stuff around town and been active in a lot of projects, and I think that's one of the things that saved me as far as this going around in this town.

Because I was established in this community, and my reputation was established as a teacher and a person, when people now know I am different from them, that I am a lesbian--at least they hear that I am--I'm still accepted, and I'm still okay, because they know I've proven myself to them.

I still am involved with all the activities at the school. I still take kids on these trips, and if they didn't trust me with their kids, they wouldn't let them go out two weeks on a bicycle trip with me or off on a weekend on a bicycle trip. The kids are able to come out [to our home] for sports activities. At the end of the season they come out here, and we have dinner. The parents all know Jeannie and I live here. So we're just completely involved in those things. Right now, there doesn't seem to be any problem. And it's

extremely open. When the kids come here, they go upstairs, they know that that's our bedroom upstairs. We don't have separate rooms. When Chad's friends are here, they go to the same school, they spend the night with us. They know we sleep in the same bed.

I can't say that I notice anything different as a lesbian phys. ed. teacher than as a married phys. ed. teacher. I don't really see any difference at all. I don't see a lot of difference other than I am very careful that I don't just go up and touch anybody just because I feel if I come up and touch somebody, then they'll say, "Hey, lezzie." But in some situations, like I'm doing self defense now, you have to go up and put your arm around somebody. I find myself getting more back now to what I used to be. I was more stand-offish the first couple of years [and] a little bit afraid.

Those softball kids I talked about, one of those kids I felt the closest to her. I never felt sexually toward her, but I felt almost like a mother. When [Sue] was in her junior year, she was on the volleyball team. And she fell in love with a girl who was a senior. During that time, they got to know each other really well. They were over at each other's house, and it was just like being in love. And I could see this. [Sue] confided in me in how much she really liked this Beth. And how upset her mother was. I believe what I said to her was something like, "You have the right to live your own life. Your mother wants what's best for you, there's no doubt about that. She's saying this because she loves you, and she doesn't want to see you hurt, but still, your life is basically yours. And if you choose to live that lifestyle," I never said the word lesbian or gay or anything else, but I said, "If you choose to live that lifestyle, then you have to suffer the consequences. And your mother may or may not like it." That was the gist of it.

There [are some students] that I would love to be able to talk with. It would be important to them, but that's one place where I'm afraid. Maybe if I had a tape recorder there so I could prove what I said would be one thing. I know I wouldn't say anything that would be bad, but when you talk to somebody, it gets all mixed up. So what would come out of that might not be a good thing. So I would not just sit down and talk to anyone and

give them any counseling about being gay. I would not get involved in it, but I think that we should at some point. That's something that's really important that the students have someone to talk to. But unfortunately, I don't feel like I could do that now.

We were up at a costume party at Halloween last year. And this girl [who] graduated this year was there. And [she] didn't act like it bothered her [that we were there.] She was with another woman, too. I figured if she's there, she's one, too. So it didn't bother me that much. At first it did, but like we were out Saturday night and ended up running into a former student who was at this [gay bar]. She's a good friend of ours, and she openly came out to me. She's openly gay, her family knows about it. All of her friends know about her. [Another teacher] was right there, too. We were all there in this gay bar together. So far as I can see, it's seems to be a closed mouth circle. They don't talk to anyone anymore than I talk, so I don't find that it's anything to worry about.

I am 45 years old. And I find myself categorized now as a lesbian physical education teacher. The first thing that comes to mind is that I personally am extremely comfortable with who I am which I guess is the most important thing. If I really think about the situation, and I realize that who I am, being a lesbian and then again being a lesbian physical education teacher, is not what you would call acceptable in our society by today's standards. However, I do feel that as long as people are not really confronted with the situation, as long as they trust who I am and what I do and how I act, really whether they know I'm a lesbian physical education teacher or not doesn't really make any difference. Even if they think they know I am, if they're comfortable with what I do, if I don't confront them with it, it doesn't really make any difference. I think that the fact that I'm comfortable with who I am is really what's most important. If I were to come out into this community and outwardly say I am a lesbian, I am teaching in the school, you have to accept me, I firmly believe that regardless of who I am and what I've done, the community would come down upon me.

Because I feel that way, I do hide, I hide who I am in some respects. I'd say I'm probably out of the closet as much as anybody could be without standing out there and just outwardly saying I am a lesbian.

Every place [Jeannie and I] go together. We're treated like a couple. It's Jeannie and Jody here or here. We're always together, so I'm assuming that people would then say, hey, we are a couple. I think that the people in the community ignore what we might do sexually. They just wipe that out of their heads, because that's important that they wipe it out. If I were to bring that to their attention, I believe that would be taboo. That would really raise cane in the community. Because then they would start thinking--as many people I still think do--that if you are a homosexual, you also are perverted in some way. People are getting much more educated on that, but I think that still persists. Therefore, if I were to outwardly come out with those facts, it would be a problem teaching in the community. As long as I don't outwardly stand up there and talk like that, I think that there's no problem here.

If my principal asked me outward, "Are you a lesbian?", I would say to him, "Do you think I am?" I would play the teacher act. I would put the question right back to him. I would keep beating around the bush until I played with him enough to find out whether or not I should answer. I wouldn't just come out and say, "Yes, I am," or "No, I'm not," without getting the inside into why he's [asking] that.

If I actually said no, I think that I would be secure enough in my own head that I would know that I had to. I had to say that to save my own neck. Just like everybody else, I need the job that I have. I have to support myself. So if it comes to a point that I have to say that, "No, I am not a lesbian. If you think that I am a lesbian, then you prove it," I think that's what I would do. I would maintain a comfortable feeling in it, because I know that that's what I would have to do to survive. And I know that I'm a survivor, so I would do it.

I would deny [being a lesbian] because of the existing fear of not knowing how people would really react if I stood up and openly said I was a lesbian. As long as nothing's said, I think people are comfortable. But if I openly came right out and said, "I am a lesbian," I don't know how they would react. Because nobody's ever done it around here. I would like to be able to feel that people that I know and trust and, in a sense, love in the community, that I work with, would support me. But I also know that in this world you can do many good things over and over again, but when you do a bad thing, you're nailed [for it]. That's just human nature, and it would probably happen here. If I was to take the whole thing and analyze it, I think if a person chooses to be a lesbian, whether they're a physical education teacher or whatever they are, I guess by today's standards the wise thing is to go along with your life. I don't think you should live in the closet in the respect that you should hide the fact that you may live or go out all the time with women. But I don't think you should stand up on a pedestal and announce it.

What is so unpublic about me now versus me as a married, physical education teacher? Before I was with a man, and I was a phys. ed. teacher. Now what I did with that man, nobody knows. Nobody knows what happened behind closed doors with that man. Now I live with a woman and nobody knows what happens behind closed doors between this woman and I. And I'm still the same person on the outside, so really what's the difference as far as me being public or not being public. Aren't I just as public now as I was before?

I think right now, knowing who I am and knowing that I am lesbian, I am a physical education teacher, I think that it is important to be a really good professional person, to be a warm person, and to be a good role model, so to speak. There are lots of young lesbian people out there who probably do need role models. [I am a] good teacher, [I am] professional, [I] try to be not real masculine but try to be [a woman] which [I am]. We all have tendencies in phys. ed., but you can be athletic and not be an unkept, male image kind of thing. I think it's an important thing for those people who might be young

lesbians, whether they know it or not, but also for just the general run of the mill people to see that you're a normal, professional, good person and [that you] might be a lesbian.

### Caren Williams

Caren, 32, has been teaching for 10 years and is currently teaching at an urban high school. She is black, was married for three years, and had her first lesbian relationship six years ago.

[In my school] I'm pretty isolated. I've isolated myself from the rest of the faculty. I teach high school now, so the phys. ed. department is a separate building from the academic. And there are three gays out of five in my office. So, I've pretty much stayed there in my office, and I don't associate with anybody else in the school.

I was [at the junior high] for five years. And it was like a really tight knit group of people, 'cause there weren't that many faculty there, and we were pretty close. When I first started there, I was really going to different social events with all these teachers. As I found out that I was gay, then I just stopped going to a lot of the social events.

Every Friday, everybody [would] go to the [bar], all these teachers, and we'd just bitch and drink. I used to do that every week with those guys. And then it got into Saturday parties at different people's houses and Christmas parties and Thanksgiving parties, and they just thought of parties. We used to spend a lot of time together. And I just didn't do it anymore.

They kept asking me, "Why aren't you coming?" "I'm just tired." I started really coaching heavily, and I used that as an excuse. I'd try and come, but it was just like [I'd] get there and then leave within an hour.

I wasn't comfortable anymore. The people were into the same things that they were into, joking with the girls and saying jokes about sex and everything, but I couldn't deal with it, so I just stopped going.

It's pretty much a black out for me those last couple years before I became a lesbian. The things that I was going through with my husband were so overwhelming that I didn't think of anything else. I can see the things that happened with him, but I can't see anything else that happened in school. At the end of my last year at the junior high, I met this teacher [Debbie] at [the high school] who became my lover. Then I went to the high school and that first year was probably the worst year of my teaching.

She had me in left field somewhere. Because I was in a relationship, and I wasn't. So it was pretty crazy. I was crying everyday in school. The first year I went to the high school, I had a semi-relationship with her. The second year was the bad year that I was crying everyday because of that relationship.

We had talked a lot about it and that we were going to just lead our normal teaching day. And that was fine for the first year and then when all these problems were happening, it didn't work out like that 'cause when I saw her, I just cried. So people thought there was something wrong and there was. But it was hard. I'd drag myself to school. I think I stayed out of school many more days than I've ever, but it was a real bad year.

I knew no one outside the p.e. department. No one at all. It's just over the past couple of years that I've gone to like human relations events that I've met other people. But I don't really know anybody other than the phys. ed. department.

There's about 3,000 students and the phys. ed. facility is one building and the academic facility is over here. The design of the building was set up to keep teachers apart. Everybody has their little cubby hole someplace, faculty rooms all over the place. So there's no central meeting place except for the cafeteria, and most people don't eat in

the cafeteria, so we're pretty spread out. I haven't even seen some of the people that teach there.

I'm the only Black woman in phys. ed. in the district. It's really hard. I really don't associate with any other Black people in the school. I went to school with one girl that teaches health on the other side, and she's really into drinking, men. And the other ones are either bourgeoisie or Black power, and I don't fit into either one of those. So I guess I'm not too much into the Black faculty.

There's six [women p.e. teachers. Lesley, Ellen, Ruth, Debbie, Rita, and myself.] Lesley is probably my best [contact]. She's taught there for four years. She's the other gay person in the office. And I associate with her outside of school and in school. But we're just like a twosome in the building. We do things together, and we eat lunch together, we do everything together. And the kids know us for being together. We're the crazies in the office. We do crazy things.

Five women get along really good. We share, and we cover each other's classes, the five of us. Nobody talks to Debbie, and she usually has her back to all of us when we're joking and having a good time. So other than Debbie, it's good. We have a good time.

I had Ellen and her husband over to dinner over here. In the office, I was talking about my life, and I just had to lie about a lot of things, and I was tired of it. Like for example, I told her that I own this house with Ann, [my partner]. And finally I said I don't own this house. This is Ann's house. I just got tired 'cause she used to say to me, "Aren't you taking this off the taxes?" Finally I said I'm not doing this shit no more, so I just told her. I brought her over here, and I told her, "I'm gay." And she said, "Yeah, I kind of figured." And so it's pretty open. Lesley hasn't come out to her, and I know she knows that Lesley is. But it's fine, but we don't talk about anything when Ruth and Rita are around. I really wouldn't want Ruth to know about my life. I'm sure it would be out there in the headlines. [With] Ruth, I lie.

I used to lie a lot [when I first was at the high school]. I didn't really talk about my life other than with Lesley when we would eat lunch together. I didn't say much of anything. Or if we talked about anything, we would be out of the office in the locker room talking to each other. But I didn't really say much in the office at all. When I was going through that stuff with Debbie, I used to talk to [Lesley] all the time. She helped me move out of her house, so she knew. And I lived with Lesley for about a month while I got out of that situation. So she knew a lot about my life, and we talked a lot, but not when anybody else was around.

Some of the kids in my class would say, "God, if I ever get Miss Shell (Debbie) next year, that lesbian, I'd transfer out." And I've said that to Ruth [that] the kids talk like that about Debbie. And Ruth says, "Well, I don't let it go on in my class. I just tell them to shut up and discuss it some other place." And I do the same thing, but I'm not for Debbie, but I'm not against her. I'm for equal rights. I talk about everybody having their own preference. Who cares what she is? So Ruth shuts it off, and I talk about it. It's okay to be Black, it's okay to be a lesbian. If that's what you got to do, then that's your life. As long as it doesn't affect me, then life goes on. So I think my relationship with the kids is a lot different than Ruth's.

I had [a] kid that was on my team a couple years ago that came to me, and she said she had something really important to talk to me about, and she didn't know if she could tell me. And I said, "Well, what is it?" And she wouldn't tell me, and so I said, "Well, is it about being gay?" She said, "Yeah, how did you know?" And I just talked to her a lot about it.

We weren't talking about her. We were talking about gay in general. So I just told her how I felt about people and being different. It doesn't make a difference to me. She was on my team, and she started dropping out and not coming to school. Then I found out that she had moved out of her house. And she was living with this girl. So this kid invited me to a party, and I went over to this party with Ann. And her mother was there,

and I talked to her mother a little about me. I didn't say anything about being gay. I didn't say anything about gay. I knew that most of the people there were gay, but I didn't mention anything about anything.

Her mother didn't really confront me about anything, but I don't know what I would have done if her mother did. I probably would of had a heart attack.

She was a really fine athlete, and I wanted to try and keep her in school. But she really couldn't, she was so out. The kids were saying things to her about her being a dyke. She wore muscle T-shirts, and you don't do that at [city] high. If you're different, you stay with your little group and you're fine. But just don't go making waves. And she was trying to make too many waves. She couldn't stand the pressure, and she dropped out.

I had another kid that I met in [the gay] bar. And me and Lesley were in there at the same time. [Lesley] came over to me. "Caren, look." So we all got under the table and [discussed] what we were going to do. We came back out from under the table, and Lesley was going to leave, and I said, "She's seen us in here." Lesley was up on the dance floor going crazy. So I said, "Well, what are we going to do?" So we just sat there, paranoid. Then the girl came over and spoke to us. And we didn't say anything. We just said hi.

I really can't talk to those kids, the ones that are just out of school and are into the bar scene. I can't talk to them, because they're coming back to school. And I don't want those kids to know about my life. I'm already in discussion in the hall. But there's another kid that I had on my team. She came back about a week ago, and we talked a little bit, and I keep telling her that she has my [phone] number. She must be out of school probably four years. And she's got my number, and I keep telling her, 'cause I know she's gay, "Give me a call." Her I would talk to because I know her, and I know she's not into this kiddy stuff, and she doesn't drink, and she doesn't frequent the bars. I think that I can trust her. But the other kids, they're into drinking and drugs.

A couple of weeks ago there was a rumor going around. One of the kids came, "Miss Williams, do you know what the new rumor is going around school about you?" I said, "No, what is it?" "Well, supposedly, Kristen put her arm on your knee," implying being gay. I said, "Really?" So I brought the kid [Barb] in and asked her what was going on out there. "It wasn't me, Miss Williams." I have a couple favorite kids that I took camping last year. And I told the two of them about what happened, and they went out there, "Let's go. We're going to get [her]."

I wanted them to know what was going on out there with me. And they were good. They were really protective of me. They don't want anybody to say anything about me that's going to be negative out there. I don't know what they did, but they found out the rumor that came back and told me that it wasn't Barb that said it. It was somebody else who said it. They always dig.

Like Tara, she asked me if I heard of the [gay bar], did I ever go in there. And I never think quick, but I said, "No, I hang out at the [straight bar] all the time." And so that just went by its wayside.

I probably wouldn't have the rapport that I have [if students knew I'm a lesbian]. I'm pretty close to the kids, and they come and tell me their stories. I think that the paranoia that I've heard in the halls about lesbians would really alienate them from me. It wouldn't be the same teaching experience that I have now. 'Cause my kids I'm pretty close to and my basketball kids, I'm pretty close to them. We talk about just about everything, except for being gay. They don't question me about it, but I just think that the kids, the older kids that are pretty mature might, but still, I don't feel that good about them even knowing anything.

When I was taking the kids home from a college game, I met a girl on the street that I knew, but she was really gay. I mean like the ultimate dyke. And she said, "Hi, Caren." And she came over to the car, and I'm saying, oh, Christ, let me out of here. It happened that she lived next door to one of the kids that I was driving home. [This kid] said to me

later on, "Miss Williams, I saw that girl kissing a white girl out on the corner." I said, oh, my God. I said, "Really? I don't really know her very well, but I just know her to say hi." And I talked about how I really didn't like how she carried herself around. So I really explained to the kids about that and didn't really get into the gay stuff.

I wanted to drive away right quick. I felt really horrible, like I knew this person that was really gay. I felt this is giving away my life here. But I just told them that I didn't know her that well. I just knew her from conferences. I knew that she was a carpenter, and I thought about talking to her at one time about learning her trade. Other than that, I didn't know the woman. So I don't know what they thought.

I guess I don't put the two words together, lesbian and p.e. teacher. Because it means not having a job if I put [them] together, if I was out. My lesbian life is separate. I've kept it and I'm trying to keep it very separate from my teaching. It's getting harder and harder. For example, I went to a lesbian's Alcohol Anonymous meeting, and a present student was there. Here you're supposed to go in and talk and feel good about yourself. Well, I didn't feel good at all. The minute I came into the door, I froze. When I was supposed to speak, I said, "Well, my name is Caren, and I'd like to listen." And that's all I said for the whole night. You're supposed to admit that you're an alcoholic, and, no, I just sat there and listened.

I wasn't going to stay, but a friend of mine talked me into it and said that she would say something out loud so that it wouldn't look like I was a lesbian in that meeting. [She] said to someone that a friend (meaning me) had driven her to this meeting, loud enough so everybody could hear, so that the girl didn't think I was coming to this meeting. So, I don't know if I'll go back.

I'd rather for [this student] to know that I'm an alcoholic than a lesbian. But I don't feel all that great about anybody knowing anything about me.

Kids, they like to talk. And rumors start and no matter what it was, it's not going to be the same story that it was when it began. So, the less they have to talk about, the

better it is. That's what I figure. Like there was a rumor around two weeks ago that I was pregnant. I don't mind [that], but when they start saying stories around that I'm a lesbian, I get worried. I get paranoid. It's okay to have a baby and be a single parent in that school, because a teacher did that last year. And I talked to her about it, and she never got any flack about it, nobody said anything to her. But if you're a lesbian in that school, they'd surely get you out of [City] High. They'd drop you right down where you weren't too visible.

[If confronted by an administrator about being a lesbian] I'd say, "Yeah, so?" I'd have to know why, "Is there a reason for you questioning my sexual preference, I want to know the reasons." Then I'd have to take it from there. 'Cause unless they have something that I've done, like if I've been involved with a kid, there's really nothing they can do, because I do my job. And I would fight. Ann tells me all the time, "It's going to happen sooner or later." I really dread it happening, but what could they really do? I'm a good teacher. The only thing they could do would probably get me out of [City] High school so that I wasn't visible. Plus I'm the only Black woman phys. ed. teacher in the district. So I'm in a pretty powerful position. I don't think they could do very much, but make me unhappy.

[Being a lesbian] does affect my teaching somewhat, but I don't really think it does too much. Like for example, I sit on my bench in the locker room. Since I've been a lesbian, when they're changing, I turn my back. I know I've done that. When I touch a kid on the rings in the wrong place, it snaps me back into reality, but during the day, it just doesn't affect my life.

I've got lots of stuff I've got to work on that I just put by the wayside, because I felt really bad about what a lot of people said about me or what they felt about me being a Black woman and a phys. ed. person, or whatever. I know I've squashed a lot of things. They're coming up now.

I'm the kind of person that personalizes a lot of things. If some of my white students were calling these kids "niggers," I'd take that really personal. But if they were really just calling people "lesbians," I would go over and talk to them in a calm sort of kind of way. Where I wouldn't tolerate people calling Black people "nigger."

I feel discriminated against because I'm a lesbian, but the whole thing is me being Black. My whole life is me being Black. Being discriminated against for my whole life. All Blacks being discriminated against, so that's a priority, and then second comes a lesbian. I'm in a Black lesbian group, and we've been trying to look at that. Where I think white women that are in the political movement are more oriented as being lesbians first and then white women next. Well, I'm Black first, and I'm lesbian second. It's really different for a Black woman being a lesbian than it is for a white woman being a lesbian. And I'm just finding out all about that. I knew it was there, but I'm learning.

I know I've been Black all my life and even though, I haven't put myself in the position to be involved with the Black power people, I've still been on the periphery, and I've really experienced a lot of things around that, so it's still inside of me. Where I've been a lesbian for six years now, so it's not high a priority. Maybe that's not the word, priority, but it's not inbreed or something. I'm learning about the stereotypes of lesbians and all the things that are done to lesbians. I know what's done to Black people, and I've known that all my life.

[Being a lesbian is] not a struggle right now. It's not overpowering as it is being Black. And that's about all I can say. It's not that major. I don't know if it will be later on in life, but I doubt if it will, because I'm Black and that's a real struggle, being in the professional world.

My life is separated from my professional life, and I don't care for those people to know anything about my life. I don't believe there are people in that building that are well enough to even talk to me with their homophobia and prejudice and everything else. I just don't think those people are there. Now maybe they are. Maybe I haven't put

myself out there, but I feel fine with what I'm doing, staying in my office and eating with my lesbian buddy and having a good time. It's all I need. I don't need those people. I don't really think that your personal life should be really intermingled with it.

### Jackie Thompson

Jackie is 45 years old and has been teaching at the same suburban high school for over 20 years. She is white, and her first lesbian relationship occurred when she was in college.

I started teaching in 1963. I got the job at the high school I'm still at. My first two years I was just trying to fit myself in as a human being into the school system and learn my job and how to relate to high school kids on a daily basis. I was just really enmeshed in physical education, so for two years I really didn't think about myself as a lesbian and a physical education teacher. I was just a phys. ed. teacher, and that was it.

The end of my first year of teaching turned out to be okay, but I was very involved with this guy who I was very friendly with. Straight guy. We would go out on occasion, but it was just like dinner dates, because he really wasn't that interested in me, and I certainly wasn't in him. Then I guess everyone just got caught up with the politics of the times. The war in Nam. Everybody was getting involved with the peace movement or the women's movement, and that was it. The women's movement--it was like an explosion. It was wonderful. I started reading whatever I could find. There were no women's bookstores. There was a bookstore that carried regular books, filthy men's magazines, and the Ladder [a lesbian publication]. And I started reading [it], and I really thought this is where I want to be. I wish this had happened 10 years ago.

And then in, it must have been '70. I hadn't come out to anybody at school at all. We have a course at school, like an outward bound course, and they would bring in outward bound instructors. Well, this instructor came in. She was hanging out watching my

basketball practices. And we started talking. She came over to my house and said she was gay, and I said, "Well, I'm gay, too." And she said, "Oh, you know so and so in your department's gay, too." And I didn't know it. And I said, "Oh, wow, this is neat." So, I finally went downstairs to her office and said to the person, "I'm glad to find out there's a sister here." So I finally came out to somebody in my department. Wow, it was great.

In 1971 we had several lesbians working in the department. At one point, half of the department was lesbian. We were always constantly talking about issues affecting lesbians in the office. Kind of an undertone so nobody could hear. It was really nice to have other women to talk to in the office that felt the same way you did politically.

All through my teaching I was very careful not to touch kids. I'm still am very careful touching kids. It's just a hang up I have because of being a lesbian touching girls. I'm just very leery of it. I was always concerned about kids thinking I was gay. It was never a big thing, because I figured they'd assumed I was not, because I didn't think that was a concern of theirs. And it really wasn't. It was never an issue with any of kids until I'd say the beginning of the '70s when everybody was a "fag." Boys, girls are "fags." From that, kids started, "He's a homo. That kid's a fag." Kids became aware in the '70s of maybe they were gay or maybe that kid sitting next to me is. It became an issue in the '70s like everything else. Kids still put other kids down by calling them a fag, whether it's a boy or a girl.

I never wondered really what the kids thought about me or not until I started coaching softball. When I started coaching softball, the first couple of years, one kid in particular was always starting rumors about everybody on the team. Unbeknownst to me, she was starting a rumor about me that I was a lesbian and had been seen at all the bars. That's the middle '70s. That's when I started worrying and thinking more about do these kids know? Obviously, they're talking. And it became more of an issue with me. I was always careful to change my pronouns from "she" to "he" or "we" when talking about

myself and doing something. If I was playing softball on the weekends, if I was doing anything, "he and I" went thus and such a place.

[When I did that,] I cringed to myself. Why the hell am I doing this? Why do I have to hide this? What the hell does this have to do with my ability to teach? It bothered me. We all did this, and I'm sure we all still do. Because I don't want any interaction with these kids about, "Oh, she is living with another woman," or "She's doing things with another woman." You don't need it. It's nobody's business at all what we do after school hours. I don't see any reason for a particular group of kids to know more about you than what you do as a coach and teacher. Your private life from three o'clock on is your private life. That is a big ball of wax that I prefer not to let everyone in on. However, it happened. When I was coaching, the kids found out. I don't know how. Terry [another lesbian PE teacher] and I both think through the ventilating system. There's a vent in my office, and it goes right into one of the girls' rooms. And I quit coaching because of it, actually. It was just mind boggling. They knew all about me.

It was a really heavy thing. And I was the one who didn't want kids to know. I figured it wasn't any of their business and boy, they made it their business.

It bothered me that my whole team knew I was gay. Through an assumption. It annoyed me. It upset me. It made me irate depending on my mood in the day that a body of people could know about my private life. They had made an assumption, which was a fact, that I was a lesbian. They all knew this. I might have been fearful that someone was going to do something with it. It bothered me mostly that, damn it, all these kids knew about what I did at home and made assumptions from that. I don't think I was really in fear of repercussions, like getting my car smashed or "lezzie" written all over my house. But it was just I didn't like my private life being tampered with and known.

I got out of coaching because of the just unbelievable mess that this one kid [who started the rumors] had 'caused. It was like The Children's Hour, Lillian Hellman's book. One kid can just really botch up somebody's life. It was a contained thing with the

softball team of 14 kids, and when I stopped teaching that particular June and the kids that were on the team had graduated, it seemed to just diffuse itself. It was gone. Never again to rear it's ugly head, I hope.

I [have] bumped into quite a few young ladies [at a gay bar] who I had in high school. [They] said, "I wish I could have come to you in high school, because I needed to talk to you or Terry about being lesbian because I was a lesbian in high school. I needed some support." So, some kids must have known. Maybe it is just the fact that I'm a phys. ed. teacher. You know, the assumption that all women phys. ed. teachers are gay unless you had little children running around.

It's something that wasn't ingrained in my head, but once I was in college, everyone that I went to school with assumed all our professors were [lesbians]. When I was a sophomore we had a big sister-little sister thing. You were in charge of a freshman when you're a sophomore. You kind of show her around the campus, and if she has questions or problems, you're there. And my freshman sister who was in physical education came to me one day after like four months of college and said to me, "I'm concerned. I don't know what to do." She said, "I found out that you're a lesbian." And I said, "Who told you that?" And she said, "Oh, so and so." And I said, "Well, let me debunk that. I'm not." I wasn't actively pursuing being lesbian. But I thought I'm not about to open up to this person. Here it is 1961 or '62. I said, "I can't believe it. I think everybody thinks that." She said, "Everyone thinks everybody else is. All the physical education teachers, students are [gay]." I think it's because a lot of women who are in physical education are not married. Whether by choice, good luck, bad luck, or because of their own careers and not wishing to get married and wind up in the role of wife, mother, nose wiper, etc., I think that's how it's kind of perpetuated. And women who are in physical education are athletes, and athletes must be lesbians. I think that's what men do. If a woman doesn't fit into a stereotypical role of being a real feminine

type of person, they automatically assume, "Well, she's not feminine. She doesn't hang around with men. She's not married. She's got to be a lesbian."

My senior year in high school I had very long hair. And I had worked with summer playgrounds with two men, and we took our kids swimming at this outdoor pool. At the close of the summer, I told them I was going into physical education. And [one of them] said, "Oh, don't cut your hair like the rest of them." I looked at him like I didn't understand. "Don't cut your hair." I still don't understand. I guess we've been stigmatized. Physical education equals lesbians.

I never made that assumption when I was in high school, but I think a lot of kids do make that automatic assumption. Or the parents make that assumption.

I remember this one kid who was in the shower. We used to require showers in the '60s. "You will take gym. You will sweat, and you will take a shower." I didn't really care if the kids smelled or not. That's his or her problem. But we made them take showers, which none of them did. They just pulled their bra straps down, put their towel around them and walked in the shower, and then they checked off their name, and they just didn't smell any better, but we did our job. We did stupid things back then. Anyway, there was a young lady, and she did take a shower, but one of my colleagues overheard her say [to a friend of hers], "They make us take showers so they can look at us. They're all queer." Geez, now who told her that? Somebody must have told her that because it didn't just pop into the kid's head, did it? Most of our ideas come from our parents or from our peers, but our peers got those questions and those wise remarks from someplace.

I had another student, [Jill]. I had on a T-shirt one day, a human relations type of T-shirt. The kid said to me something about, "Oh, yeah, homosexuals need rights, too." I don't know what prompted that outpour while I had on this particular T-shirt. "A day without human rights is a day without sunshine." But she associated it with

homosexuals. I had never worn a pink triangle on my sleeve or anything. But Jill made that assumption.

That hasn't happened in a long while either, because that was the '70s. After I got out of coaching, I very seldom think about being a lesbian and phys. ed. teacher and how I'm relating to kids. It just doesn't seem to be a burning issue. It is with kids. Kids are concerned about their sexuality. They're still calling each other "fag."

At one point there were 10 lesbian and gay teachers at the high school. There are five or six now. The school community and the school committee are, I think, aware of the fact that there are going to be gay people in the building. Teachers, students, and that's O.K. with the school committee. I don't think there will ever be a witch hunt. I'm not in fear of my job. I just don't want other faculty members to know this. Not because they could use it as a leverage tool, it's my private life.

I once told one of the women I teach with that I was gay, and she was kind of, "Uggh, oh, God, you're going to hell. I know you are." I don't even know why I told her. I have no idea to this day why I opened my mouth, but I did. Sometimes your mouth just opens and the wrong things tumble out. The wrong thing tumbled out. So I'm just more careful.

It was the middle '70s. I was having a conversation with her, and I don't even know what we were discussing. But I said almost off-handedly, "Oh, and by the way, I'm gay." Not in those precise words but near to. After I said it, [I] was like, "You big dummy. Why'd the hell you even say that?" It had no real bearing on our conversation. There was no vital need to tell her, but it slithered out. If I could retract my words and stuff them back in my mouth, I would have, but couldn't.

She was flabbergasted. She was taken back on her heels, and she didn't know how to respond. And it was like I was trying to hide under a bed fast. Just dive under there and stay there and pretend the real world did not exist.

When I first came out to the whole world, I had to write several letters to several friends and tell them I was a lesbian. I thought there was a need then, but there was no need to even say anything to her. It just [was] a mistake that I wish I had not made.

I am very friendly with a lot of teachers in that school. Those that are gay know that I am gay, but the straight teachers do not. I don't socialize with most people in the high school. They have a couple of faculty parties a year. I don't do that.

I just never have. I don't enjoy parties, because the faculty parties are large parties. There's a phony atmosphere there, and I don't much belong to that. I would prefer being home or being with gay people. I have to pretend that I'm straight most of the day, and I just don't like to have to put on airs, and that's what you have to do sometimes at these parties.

You can't be the person you really want to be. On a day to day basis, I talk to a lot of teachers. We joke, and we josh about educational things but never really personal things, unless a particular teacher is a lesbian or a gay man. Once I'm home after 3 o'clock, I really lead a different life than how I act and react at the high school.

Most of the faculty make the assumption that everybody else is straight. They might assume that I'm gay, but they don't know that. Today I was talking with the woman who is the receptionist. She's a really nice person. We've been buddies for years. And she said, "Are you coming to my party?" She's having this big faculty get together, and I said, "Gosh, I'm not." And she said, "Who are you going out with now?" "Nobody, that's the problem." I wish I could have said to her, "Well, my lover and I really can't come because we're going to a party elsewhere." Or I should have said, "I can't come. I'm busy."

Things like that happen all the time. I work out in the mornings. We have a really nice weight room. And I keep the doors open so you get heat from the room for the first class at 8 o'clock. I'm lifting some weights, and the custodians will walk through. It's a nice short cut for them. This fellow, Charlie, is always saying, "What are you building

up muscles for? Your boyfriend won't like them." And I said, "Yes, he does." It's that banter that has to occur just to keep things going.

I have to do it. It's just a natural response. I don't even think about it. It's just, boom. You have to be quick. I just do it.

My private life is my private life. And I don't want to have to answer more questions or add to someone's "Is she or isn't she [a lesbian]?" They can say all they want as long as they don't ask questions. I don't really feel like trying to educate them, I guess. Even though they're an accepting bunch, I'm not about to go [tell anybody]. I might have 10 years ago, but I'm not about to now.

Initially I just wanted to say this is foolish. Why should I have to keep secrets from anybody? It's something that you just do. I don't like it doing it. I don't like being secretive. I think I'm a very honest person basically, and I would like people to understand the way I live, but I can't for fear of being chastised in some degree. Losing my job, possibly. I don't think so at that school. But just losing some contact because I don't think some people could handle it. I don't like keeping secrets, but it's so much a part of me--changing pronouns, changing "we" to "I," making sure like back in the '70s if I went on a march, if there was a TV camera, I was way the hell away from it. When straight people come over [to my home], making sure that all my lesbian books were elsewhere. I don't like to live like that. But it's so much a part of me now, it's second nature.

It has to be done. People don't want to hear certain things. People don't want to see certain things. If they prefer not to see it, and they mean enough to me, I'll not show them certain things that I do. If they want to know, they will ask. I'm not about to go broadcasting it. But I don't like hiding things from people, from my family, from my friends who are my students. But sometimes you just can't make a blanket statement. It's like you just can't go around pouring hot water on people, because they can't accept

certain things. They don't know how to accept it, so they've got to be educated, but I can't educate them. It's kind of a circular problem.

I've lost friends because I've been gay, or because people have found out that I was gay. It depends on the individual person. People may just react to me differently, be stand-offish, be a little more cold. Or they maybe say, "Oh, well, that's wonderful." I don't know. But I'm sure not about to find out. I have worked with a lot of people for 23 years and I don't know what they really think, but they like me just for being the surface person.

But as far as me, how do I feel about being gay? Well, I don't think being in physical education and being a lesbian has hampered me in pursuing my career at all. I don't think it's different than being a straight physical education teacher, really. Except that I can't talk about my kids like some of my co-workers can. I talk about my dogs a lot. I guess what I would like to be able to do is to be more open as a lesbian physical education teacher with my students to dispel any myths that they have. That would be nice so that they could leave high school and say, "Gee, I knew a physical education teacher and yes, she was a lesbian like they all are. But she was a normal person, and we got along fine, and I related well to her." And maybe through me, they learn how to handle other gay people that they are going to encounter in their lifetime. That bothers me that I'm not able to do that. The straight married teachers, especially [those] who have children, teachers will ask them how their kids are and that kind of thing. And kids know nothing about my private life which is O.K. But it would be nice if they could know something about what it is to be gay. The kids really have no one to turn to.

I guess just having [kept my personal and professional lives separate] for so long that it doesn't bother me unless an incident arises that I just want to say, "Shit. here I am, and I can't tell anybody, and I've got to because what I did with my housemate this past weekend was so amazing, and it was just wonderful. And I can't tell anybody." You just have to adjust to it. I guess it's like, what else can you do? I would never want to

leave teaching for the reason [that] I can't be totally honest. I like my job too much. I really do. And I like the school. I guess I don't let it get to me. I think I did at one time, it got to me more, but as I've gotten older, it's like, well, it's there. I have to be a split personality.

[It] must be really nice to be able to go into work, and all the cards are on the table. Everybody knows what your lifestyle is, and you can tell stories about what you and your lover did. It would be nice, I would love to be able to do that, but it's not feasible now on the high school level in the teaching field without accepting some consequences, and I don't want the consequences. Even though there'd be no witch hunt at the high school, I don't want some parent being upset or not wanting their kids in my gym class. I don't want fingers being pointed at me. So I guess I'll be secretive, and I'll live two lives, rather than have to cope with people pointing fingers. Until people can become educated and understand that homosexuality is an O.K. thing, I guess I have to keep hiding.

[Being a lesbian is] loving another woman. Or that a woman is a focal point of your entire life. It's just fulfilling your wishes and desires with and through another woman. And that's kind of hard to do sometimes in a society that doesn't like that. It's hard, but it's wonderful. Loving someone is a wonderful experience. It's just a very, very nice, warm feeling that I don't think I would, could ever have with a man. There wouldn't be the equality, there wouldn't be the warmth, the sharing. I just don't think there's that intimacy that women have together. Women together just, there's a bond there that heterosexuals don't have. It's a matter of nurturance and men don't nurture. I guess they could be taught to nurture, but they're not.

I think I've always had a hostility about, not men--I like men. I like boys. I don't like the privileges they have. And I think it's been burning inside of me for years. When the '70s hit and the women's movement, it was like, "Right on sister." It was all these things I was upset about as a child, I was able to talk about, and we could do something, or so we thought. I guess we've made some strides. I think I was very conservative in my

teaching, but outside I was just kind of a crazy dyke. I was right on. We're going to change the world. I used to have all sorts of buttons everywhere. It just felt so good to be able to come out and to talk about those things we had believed in all your life but weren't really aware of. But I would get to school and just kind of put on my gym clothes and be a different person.

I'm just a little, happy suburban lesbian with my lover and my house and my three dogs. Politically I've changed. I've grown up. I don't do bars. I don't belong to any faction or splinter group off another group of another group. Ninety-nine percent of our friends are lesbians. One percent are gay males.

I'm very, very happy. And if being a lesbian is caused by (a) a virus, (b) a hormonal problem, or [c] an environmental condition caused by your parents, I really don't care who's caused it, if anybody caused it, or if it's good or bad. I like it. It's not a condition to me, it's me. I function at my job as a physical education teacher, and I think very well, and I'm very happy with my job. And if I was straight, I'd be very happy in my job, too. Because sometimes I don't think being a lesbian physical education teacher is any different on the top. Underneath it is.

Generally speaking, there's no difference between a straight and a lesbian physical education teacher. We do the same things. It's the undercurrents that are different. Like Maryann can bring her kid to school. She can bring her husband to school. The other night she was telling her kids that she didn't get any sleep because Sara was sleeping between she and her husband. I couldn't say, "I didn't get any sleep because I had two [dogs] asleep in my bed between me and my lover." That's being silly, but little undercurrents. Maryann and I are the same, you know, she's straight, I'm gay, but we teach physical education. We teach the same thing. We do them about equally. We have the same philosophy of teaching, but underneath, we're different. That's all.

I never really said to myself, I'm having a hard time dealing with teaching kids because I'm a lesbian, or I'm really terribly worried about people finding out, or I can't

do this dual role of going to school and coming home and then being another person. I just never had a terribly difficult time with it. Except for minor incidences. When someone says something, "Well, what did you do this weekend?" And I'd have to cringe and go, "Oh, gee, I didn't do anything," or, "we did," or "he and I." I guess I just kind of accepted [it]. I guess I'm too accepting. I like my lifestyle. I like myself. I like being a lesbian, and it's been me for so many years. I'm just sorry that I can't be a better role model for other lesbian kids in the high school. And I don't know really what to do about it. I think most of the women I know that are lesbian and who are in physical education whether they're on the college level or the high school level or the elementary level are pretty darn happy people and like teaching kids. I think all of them would say they don't like having to split their lives, but they all do. They've all kind of accepted [it]. It doesn't mean that it's right just because you accept it. But what else does one do?

### Alice Baker

**Alice has been teaching in the same suburban school system for 15 years. She is white, 36 years old, and was 16 years old when she had her first lesbian relationship.**

I never really thought about being a lesbian and connecting it with the teaching. I made my decision to become a teacher. I applied to four or five places. I was accepted at three. And I chose [this town] because they were opening a new high school, and I had the opportunity to start brand new in a junior high school.

Being younger and being single, obviously there's no big deal. So at the junior high school, I was there five years, I really never had a problem with being single. I lived with Gail [my partner] who taught in the same system. But of course, she got married. I was at the high school then. So, of course that played a major role in no one really thinking too much of [me being single].

[The high school is] where I probably first encountered any confrontations [about being gay]. And they were totally with [David Silvers, the director of p.e.] who I personally feel has a problem with women that succeed. Several years ago he even went to the point of confronting two parents. It was a year where several students had come out [as being gay]. It was a known fact in school. And it became very difficult for those students. He talked to [two mothers] and said that their daughters were next on my "hit list." Both of those parents came to me and told me what he said and that they couldn't even believe it and that I should do something about it. Of course, you panic, you don't know quite what to do. But I finally decided that this was ridiculous. So I went to the principal and the vice principal. The vice principal is younger and kind of is on my side. The principal was an older man. He just retired last year. And he had a real difficult time even talking about it. But I explained the situation. I said, "He's speaking to parents about me. It is totally unprofessional, aside from the fact of being defamation of character and slanderous." I said, "The man is really asking for trouble." So the vice principal said to me, "Well, you have two options. You can sit there and take it or you can do something about it." He said, "Personally, I think you should do something about it." So I called [David] in, and I just let it all out. I had to evade most of the issues, but I said, "Two parents have come to me. Evidently, you spoke to them recently. You are talking about me behind my back, about my personal life. Whether it is true or not is not the point." And so we talked about it for a few minutes. I said, "There's some things that I disagree with you that you do." I said, "But I certainly don't go talking to parents behind your back about it." I said, "We better come to an agreement here, because if we don't, I can assure you that you will be hearing from a lawyer." So I really kind of laid it on the table. He backed right down.

I think that [some students' parents] know [that I'm gay]. After Gail got married, then all of a sudden Jan came into the picture, so I mean I have never told a parent, "Yes, I am [a lesbian]." They have never asked. [I] can see them saying, "Well, even if you

are, Alice, that's not the point." And [I] can see them saying that just by the way that they talk to [me]. "You just shouldn't let him do that to you, Alice. That's none of his business. Your personal life is yours," and they have said that over and over. So, it's almost like, "It doesn't really matter to me what you are, Alice."

One of the teachers, Larry Bass, my second year teaching at the high school, he's a good friend of mine, said to me once, "I saw you at that restaurant the other night with that kid." It was senior girl who was going for an abortion. It was a very traumatic affair, and I was very close to her. And I took her to supper one night, and we talked about it. Larry said to me the next day, "You know that girl that you were with at dinner last night." I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, David Silvers and Chuck Ryan were talking about you and her in the faculty room." I said, "What?" [I was] kind of incredulous. Here I was talking to the girl about a problem, and they're starting stories. Larry says, "Well, you know what it's probably about, right?" He had a hard time, too, saying it. And I said, "No." And he said, "Well, they think that maybe you two are, you know." So, I mean what do you say? You don't want the guy to go on, the poor guy was panicking, he really was. And I said, "Thank-you, Larry, for telling me that." So I went to the principal. And I said, "Well, I just want you to know what's going on. Just keep that in the back of your head, please, because," I said, "if anything ever comes up, I just want you to be aware of the fact of what's going on."

But, I panicked. I really did. I didn't know what to do, because at that time, I was afraid of David Silvers. He was my boss. And I also didn't know enough to shut my mouth at that time. It's just better with some people that you can't talk with, you should just shut up sometimes. And that took me five years to mature into. But, that's when I said, uh-oh, you're going up there with high school kids. You best watch your step. You best be careful.

There's nothing that I keep hidden from my kids except my real personal life. I play games with them. Last weekend I told them I was on a date. I was down at John's who is

my gay friend, but I told them I was on a date with John. You've got to play a little game. I have no intentions of my kids knowing that I'm gay. The ones that are [gay] and [that] come out to me do it really carefully and because they went to somebody else first and then said, "Ms. Baker, I need to talk to you." There hasn't been an open gay kid for two years now. I can see one coming now. But I do not go to the kid. There's no way, you shouldn't. That's their decision. I personally don't think I put any influence on them towards that life at all. I try very hard not to. That is their choice. It's a difficult life. If that's what they decide, then fine. I can work with them then, if that's what they want.

The kids will ask [me], "What did you do Saturday?" "Nothing, I shoveled [snow]." I don't tell them, "Oh, I went out to the gay bar." I might say, "Oh, I went out with a bunch of friends." I just don't make any allusion to being a lesbian. There's no need to even mention anything near it. It's a game, but it's unfortunately a game that has to be played. I just don't think you should discuss it or even get near it with students. If they're ready and they need to talk with someone, and they want to talk with you, they will make it a point to get it across to you somehow.

There are some things, you know the old expression that there are some white lies that sometimes you have to [tell] in order not to hurt people? If one of my kids said to me, "What did you do this weekend?" And I said, "I went to the gay bar with my friends." That could destroy that kid if I said that, which is too bad. I hate it. I wish that if my kids said that to me, I could say, "I went out with a bunch of my gay friends." But because of what society holds as supposedly right or wrong, if you said that, you could destroy kids. They would lose faith in you. And if telling them a white lie is going to save them from being hurt, I'd rather tell the white lie. It's not something that's going to hurt them. Telling them that I went out with John for a date isn't going to drastically change their lives. Unfortunately society dictates what is acceptable and non-acceptable behavior. And right now, being homosexual is not really an acceptable behavior.

Of course, my thing that I deal with is if a kid is gay or if a kid is coming out, do I discourage that? Do they think, "Geez, Miss Baker talks about dates. Maybe she has dates. Maybe she's not gay." But I haven't had that problem. A couple of my kids have said, "You didn't fool me when you were talking about John. Who are you kidding?" I kind of chuckled, so I guess maybe they did know that I was telling stories. I just think there are sometimes when you have to protect people from even the truth.

One funny incident [happened] with this girl Nina who was class president, and I was the class advisor. She spent a lot of time down in my office, doing class work. And one day, she's sitting at a desk, and I'm sitting at another desk doing my work and she says, "So, are you going out this weekend?" And I said, "I don't know." Now she's still looking down, and so am I. And she says, "Well, if you do go out this weekend, maybe you shouldn't go to P.J.'s," [which is a gay bar]. Slowly my head came up, and I just looked at her. I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, Bobbie's going, and she says she can get in." Bobbie was 16 years old at the time, a junior in high school. I just put my head back down and said, "Thank you, Nina." Evidently, [Bobbie] got herself a false I.D., so they let her in. But if I had gone down there and seen this kid, this kid has the biggest mouth in the whole world, and she's a jerk. And can't keep quiet. Those kind of students I avoid. And I make it a point to avoid [them] very much.

I spoke to Nina after that one day and she finally said to me, "I know." And I said, "Well, just keep it to yourself, lady, because, this job is kind of nice." She said, "I know. Don't worry."

I found out about the Diana [Lang] situation through the parents that were going to take her in. They came to me and said, "Look, we've got a problem. Diana is gay and her mother is throwing her out of the house, so we're going to take her in." About a couple of days later, Diana came to me and said, "I need to talk with you." And I said, "O.K. fine." And she said, "Well, I know about you." I said, "What do you mean you know about me?" "Well, I know you're gay. I need somebody to talk to." I said, "What do you mean you

know I'm gay?" And she said, "Oh, come on. Cut it out. I need to talk with you." So you close the door and say, "Alright, go ahead." I mean what are you going to say? But, again, it's totally depends on the kids. And I would say in the last 10 years that I've been teaching at the high school, 25 kids have been gay. And out of the 25, 23 of them have been extremely mature about the whole situation. But it was like a two, three year period when there were like 10 kids. It was crazy, but they were all very mature kids except for one. They all handled it well. Thank God. It's a situation where I could have been in trouble. But what do you do? They had no one to talk with.

I think if you're a good person, and you're a good teacher and a good coach and good in the sense of that they respect you, that they really care for you, I don't think it comes to play an important part that you are [gay]. If they found out that you are, I don't think that it would really matter. I know that's probably not true for a few people. That's my greatest fear I think that some parents would fall to the belief that you actually look in the locker room or maybe coaching, you're a little too friendly with the girls which just makes me so mad to even think about, but that's my greatest fear.

When they first hit you with, "Miss Baker, how old are you? Thirty-six? How come you're not married yet?" you wonder what's coming next, and it's always there. But you've got to handle each individual word or thing differently. Now if I had jumped to conclusions and got defensive, that kid knows. Maybe they would have said something, but if you can just kind of roll with it and handle it real easily. All they need is an answer. They're curious. I try not to panic, and there's been some times when it's been hairy. But there's always that thought in my mind that someone is going to say something to their parents. But I think you take those chances.

I think I was too aware of [being gay] at the beginning [of teaching]. Overly conscious all the time. Probably not saying anything about gays, about not laughing if it was a gay joke, about kids getting too close to you, touching you or you touching them. Over the years, the first couple of years especially, I came to the realization that you

have to be you. The way that I teach and the way that I act is not because I'm gay. It's because I'm me, and if you can't accept me for what I am, then don't accept me.

To me, it just happened that I became a P.E. teacher and I'm a lesbian. That's like saying there's a connection, I also ski, does that mean all teachers should be skiers? I like cheap wine. Does that mean that all P.E. teachers should like cheap wine? I almost don't find a connection. The only connection that I do find is because I went into P.E.

Maybe because of being athletic, you're going to find maybe many lesbians are athletes. I find many lesbians are athletes. There's a connection there and then of course, being athletic you go into P.E., so maybe there's a connection there. But I never really thought about it as a connection. I still don't actually. I try not to let my personal life interfere with my teaching. Whether it's morals or just my regular teaching, I try not to let my personal life be involved with my job at all. I went into P.E 'cause I love sports, and I went into P.E. because my high school teacher annoyed me. I decided to be a P.E. teacher in 7th grade. And I didn't come out until [the] end of 8th, 9th grade. Of course, I always knew I had feelings. I knew I was in love with my 7th grade P.E. teacher then. But, I don't know what the connection is for me.

I wish I could tell people more. I think being a teacher totally limits you. That's probably the biggest thing about teaching that bothers me the most. I wish I could just say, "I'm gay. Here I am. O.K. anyway, so where were we? I'm teaching square dance today." You just can't do that. I wish that it didn't make a difference. I wish people on the whole could look at people for who they are and how they are and not what they are.

I'd love to confide in Betsy [a heterosexual friend]. I just can't. I can't take the chance that one parent would cost me my job. I love my job too much. I enjoy my kids. I enjoy my job. It's surprising in 16 years that some parent hasn't said, "My daughter said you were in the locker room. What do you do, look at other girls?" I've often thought about it, what would you do, but I think that my character for the last 16 years

has spoken for itself. I think that the parents would support me, but I hate that the most. I just wish that we could tell people.

Why should people think less of me because I'm homosexual? I have a real hard time with that. I hate stupid people. What does [being homosexual] have to do with teaching? There are bad homosexual teachers just like there are bad straight teachers. I mean I've got two or three in my school that aren't worth the time they spend coming to school. They're bad teachers. What does homosexual have to do with being a teacher? What does homosexual have to do with anything? You're a human being. If you have the right moral values, you're not going to put them on other people anyway.

I think most people have come to the realization that probably I'm going to be an old maid school teacher. And, so most of the questions that I used to get hit with when I was in my mid-20s were the toughest. "Boy, Alice, you're 26 and you're not married, yet." By the time you're 36, they don't ask it anymore. But, what are you going to do until being a lesbian or being homosexual is accepted, which I really can't see that in the near future, especially teachers. People just feel that teachers have too much influence on children. If they would only realize that straight people influence children, too. And sometimes that's not good either, the way [most people] influence them, but they don't think that way. But there's a game that you have to play, and you're going to have to play it if you want to be a teacher, if you want to be a coach. When you're with children, they just assume that you're going to influence them improperly. There's a game we all have to play. It's a game, and it's a lie. You're being a hypocrite. But if you want your job, you probably best do that. I do hate it sometimes. I wish I could tell people. I just want to scream some days, but that's one of those inconveniences, I guess, that I'll have to put up with. It's too bad that it has to be that way, but it is.

I know I'm O.K. I don't have a problem with myself. If other people do, that's their problem. But I do get tired of it. And I've had some bad times like when Gail and I broke up. It was tough going to school every day. I had my own problems to worry about, and I

had nobody at school I could talk to. "What's [up] Alice? You're mopping around today." "Oh, my lover broke up with me, and now she's going to get married. I'm devastated, but I'm living." You couldn't say that to someone, and that hurts. That really hurts. You wish you could talk to people who are your friends. They are my friends. And you can't tell them some of your close secrets that you wish you could. That gets to you, but I know I'm O.K. I know what I do is right.

Being Black today is such an issue, and Black people themselves have brought to the attention that using the word "nigger" is demeaning and not acceptable. Whereas maybe, we as lesbians or we as homosexuals, we're making waves and we're making progress, that saying "gay" or saying "faggot" are not acceptable terms, but I think probably the biggest reason that homosexuals have not been able to make bigger strides in changing the views of being homosexual in America [is], I mean I'm not going to march. I can't. If I marched in [a] homosexual parade or a rally, and my picture was in the [city newspaper] the next night, I might be out of a job. Because society is so negative towards homosexuals being in certain fields of endeavors, you can't come out, therefore you can't campaign. Your teachers are your people that could really campaign. They're intelligent. They're the people that could maybe come across and do something.

What can I do without jeopardizing myself, my job? So we're in a real catch 22 situation, homosexuals. You can't fight for yourself, 'cause you can't say anything and yet, you not going to get anything until you can, until people start accepting you for what you are. You have to change so many people's views on what homosexuality is. I think I have maybe made some strides, and I think many people suspect that I am homosexual. And I think, hopefully, because I am a good person that maybe some of their views on homosexuality have changed. Maybe three parents have said, "She's probably gay, but she's pretty nice anyway. She's a good coach and good teacher." Maybe that has made some impression on some parents or some kids. And, maybe in some senses I have

helped, but not much, because I can't be open. I can't go out there and fight for what I really believe. And that bothers me a lot.

You can't go out there and rally for your cause or fight for your cause the way you'd like to. You're in quiet little bars in the cellar, so nobody will see you, nobody will know. And it's so sad. It's a real catch-22 issue.

If someone can't deal with the issue that I'm homosexual, that's their problem. But unfortunately, in society, that's easier said than done. Because it's everyone's problem. It's my problem, too, but I will try my best to deal with it.

## CHAPTER V

### COMMON THEMES

The participants are a diverse group of lesbian physical education teachers, yet, commonalities among them emerged from the interview data. The following description of these commonalities should not be interpreted as generalizations about all lesbian physical educators; rather, the intent is to develop an understanding of the teachers in this study by providing descriptive detail about the participant group as a whole. The following chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides background information about the participant group. The second section explores specific common themes in their experiences as lesbian physical educators, and the final section presents a conceptual model that illustrates the participants' meaning-making process as lesbian physical educators.

#### Section One: Background Information

Background information provides descriptive detail about the participant group. Seven categories of background information about the participant group are presented. The first six categories are included because they reveal commonalities relevant to the participants' identities as females, lesbians, and physical educators. The final one emphasizes the contextually bound uniqueness of their individual backgrounds. The seven categories are: (a) gender role information, (b) the early role of athletics, sports, and physical education in their lives, (c) reasons for becoming a physical education teacher, (d) early awareness about one's lesbian identity, (e) the nature of lesbian relationships, (f) self-acceptance of one's lesbian identity, and (g) themes unique to a single participant.

#### Gender Role Information

The participants often described themselves as tomboys who engaged in many non-traditional gender role activities as young children and adolescents. For most participants, their neighborhood friends were primarily, if not exclusively, boys. The

participants preferred playing ball to playing with dolls, doing yard work to doing housework. Many objected to the stereotypical female role to which they felt pressure to conform, saying they disliked wearing dresses, they were uncomfortable around girls who only talked about boys, and they disliked doing "girl" things. One participant said this about her early sense of gender roles:

Growing up, I didn't have very many people to play with, and I always played with my [older] brother and other boys in the neighborhood. I never played with any of the girls. I played cowboys and indians and war. I always played football and baseball. Every kind of sport you could play. I was very competitive with my brother being three years older than me. I always wanted to do things that he was doing. And I think because I was a girl that I was told you're not supposed to do that. Like [my father and brother] would plan to go on hunting trips. I would sit around with all the excitement and think, "Oh, wow, this is going to be fun." I'd love to go, but I never did, I never could go.

My father would go out and work in the barn to take care of the animals, and I always wanted to go out there with him. My mother would always say, "You would rather go out and shovel stuff out in the barn than be in the house." She would always be upset with me, because all the women in my family always liked to sew and knit and do all these things. That was what everybody did, and I guess what they were expected to do, and I was kind of a rebel in that respect that I didn't like to do that. (Jody)

The participants described their parents as fitting traditional gender roles, although one participant reported a role reversal in her family. She characterized her mother as assertive and independent and her father as sensitive and emotional. Another participant described her parents as equals sharing in family decisions. The majority of participants' mothers were homemakers. Of those who were not, one was professionally oriented, and two managed their own businesses. A few participants described their fathers as being protective of their "little girls," often forbidding them to play football or baseball; others, like Mona, were treated like their father's "son":

I was the apple of my father's eye. My father took me everywhere. Did everything with me, played ball with me. I was my father's son. I would work with him when he was building things. I'd slosh around up to my knees in cement when he was pouring cement. I would help him put the glass on the green houses. I used to do all the outside work. I wasn't into housework. And to this day, I hate housework, and I refuse to do it. (Mona)

Many of the participants recognized male privilege at an early age and described boys as "being able to do anything" or as "having it easier than girls." In many of their athletic or physical pursuits several participants were told, "For boys only."

I really wanted to be one of the boys, because my brothers used to get to do things with my dad. I think that's why I took up golf. But the country club, of course, didn't allow girls on the golf course until after 12 noon. So even then I couldn't play with my dad, because he always played in the morning. (Sara)

The older participants talked about the few career options available to women in the 1950s and '60s. As one participant said, "You taught, you were a nurse, you were a secretary, or you got married and had kids. Basically that's what your choices were."

The majority of participants actively dated boys in high school and college. Two participants were married, one marriage lasting three years and the other over twenty years. Both talked about the restriction they felt in their role as wives.

It didn't feel right to me to be married. It felt too confining, because the more I ventured out, the more strict my husband got with me. He tried to control me, and I didn't want to be controlled. (Jody)

The rejection of traditional gender roles emerged as a salient issue for all the participants. Whether as young, physically active girls who wanted to have the same play opportunities as boys or married women who did not want to be restricted to the role of wife and mother, the participants challenged society's stereotypical definition of females.

#### Early Role of Sports, Athletics, and Physical Education

Sports and physical activity played a significant role in every participant's growing up experiences. Most described themselves as always being physically active, and a few traced their involvement in sports to an early age, crediting a father or grandfather with getting them involved. Jackie talked about the strong influence her grandfather had on her.

I've been interested in [being active in sports] since I was about three. I had a grandfather that [was a] semi-pro baseball player back at the turn of the century, and I guess he realized when I was about two that I hated dolls, and he was always throwing me a ball or sticking a bat in my hand. He made me a bat out of some black

wood. I was little, about three, and all he did was take me out in the lawn and throw the ball at me, and I learned how to hit. He was very proud of that, and I never played dolls after that. (Jackie)

Nancy described sports as always being a memorable part of her life.

That is one of the glaring things about my childhood--lots of sports, lots of different kinds of sports. I played baseball, hardball all the time. Some of my best memories of my childhood were of playing ball. We used to whittle our own bats, "just so..." Here we were little kids growing up, and we'd play for hours and hours. "Hit the middle of that window, that's a triple, over there's a double, over there's a home run, and that's an out." Three outs, boom, change. All day. (Nancy)

### Reasons for Becoming a Physical Education Teacher

The participants had a variety of reasons for becoming physical education teachers.

Most of the participants decided to teach physical education because they were athletically skilled and enjoyed being physically active. Bobbi made her decision to become a teacher during college.

I decided that [majoring in phys. ed.] would be best, because I liked sports and I liked people. I wanted to go to [City U.] because that would give me an opportunity to try it out and see if I liked it. I think I could have gone anywhere and liked sports.

Sophomore year was a big year for me because I went out on a [teaching practicum]. I went to a junior high where they said, "Okay, you're the phys. ed. teacher. Go and do it." And I loved it....After that, I really wanted to become a phys. ed. teacher. (Bobbi)

Some participants were motivated to teach physical education because of their own negative experiences in physical education. As a teacher, they believed they could make physical education a more positive experience for girls.

I really didn't like gym in high school. Half the time the girls wouldn't do anything. And I just loved gym. I couldn't wait to get to it. And then they would all complain and moan about what they had to do. So I hated it, and that's when I really decided I wanted to be a gym teacher. I thought maybe I could change something. (Alice)

For older participants, teaching was one of the few career opportunities available to women. The participant who was an athletic trainer believed teaching physical education was the only way she could pursue her interest in sports medicine.

### Early Self Awareness about Being a Lesbian

Four participants knew in high school that they were lesbian, and three of these women actively pursued relationships with other females during that time.

As far as being gay, I think [high school] is when things started to accelerate. I actually had relationships with women when I was in high school. And it really caused a lot of heartache, some of the outcomes of those affairs--that's basically what they were. (Toni)

The other participants did not identify themselves as lesbians until college or much later in life, but they did recall having what they described as "crushes" on girls or women when they were young. At the time, however, they did not associate these feelings with being gay.

When I got to ninth grade, I really loved my English teacher/coach. I just remember hero-worshipping her. Playing basketball, I can remember just before I went out on the floor, I had to touch her, because I was thinking that would be a really good luck thing. I also had another crush on a girl three years older than me in the band. We both played the baritone. I remember thinking how great this girl was. I never did anything about any of this or even thought about it. I don't think I knew at that point what a lesbian was or anything about it. Now maybe I did, but I just completely wiped it out of my head. It never entered my mind, anything sexual other than the fact that I somehow felt really warm towards these people. (Jody)

#### Nature of Lesbian Relationships

Many participants described themselves as feeling more comfortable and more equal in their relationships with women than they did in relationships with men. The participants perceived women as more caring, sensitive, tender, and loving than men. Traci finds a combined strength and softness in women that she does not find in men.

A woman would be my choice for a partner and a companion, both emotionally and physically. Since we would both be female, you're in tune a little better. And I've said that before, and someone said to me, "But maybe you've never given men a chance. Maybe you were too quick to judge." And I thought about that. I said, "Well, maybe it's true, but the times that I have tried to give it a chance, it's never been there." There's never been that connection for me [with] a man what I have felt for women. There's a strength and yet a softness in a woman that I have yet to see in a man. (Traci)

Many believed that heterosexual relationships were bound by traditional gender roles, and that men were socialized to be less feeling, less nurturing, and to treat women as possessions. For these participants, other women were "on the same wavelength" or "spoke the same language" as they did.

I think there's a difference between men and women. I think men have not been socialized to be nurturing, to be sensitive, compassionate. And for me, I've always

been much fonder of women than men, and once I allowed myself to have that all in my life, I don't think I could live without it now. I think I could have survived a heterosexual life and been okay and potentially been happy, but to go back into it now, I don't think that's possible. (Susan)

The participants' descriptions of their relationships with women reflect their understanding and challenge of traditional gender roles. Many participants, sensitive to the stereotype of lesbians as "man-haters," did not view their relationships with women as a rejection of men. Instead of rejecting men, they were rejecting the traditional gender roles to which women and men are socialized.

### Self Acceptance of Lesbian Identity

Four of the participants described their lesbian identity as a "fact of life." In other words, being a lesbian was not a choice they consciously made but was a reality they have accepted about themselves.

I believed I always was [a lesbian], and I just never acted on it. I probably could have been a lesbian at eight years old if I acted on it, but I didn't. I don't believe that you choose to be a lesbian, 'cause it's not a choice. It's a fact of life. (Caren)

Three participants characterized their decision to be involved with women as a conscious choice; they did not describe themselves as innately lesbian. Two other participants also described being a lesbian as a choice, but one brought on by experiences and circumstances. For them, sexual involvement with a man was not perceived as a choice they would now pursue.

I think [being a lesbian] is a choice brought on by circumstances. And it's entirely possible that if Sylvia and I broke up that eventually I may be in another relationship with a woman. I will never be in a relationship with a man. I simply don't want any part of that. It's either a choice of being with a woman or being by myself. (Mona)

The final two participants talked about their lesbianism as something they intuitively knew to be true about themselves, even though at times, they wished they were heterosexual.

Almost all the participants disliked the word "lesbian," preferring the word "gay" to label themselves. Nancy's dislike of the word "lesbian" goes back to when she was in elementary school.

I don't like the word lesbian. When the word "gay" came along, I like the sound of it much better. It's easier for me to say. I remember when I was real little, girls calling other girls "lezzies." I didn't like the connotations that went with it. Like in the fifth grade lunch line when somebody called a girl "lezzie." This girl did something, and it had nothing to do with two women or two girls. It was more like, "Hey, she's the scum of the earth. Don't talk to her. She's dirty, she's disgusting." I remember that poor girl. She was devastated. I felt really bad for her. (Nancy)

Most felt uncomfortable around lesbians who fit what they described as the "dyke" stereotype: an unkempt, masculine woman they often associated with lesbian separatists.

I have a lot of trouble with [the word "lesbian."] Sometimes when I think about being a lesbian, this is awful, so I shouldn't say it, but I kind of visualize these bull dykes with their tatoos and chains holding their wallets in their back pockets. Maybe I visualize that kind of an interpretation to that word, and I don't think I portray that image. Maybe I am denying that word, because I don't want the association. (Toni)

None of the participants were immune to society's negative labeling of lesbians, but as a general rule, the participants who were most uncomfortable with their lesbian identity were also the ones who were most uncomfortable with using the word "lesbian."

#### Themes Unique to a Single Participant

Within each participant's transcripts, themes emerged that highlighted the uniqueness of that participant's experience. Themes unique to a single participant were either one significant event that continued to have an impact on a participant's life or a belief that resurfaced in more than one interview. The following descriptions are examples of the many unique themes that emerged for each participant.

**ALICE BAKER:** Alice knew she was gay at 16, and for her, feeling comfortable and accepting her lesbian identity came easily. As she stated, "I never had a problem dealing with being gay at all, ever." She attributed much of this to her parents whom she described as very accepting of her as a lesbian. "My parents found out that I was gay when I was 18, and it's probably the best thing that's ever happened." This positive sense of her lesbian identity emerged as a recurring theme for Alice in the three interviews.

Another unique theme to Alice focused on the presence of "butch/fem" roles among her gay friends. The cultural norm in the gay women's community Alice first associated

with was to identify oneself as either a "butch," a more masculine role, or a "fem," a more feminine role. Alice described this phenomenon as significant in the development of her lesbian identity.

Everything was either butch or fem back then. When I think of Jane and Amy who were together, there was no doubt who was supposed to play, quote, "the man's part." That was Jane. Amy carried the pocketbook with Jane's wallet in it. It's funny now when you think about it, but back then, although they both played sports, there was a definite line. Today, it's just changed so much. You would never catch Jan [my partner] with a pocketbook. Even if I begged her. There's just no division anymore, thank God.

BOBBI RHOADES: Bobbi was sexually abused as a teenager, and this experience surfaced and resurfaced as a critical element in her own understanding of her lesbian identity. Although her disclosure about being sexually abused marked only the second time she had revealed this information to anyone, the effect of this experience was reflected in many of her stories.

When I was younger--sixth, seventh, eighth grade--I was sexually abused twice by two different people. I think that turned me right off from any sexual involvement in high school.

I actually have only told one other person about that. I just have a hard time with it. I know that had a lot to do with any sexual involvement, even up to now. I still have trouble with it. As a matter of fact, at times I've questioned myself if that's why I'd rather have a relationship with a woman than with a man because of what happened.

CAREN WILLIAMS: For Caren, being black shaped much of her view of the world as well as her day-to-day experiences.

I feel discriminated against because I'm a lesbian, but the whole thing is me being black. My whole life is me being black, being discriminated against for my whole life. All blacks being discriminated against, so that's a priority, and then second comes [being] a lesbian.

Caren identified herself as a recovering alcoholic, and she talked about this in each of the three interviews. Alcohol played a significant role in Caren's life, affecting both her personal and professional relationships.

JACKIE THOMPSON: In telling many of her stories, Jackie acknowledged that her own development as a lesbian was strongly affected by the social change movements of the

1960s and 1970s. She contrasted the 1960s to the 1950s when homosexuality was not openly discussed and described the 1960s as an eye opening experience for her.

Everybody was getting involved with the peace movement or the women's movement. The women's movement--it was like an explosion. It was wonderful. I started reading whatever I could find. There was a book store that carried regular books, filthy men's magazines, and The Ladder [a lesbian publication], and I started reading [it], and I really thought this is where I want to be. I wish this had happened 10 years ago.

Even the more conservative nature of the 1980s was reflected in her self-descriptions.

I'm just a little, happy suburban lesbian with my lover and my house and my three dogs. Politically I've changed. I've grown up. I don't do bars. I don't belong to any faction or splinter group off another group of another group.

JODY PORTER: Jody was one of two married participants and the only participant who had children. Her 20 years of marriage strongly influenced her understanding and acceptance of her lesbian identity.

It didn't feel right to me to be married. It felt too confining. Because the more I ventured out, the more strict my husband got with me. He tried to control me, and I didn't want to be controlled.

I would not be in a lesbian relationship that was like being with a man. If I wanted to do that, I'd be with a man. I like it because I like the equality of the whole thing. And maybe all my life, I've really wanted that equality.

I don't feel like I have in my relationship now a role to play. I feel I have an equal relationship. Before I think I had a role as a woman and a wife. I had to be in this house as the wife, take care of the house, do the laundry, and clean the house. Do all these things that you were supposed to do. Because the woman was supposed to do those things. It's not the same sharing equality that there is in a relationship with a woman.

MONA TAYLOR: For two years, Mona was harassed by students about being a lesbian, and this experience surfaced again and again as a critical incident that changed her views about students and about teaching.

I had some problems right around '71, '72, '73. I can't pinpoint the year, but there was an incident in school that forever changed my relationship with students. And I have never recovered from it.

That was a very hard time in my life teaching. It's something I would never want to go through again. Kids are vicious. They are.

Another theme that emerged in each interview was Mona's sense of powerlessness to defend herself. She linked this back to her mother whom she described as "peace at any

price," and in describing herself Mona stated, "I would rather walk away than have a fight." This lack of assertiveness resurfaced when talking about defending her lesbian identity.

It's not socially acceptable to be gay or lesbian or homosexual. And people are not broad minded. I'm just not strong enough to stand up, to defend it.

I feel powerless and defenseless, because I can't speak out. Because if I do, I'm going to be unemployed. I don't know whether that would happen or not, but I'm not willing to take that chance.

We never did fight in the house growing up. We never could talk back. So nobody learned how to fight, nobody learned how to speak out, so consequently this is the way you've been programmed, so you don't know how to fight. At least I don't.

NANCY JOHNSON: Throughout her three interviews, Nancy communicated an undertone of non-acceptance about her lesbian identity. In the final interview she was able to verbalize the source of that non-acceptance.

How I feel about being gay is, I'm not really sure if it's really making me feel good or making me feel guilty or making me feel inadequate or making me feel like, oh, I've conquered the world. A lot of times I think to myself I wish I wasn't [gay]. And other times I realize that when I really look at myself, this is the only way I can be and be happy. But I think the thing that really [keeps] me from being extremely happy is probably my parents and my family. I guess why I'm saying that I'm not completely happy that I'm gay [is] because I can't go tell them or can't totally tell them how I feel.

PAM LUCIANO: Pam's view of her lesbian identity was very much shaped by her own internalized homophobia. This theme emerged in every interview.

This guy at work is going to ask me out any day now, so I try to avoid him. He left roses on my car on Valentine's day. He leaves notes all over my desk. He's called a few times. It's like I don't want to have to deal with this.

It's a compliment, I guess. But you kind of almost feel like why don't I want to go out with this guy? He's a nice guy. What's wrong with me? Why can't I just be quote, "normal" like everyone else. Things would be a lot easier.

Having just recently ended a relationship, Pam's feelings about being gay focused on what she described as a lack of commitment in gay relationships.

When you're gay, you don't have any commitments. You do in a way, but it's not like [being] married to someone. [If you're married,] you're not stuck with them, but it's kind of a major deal to get out of a relationship. It's not like someone can wake up and say, "See ya," and leave. Since I've just broken up with someone, that's the biggie. I went out with a guy about a month ago, and it's like I really wanted to just start dating. This guy is really nice and you really wanted to fall in love with someone quick so that all of a sudden you wake up and you're not gay anymore. But the guy ended up being a jerk.

SARA JONES: During a year and half period, Sara was raped twice. It was more than 10 years later that she decided to deal with those experiences. The two rapes, the 10 years of denial about them, and several years of therapy strongly affected the meaning she made of her life experiences. Therapy helped her acknowledge her lesbian identity which she also denied for many years.

I had been raped twice, on two different occasions. And I guess to show you my power of being able to wipe things out of my mind, I never told anybody. And I never even admitted it to myself. I can do that.

Now I was probably 22 at [that] point in time. But here I was, 33, and it was [then] that I decided that I was going to deal with it. I went 10 years and never dealt with it whatsoever. Fortunately, I got myself a good therapist and worked on a lot of those kind of issues. I had probably mentioned a certain number of [women] friends at various times. [My therapist] said, "How do you feel about lesbians?" And I can remember answering something to the effect that, "Well, they're fine. I don't have problems with their choice." And still never admitting my choice.

SUSAN CARLSON: The strongest unique theme that emerged from Susan's interviews was her labeling of her sexual orientation as a choice. As a child, she learned from her parents the boundless nature of love, and this lesson influenced her choice to pursue lesbian relationships. The following is from the first interview.

I dated a black guy in high school which was okay with [my parents]. I learned through them that love really didn't have any limits. And I view this as being positive. I also view it as contributing to my choice to be a lesbian and also my choice for that lifestyle.

In the final interview, she repeats this understanding of herself.

For me, I have the capacity to love. I've been socialized that love has had no limits for me. It didn't matter, race, sex, color, or creed. If I understand a little bit of why I am in the position I am, I believe that when I've loved, I've done so for the person. Obviously, there are some needs of mine that are met more with a woman than a man. And to be with a woman has become a cognitive choice for me.

TONI KING: Toni was always cast in the shadow of her academically talented older brother. Unable to measure up to his scholastic performance, she was stereotyped as a non-achiever in school. This label stuck with her until after she had proven herself more professionally successful than her brother. Yet in relation to her sexual orientation, she still felt like an underdog in comparison to her brother.

I don't necessarily think anymore that I'm in my brother's shadow. I only feel slighted because of the things that I am not producing which is a very heterosexual lifestyle.

I love my nephews. I can't wait to see them, but I'll tell you a little story that I think probably hurt deeper than anything that I can think of in my life. [It] was the first time I met my nephew. Tim was just a year old. And my mom, I could just see the gleam in her eyes. This is heaven to have her son home with his son.

I never knew [my mother's father] growing up. I can't remember ever seeing him, but he lived in our hometown. My mom kind of had a disassociation with him for a while. She started later in life getting closer to her father. Mom was so excited to go out so that her father could see [my brother's] baby. So this, honest to God's truth, was the first time that I had ever looked at this man. I just remember my mom getting so excited, and she said, "We have to have a generation picture here," with Tim and Frank, [my brother], and her and her father. And I'm just kind of standing there. My brother said, "I think there's somebody missing in this picture, don't you?" And it was like, "Oh, yeah, Toni, come here." So I just reluctantly walked over and got in the snapshot. I've seen the picture after that, and it's written right there on my face what I was feeling. Not necessarily anger, but more hurt than anything. So that was a moment that was etched, and it's going to be there forever."

TRACI KULPESKI: Traci's first teaching position was in an alternative school. While a teacher at that school, she became intimately involved with a student. Although she described the alternative school context as being more open and supportive of closer relationships between teachers and students, Traci viewed her relationship with a student as a mistake and has since worked to distance herself from students. This experience emerged as the critical event which shaped her views about the importance of maintaining personal and professional boundaries within the school setting.

I definitely think I was too loose in my first teaching job, way too loose. And it was not healthy for me, because I didn't get a job out of it afterwards.

I think with my interactions with students [now], I'm not quite as, I don't know if it's friendly or just open with them. I am a little more reserved with them. I don't ever really talk about personal things with students. For the most part, I really try to keep it at a professional level where in [my first] job, I definitely got very personal with the kids, and I allowed them to get very personal with me. I don't think it was the right thing to do, because in the long run, when I look at my job and what I'm doing, I really enjoy it, and I really believe in it. I need to make a separation between the two, because I want to be able to do this. And I don't want my sexuality to be reflected in my professional job.

In summary, teasing out themes that are unique to a single participant is similar to presenting individual profiles. These themes may or may not have direct bearing on the participants' experience as lesbian physical educators. The purpose for identifying these themes reflects one underlying goal of phenomenological interviewing: to focus

attention on the significant events or understandings which root stories in a particular individual's experience.

### Section Two: Common Themes

Common theme are beliefs and experiences shared by several or all the participants. Four common themes are presented in this section: underlying assumptions, the personal/professional split, lesbian identity management techniques, and confrontation scenarios. Participants shared two underlying assumptions about their experience: (a) as a lesbian teacher, you will lose your job if you are open about your sexual orientation, and (b) female physical education teachers are often stereotyped as lesbians. These assumptions were shared by all the participants, were reflected in everything the participants said and did, and are reflected in the second and third themes. The second theme focuses on the dissonance participants experienced between their personal and professional identities. The third theme is a description of the identity management techniques employed by participants to conceal or reveal their sexual orientation. The contextual factors which affected a participant's decision to employ an identity management technique are also outlined. The final theme reviews the ways participants would respond if confronted about being a lesbian by an administrator.

#### Assumption #1: To Come Out = To Lose Job

Of the 12 participants, 11 believed they would be fired if their sexual orientation was publicly disclosed. (The one participant who did not still engaged in "passing" behaviors so her colleagues would assume she was heterosexual.) The following statement reflects the sentiment held by the majority of participants.

I guess I don't put the two words together, lesbian and p.e. teacher. Because it means not having a job if I [do], if I was out. My lesbian life is separate. I've kept it, and I'm trying to keep it very separate from my teaching. (Caren)

Their "fear"--as they often described it--of losing their job affected their behavior as teachers and their feelings about themselves.

I don't think [being a lesbian is] something that even to this day that I would feel comfortable talking to students about. I would wait and talk to them when they were ex-students, but I don't think I would ever talk to them when they were students. There's a real fear in the fact that you can easily lose your job in [this state]. It is illegal. If somebody ever had a grudge to hold against you, it could easily be held and that would be immediate grounds for dismissal. That's a fear that's always in the back of my mind, so I wouldn't talk about it in the girls' locker room at school.

I'm just not willing to risk it. There is that necessity to be separate. And there's times when they definitely feel separate. Conversations come up or jokes come up. I just get really disgusted and usually just walk away. But it's a separate feeling. It's like you look around the room hoping that somebody else might catch your eye and feel the same way, but it doesn't happen very often. (Sara)

Fearing repercussions, the participants often felt powerless to challenge homophobic remarks.

The head of phys. ed., he's a real nice guy, but he has about as much tact as a steam roller. He's young. And he has his doctorate, but you'd never know it. He always says to me, "I have no patience with backstabbers and faggots and queers." It's like you want to say something. Once I said, "They're people, too." And he just kind of looked at me, so I dropped it right away, 'cause he could get me fired. I just didn't want to have to deal with him. This is what I have to deal with all day in my job. (Pam)

A love of teaching coupled with the fear of professional repercussions often outweighed a participant's need to be open about her lesbian identity. The bottom line for many was this: being a teacher was more important than being out as a lesbian.

#### Assumption #2: Female Physical Education Teachers Are Lesbians

The second underlying assumption expressed by the participants was that female physical education teachers are frequently (and negatively) stereotyped as lesbians by students, teachers, administrators, and parents. For many of the older participants, this stereotype came as a surprise, but for the younger ones, a stigma had long been attached to female physical educators.

There's kind of a stigma behind phys. ed. teachers. I don't know what the percentage [is] of women phys. ed. teachers that are actually lesbians, but that's one of those battles that you're constantly fighting. (Toni)

Much of the stigma centered around the labeling of female physical educators as "locker room peepers."

I [have] bumped into quite a few young ladies [at a gay bar] who I had in high school. [They] said, "I wish I could have come to you in high school, because I needed to talk to you because I was a lesbian in high school. I needed some support." So,

some kids must have known. Maybe it is just the fact that I'm a phys. ed. teacher. You know, the assumption that all women phys. ed. teachers are gay unless you had little children running around.

I never made that assumption when I was in high school, but I think a lot of kids do make that automatic assumption. Or the parents make that assumption.

We used to require showers, I remember we did that in the '60s. "You will take gym. You will sweat, and you will take a shower." I didn't really care if the kids smelled or not. But we made them take showers, which none of them did. They just pulled their bra straps down, put their towel around them and walked in the shower, and then they checked off their name, and they just didn't smell any better, but we did our job. We did stupid things back then. Anyway, one of my colleagues overheard [this one young lady say to a friend of hers], "They make us take showers so they can look at us. They're all queer." Geez, now who told her that? Somebody must have told her that because it didn't just pop into the kid's head, did it? Most of our ideas come from our parents or from our peers but our peers got those questions and those wise remarks from some place. (Jackie)

Students today were viewed as being more aware of the stereotype and willing to confront teachers about it.

I think forever there's been the stereotype that a single p.e. teacher is a lesbian. When I was in high school you would think that, but I think myself and friends, we really never knew what that meant. Kids today are much more aware. That assumption still exists, and kids today are bold enough to confront. I have been asked on two occasions this year by eighth graders, "Miss Carlson, you're single, and you don't quite fit the mold. You're not quite like Miss Samanski or Miss Felton. Are you like one of them? Are you a lesbian?" [They asked that] right out, bold as brass.

"All gym teachers are queer." "How do you know?" "My mother told me." Her mother told her. It's like that's common knowledge: P.E. teachers are queer. "Miss Carlson, are you over 30?" "Nope, I'm 29." "Oh, you're alright, you're still safe." If you're over 30 and you're a p.e. teacher and you're single, you're a lesbian. (Susan)

The age between 30 and 40 is when unmarried physical education teachers are tagged with the lesbian label, and this label often affected the participants' sense of themselves in a negative way.

From the perspective of the participants, being fired was a threat they faced daily. This threat was directly related to the prevailing stereotype that female physical educators are lesbian. These two assumptions shaped the foundation from which they viewed their day-to-day worlds as lesbian physical educators and are reflected in the next two common themes.

## The Personal and Professional Split

The focus question of the final interview was, "What does it mean to you to be a lesbian physical education teacher?" Every participant had difficulty with this question; the question assumed an integration of two identities that the participants did not feel. Their difficulty in responding points to the clear separation they made between their identities as a lesbian and as a physical education teacher. Although every participant acknowledged making this split, their reasons for doing so differed. Some considered it the norm in their school for a teacher to separate their personal and professional lives, while others regarded it as their individual right to do so.

My private life is my private life. And I don't want to have to answer more questions or add to someone's, "Is she or isn't she [a lesbian]?" They can say all they want as long as they don't ask questions. I don't really feel like trying to educate them, I guess. Even though they're an accepting bunch, I'm not about to go [tell anybody]. I might have 10 years ago, but I'm not about to now. I'm not willing to get people too close to me. (Jackie)

Many participants justified this individual right on the basis that being a lesbian has nothing to do with their ability to teach.

Why should people think less of me because I'm homosexual? I have a real hard time with that. I hate stupid people. What does [being homosexual] have to do with teaching? There are bad homosexual teachers just like there are bad straight teachers. I mean I've got two or three in my school that aren't worth the time they spend coming to school. They're bad teachers. What does homosexual have to do with being a teacher? What does homosexual have to do with anything? You're a human being. If you have the right moral values, you're not going to put them on other people anyway. (Alice)

Most participants believed making this split was a necessity, that as a lesbian you must keep these two identities separate.

I think most people have come to the realization that probably I'm going to be an old maid school teacher. And, so most of the questions that I used to get hit with when I was in my mid-20s were the toughest. "Boy, Alice, you're 26 and you're not married yet." By the time you're 36, they don't ask it anymore. But what are you going to do until being a lesbian or being homosexual is accepted, which I really can't see that in the near future, especially teachers? People just feel that teachers have too much influence on children. If they would only realize that straight people influence children, too. And sometimes that's not good either, the way [most people] influence them, but they don't think that way.

But there's a game that you have to play, and you're going to have to play it if you want to be a teacher, if you want to be a coach. When you're with children, they just

assume that you're going to influence them improperly. There's a game we all have to play. It's a game, and it's a lie. You're being a hypocrite. But if you want your job, you probably best do that. I do hate it sometimes. I wish I could tell people. I just want to scream some days, but that's one of those inconveniences, I guess, that I'll have to put up with. It's too bad that it has to be that way, but it is. (Alice)

Like Alice, many of the participants resented not being able to share their personal life.

[The other teachers] can bring [their personal life] with them [to school]. They had a fight with their husband this morning. Or they can be mad about it. Or, "Damn baby-sitter didn't show up last night." They are free pretty much to bring theirs with them. I can't go in and say, "Geez, Jill and I went to a great movie last night." I can't, so I have to kind of say, "I saw a great movie" or, "I went to [town] and went out to eat at this restaurant. Have you ever been there?" But I don't get to say who I'm with really. If I'm really up or down about something, I kind of have to pretty much live it on an even keel. That's why sometimes I'm glad I have a 12 minute ride before I get to school in the morning. I just kind of clear my head. Maybe something went wrong [at home] or maybe something went really right, and I can't really go and say what was good or bad, whereas they can.

That's kind of a bummer. Because there are things I'd like to share. I have to stop myself short sometimes of really saying how I feel. So I feel a little cheated.

Maybe I could go a little bit further and everything would be O.K., but I always have the reins on what I'm saying or trying to describe what I've done or what I want to do. So I always kind of hold back and not make it sound like I'm gay. (Nancy)

The ride to work was symbolic of the personal/professional split the participants made.

I would go to school, and it was kind of [a] separate situation. You would leave that environment of a bunch of gay women trying to frantically get ready for work and almost like once you got in your car, you were a different person. You were by yourself, you were going to an environment that was very much different from what you had just left in your living situation. And I played the role. I was good. From the moment I walked in, I was professional. I was a good teacher. I stood my ground. I felt strongly for what I stood for as far as my professional philosophies. But I didn't let my personal life affect my teaching that much. (Toni)

For some participants, however, keeping their two worlds separate was not always possible.

My lesbian life is separate. I've kept it and I'm trying to keep it very separate from my teaching. It's getting harder and harder. For example, I went to a lesbian's A.A. meeting, and a present student was there. Here you're supposed to go in and talk and feel good about yourself. Well, I didn't feel good at all. The minute I came into the door, I froze. When I was supposed to speak, I said, "Well, my name is Caren, and I'd like to listen." And that's all I said for the whole night. You're supposed to admit that you're an alcoholic, and, no, I just sat there and listened.

I'd rather for [this student] to know that I'm an alcoholic than a lesbian. But I don't feel all that great about anybody knowing anything about me. (Caren)

Unlike Caren, many participants resented not being able to be a positive gay role model for others, especially gay students. They described themselves as being in a

"catch-22" situation. To be a role model they must be out as lesbians, but to be out jeopardizes their jobs, and therefore, their position to be role models.

A few participants contemplated leaving teaching in order to be more integrated personally and professionally, but for most participants, their love of teaching outweighed the personal costs of living a split life.

[Being a lesbian p.e. teacher is] almost like being a schizophrenic. Because you are one person as a p.e. teacher and you are one person as a lesbian. Unfortunately today's society still hasn't gotten to the point where it can integrate the two without giving you a severe pain in the butt for it. Even though they're out there, and we know they're out there, if you are not discreet in certain ways, you're going to lose your job.

But as long as there's been no scandals or locker room peepings, [you'll] get by. But it's frustrating because you give up so many rights just to be gay as it is, and you give up that many more to try to maintain your profession and allow yourself to stay in your own profession. You just have to be very smart. I feel that that's something that I've really learned to look at, that I really have to separate the two. Because I don't want to jeopardize what I enjoy doing. I have to say, okay, for this, I can keep that side closed. In order to be able to teach, I'm willing give that up. (Traci)

Living a double life was simply accepted as a way of life for a lesbian physical education teacher.

I find myself in that middle, that kind of non-radical kind of lifestyle where I am going to make the least amount of waves and if it means putting on that different face when I leave my home and what's comfortable to me and going to work to what's professional and what is, quote, "accepted behavior" for me or what I should be doing as a phys. ed. teacher of young kids, [then] I accept that there is a separation in my life. The least amount of overlapping that happens is going to make things easier.

I'm an okay person. No matter who's looking at me. Whether it's my colleagues at work or my friends from my personal side. I'm Toni King for Toni King. I'm not Toni King because I'm a teacher or because I'm gay or because I'm a gay teacher. I am the person that I am, and how I deal with both of those issues is how I deal with my life. And I think I do an okay job at it. I honestly do. I can say that I can be very comfortable in dealing with either group. But then again, there are situations that I felt very uncomfortable. But overall, I can feel pretty comfortable in both of my lives, and that's what it is, both of my lives. (Toni)

The participants justified their personal/professional split in many ways, describing it as a norm for all teachers, as an individual right, as a necessity, or as a given for lesbians. All experienced conflict around separating their lesbian identity from their teacher identity. This conflict took the form of both resentment and fear: resentment because there was no overlap between their two worlds, and fear because

there was. Many of the participants described making this separation as a choice, but in many ways, their words and experiences contradicted this description. As lesbians, they believed disclosure of their sexual orientation would cost them their jobs, and as female physical educators, they assumed they were already stereotyped as lesbians. Both these assumptions shaped the way they experienced being a lesbian physical educator. From their perspective, the only real choices were to conceal their sexual orientation in order to stay in teaching or to leave teaching altogether. Susan summed it up best when she stated,

[Keeping my personal and professional lives separate] is by choice. It's very much by choice. If the system changed and said it could be different, then I could see myself taking a step, but until that time, I am a victim of the system. I am making a choice to be a victim of the system. (Susan)

The degree to which participants segregated their personal and professional identities was reflected in the variety of behaviors they used to manage their lesbian identity within the school setting. These behaviors ranged in intent, from concealment of their sexual orientation to disclosure of it. Primarily, the intent of these behaviors was to conceal their sexual orientation; yet all participants engaged in behaviors that risked disclosure of their lesbianism. The next theme explores these management techniques.

#### Lesbian Identity Management Techniques

If placed on a continuum with one end labeled total concealment of their lesbian identity and the other total disclosure, the majority of participants fell on the half representing more concealment than disclosure. None of the 12 participants interviewed were totally out as lesbian teachers; yet all had disclosed their sexual orientation at some point in their teaching career to at least one other teacher, colleague, ex-student, or current student from their school. The two lesbian identity management techniques identified from the data were: (a) strategies to conceal one's lesbian identity, and (b) risk-taking behaviors that could disclose one's lesbian identity. In terms of the choices made by the participants in managing their lesbian identity, no simple pattern

emerged. For instance, a participant on one occasion may have chosen to confront a homophobic remark made by a teacher, but on another occasion under similar circumstances she may have totally ignored it. A complex variety of factors affected their decisions, and these factors are also outlined.

### Strategies To Conceal One's Lesbian Identity

The assumptions made by the participants that coming out as a lesbian would cost them their teaching job and that female physical education teachers are stereotyped as lesbians provided the motivation for concealing their lesbian identity. All the participants employed strategies to hide their sexual orientation, some more than others, and these strategies were used in their relationships with both heterosexual and gay members of the school community. The strategies the participants employed to conceal their lesbian identity are broken down into three categories: (a) passing as heterosexual, (b) personal censoring/self distancing from students, teachers, and administrators, and (c) personal censoring/self distancing from any association with homosexuality.

Passing as Heterosexual. A very common strategy used by the participants was to pass as heterosexual. In other words, a participant behaved in ways that led others to assume she was heterosexual.

There was always a fear that somebody would really pursue what I did [on the weekends]. I would say I got together with friends. It was always friends. It was always plural. "I got together with friends." "I went out to a bar," and God forbid anybody would ever question what bar I went to. I'd have a couple of names [of straight bars] I'd pull out of my pocket. (Toni)

Passing usually took the form of changing pronouns and names.

One teacher was taking a whirlpool one day and asked me if I had a boyfriend. He said something like, "Oh, you must have a boyfriend, right?" It was one of those questions you could say no, but he would think something was wrong with you. I was like, "Yeah, but we don't see each other that much, 'cause he's at home, and I work all the time. We only see each other on weekends."

I have to really remember what I'm saying so I don't contradict myself. [I'd] love to tell him, "My girlfriend's a trainer." Tell him about Carrie, but I can't. Especially the kids. Kids are different, though. I'll tell [the junior high kids] stuff about Carrie but just change the name. They'll ask how long I've been going out with

my boyfriend, and I just say, "Oh, for a year," and be talking about Carrie, but they won't have a clue, 'cause for them, it goes in one ear and out the other. (Pam)

A few of the participants used gay male friends as a heterosexual cover.

There's nothing that I keep hidden from my kids except my real personal life. I play games with them. Last weekend I told them I was on a date. I was down at John's who is my gay friend, but I told them I was on a date with John. You've got to play a little game. I have no intentions of my kids knowing that I'm gay. (Alice)

Many of the participants made reference to the "games" played when passing as heterosexual.

The kids would say, "Oh, you're Miss Johnson. You're not married." "No, no, I'm not. I haven't found the right one yet. Prince Andrew is busy." I'd make up all these things, and they'd laugh. They think I'm having a romance right now with a science teacher, this guy, [Steve]. We hang around together in school, and sometimes we go out drinking. So some of the freshman kids started a rumor last year that we were engaged. These kids just thought it was the most wonderful thing, and we let it go. It was kind of fun for a while. And they wanted to be invited to the wedding. So I guess you could say that every once in a while I have all these little games that either I play or a group of kids play, and I just don't push the rumors down that hard. (Nancy)

For some, the passing game almost became second nature.

Most of the faculty make the assumption that everybody else is straight. They might assume that I'm gay, but they don't know that. Today I was talking with the woman who is the receptionist. She's a really nice person. We've been buddies for years. And she said, "Are you coming to my party?" She's having this big faculty get together, and I said, "Gosh, I'm not." And she said, "Who are you going out with now?" "Nobody, that's the problem." I wish I could have said to her, "Well, my lover and I really can't come because we're going to a party elsewhere."

Things like that happen all the time. I work out in the mornings. We have a really nice weight room. And I keep the doors open so you get heat from the room for the first class at 8 o'clock. I'm lifting some weights, and the custodians will walk through. It's a nice short cut for them. This fellow, Charlie, is always saying, "What are you building up muscles for? Your boyfriend won't like them." And I said, "Yes, he does." It's that banter that has to occur just to keep things going.

I have to do it. It's just a natural response. I don't even think about it. It's just, boom. You have to be quick. I just do it. (Jackie)

Not every participant engaged in passing behaviors, but for those who did, the intent was to counteract the assumption made by others that female physical education teachers are lesbian. By misleading others to believe they were heterosexual, the participants hoped to keep suspicions about their sexual orientation to a minimum.

Personal Censoring/ Self Distancing. The intent of personal censoring was to avoid calling attention to themselves, and therefore, to one's lesbian identity. By distancing

themselves from students, teachers, and administrators, the participants avoided personal closeness with members of the school community, thus avoiding disclosure of their sexual orientation.

You kind of walk a fine line of how much you want to reveal to these people. I have a tendency not to get too over friendly or warm to my students. I always kind of keep this little front up and sometimes I think the front is in sternness. Not that I am a stern teacher, but I hold that front a little bit to kind of keep everybody at arm's length. So that maybe they don't want to pursue too much my personal life. (Toni)

All the participants spoke about distancing themselves from students or colleagues as a way to avoid personal inquiries. They withheld information about themselves or gave vague responses when asked about their personal lives. When choosing to share personal information, many of the participants carefully selected their words, making sure not to reveal too much information at once.

You really have to guard your words. I've gotten so used to saying "roommate," but I never refer to Kim as my lover. I say something about, "Well, we went to a craft show on Saturday." And they'll say, "Well, who's 'we'?" I'll say, "Well, my roommate and I." Those kind of things, sure, that's fine. I have no qualms with that. In fact if somebody asks, I would certainly more than willingly answer, but I don't know as I would often volunteer it. I don't know whether I dole out pieces at a time and not all at one time so they don't put them all together. I don't know whether I'm being extraordinarily guarded, or I have this real fine line about professionalism, and I have a real fine line about personal life.

I think [volunteering information is] giving away too much of myself. I'm a little afraid to give that much away of myself. (Sara)

In one-on-one or small group interactions, personal censoring often took the form of silence, denial, or even lying.

This is the first year that I am in conflict with becoming a pretty good friend of a [teacher] who is straight and does not know anything about me. The worst part is being so secretive to the point where I am with this new person, Elaine. It is a friendship right now that is based on lying, 'cause I do lie. She'll ask me, "Who [are] you seeing?" And I say, "I'm not seeing anyone." I don't ever make up that I'm dating anyone or anything like that, but instead of saying I'm going to [a gay bar] dancing on a Saturday night, I will just leave it that I've gone to [the city]. That's hell for me. And I haven't had to do that ever in all my years of teaching until right now. (Susan)

The participants distanced themselves from the mainstream of interpersonal interactions within the school to avoid questions about their personal life. By avoiding these situations, they avoided disclosure of their sexual orientation.

Personal Censoring/Self Distancing from Any Association with Homosexuality. When confronted either directly or indirectly with the issue of homosexuality, the participants employed a variety of strategies to prevent disclosure of their lesbian identity. The most prevalent strategy was to ignore or dismiss homophobic comments made by students, teachers, or administrators.

It is kind of strange going to school every day knowing pretty much who I am. I don't think a day goes by that I don't think about it or that the subject doesn't come up or one kid doesn't call another kid, this is their favorite thing to say, "You're so gay." It's to the point now where it doesn't mean anything other than, "You're a jerk," or, "Don't be a jerk, don't be so gay." Like this girl on my hockey team today, "I hate these fitness tests. They're so gay." And I thought to myself, she doesn't even really know what she's saying, so it's kind of lost its meaning. (Nancy)

Students commonly used "gay" or "faggot" in their daily interactions, and most participants chose not to confront them, pretending instead not to hear.

The boys are into calling each other "faggots" or, "He's queer." I pretend I don't hear those. I try not to make a big deal about it. Kids are into name calling, no matter what they use, they're into name calling. If it's not that, it's something else. (Mona)

Many believed confronting this form of name-calling would cause students to be suspicious about their teacher's sexual orientation. Even when homophobic comments were directed at themselves, many participants chose to ignore them.

I was taking my roll this year the first day of class, and the kids [are] kind of gathered around because they're all so eager. I'm checking them off, and I hear in the back, "Oh, she's the lesbian." Now, one girl is saying this to another girl. There's no question [but] that they were talking about me. And I'm thinking to myself, whoa. What is this? Already the first day of class, brand new year, and this has happened. The only thing I could think of was somewhere along the line, [a] girl the year before tipped them off. Maybe that's my paranoia about them really and truly knowing it or whether or not they just thought it, and the rumor had just passed around.

I didn't acknowledge it. I suspect that they didn't think I heard it, but I didn't acknowledge it. (Sara)

When the topic of homosexuality or jokes about gays came up in the teachers' room, some participants dealt with this by remaining silent while others made an inconspicuous exit.

Then you have the problems with the jokes in the teachers' room. My own reaction to that is to pretend that I'm busy, and I'm writing something, and I don't hear what's going on, or I'm not paying attention, or I'm talking to somebody else.

You can always be talking to the person next to you while out of your other ear, you're hearing what's going on in this little corner. So you pretend that you don't hear, and you're very interested in your conversation with the person next to you. I'll wait a reasonable amount of time, and then I'll leave. So it isn't too obvious. You know, I've had to do something, I have to make a phone call. It's an escape. I know that. (Mona)

Different forms of personal censoring were used to counteract the lesbian stereotype associated with female physical education teachers. For instance, in the locker room, some participants consciously avoided eye contact with students who were changing clothes while others avoided the locker room altogether. The most common strategy was to avoid physical contact with female students.

All through my teaching I was very careful not to touch kids. I'm still very careful touching kids. It's just a hang-up I have because of being a lesbian touching girls. I'm just very leery of it. I was always concerned about kids thinking I was gay. (Jackie)

Even when students initiated physical contact, participants consciously chose not to reciprocate for fear of repercussions.

Walking out to a class or walking out to field hockey [practice], I probably won't go up and put my arm around a girl and talk to her on the way out. I wouldn't do that.

[The kids] don't feel bad about coming up to me, like some of my hockey players slap me on the back or put their arm around me. But I won't do it to them. That probably will never change. You don't know who's watching or who might go home and say something to their mother. I just wouldn't want any controversy to start when there's nothing to be talked about. But I do worry about it, and I think about it consciously. (Nancy)

When dealing with a gay or suspected gay student, many participants took a cautious approach. Some avoided being alone with students they thought were gay.

You know how you peg kids, this is awful, but you peg them. Like, "Oh, that kid's going to be gay. I don't want to be near her." So I never went near [this one] kid. Then she got hurt, she pinched a nerve in her neck. She brought in a doctor's note, and the doctor wanted her to get massages every day. I was like, oh, no. So I always had the doors wide open. I always made sure there were about five kids in the trainer's room. I was real paranoid. I had to massage [her] neck and shoulders. It was for about three weeks, and I was paranoid every single day. (Pam)

Other participants made a choice not to counsel gay students or those they thought might be gay.

There [are some students] that I would love to be able to talk with. It would be important to them, but that's one place where I'm afraid. Maybe if I had a tape recorder there so I could prove what I said would be one thing. I know I wouldn't say

anything that would be bad, but when you talk to somebody, it gets all mixed up and so what would come out of that might not be a good thing. So I would not just sit down and talk to anyone and give them any counseling about being gay. I would not get involved in it, but I think that we should at some point. That's something that's really important that the students have someone to talk to. But unfortunately, I don't feel like I could do that now. (Jody)

Overall, the strategies the participants employed to conceal their lesbian identity reflected the separation between their personal identity as a lesbian and their professional identity as a teacher. Yet at times, they chose not to separate these two identities and engaged in behaviors within the school environment that disclosed or risked disclosure of their sexual orientation. These risk-taking behaviors are examined next.

### Risk-Taking Behaviors

The participant group took risks much less frequently than they used strategies to conceal their sexual orientation. The behaviors engaged in by the participants that disclosed or risked disclosure of their lesbian identity fell into three categories: (a) passively overlapping personal with professional, (b) actively challenging, confronting, and supporting in the role of teacher, and (c) actively overlapping personal with professional. Most of the risks taken were premeditated, yet some were spontaneous. As with the strategies used to conceal one's sexual orientation, a variety of factors played into a participant's decision to take risks that might disclose her lesbian identity.

Passively Overlapping Personal with Professional. This type of risk was characterized by a participant sharing personal information about herself with students or other colleagues. For instance, a participant might have acknowledged that she owns a house with a "roommate," or she might have brought her partner to school events. She also might have brought students to her home.

This was a tough year, because I spent a lot of time with my basketball kids, and they probably stayed over here [at my house] a couple of nights. So they really got to know me and Ann [my partner] and this house. I think they were kind of questioning things. (Caren)

The consequences of such risks were not clear: an assumption about the participant being a lesbian might or might not have been made. For example, some participants socialized with heterosexual teachers after school and were not sure how much their colleagues really knew about them.

We did have a group of teachers at the [school], women that used to get together. For some reason, I was included. They were all either married or living with a man or had been married and have a ton of kids, engaged and have their wedding date planned, etc., etc. And here was Toni in this whole group.

It was just a mutual group of people through friendship in school that would get together on a monthly or bimonthly basis to go out and have dinner. I enjoyed going out with this group, but I felt uncomfortable for several reasons. One being my sexual preference being gay. I was always hoping that nobody ever really talked to me and said, "Well, are you seeing anybody, are you dating anybody?" And there was never really a time that anybody would delve too deeply into my background. I was always thankful for that, but I could never figure out whether it was really because maybe deep down inside they knew. (Toni)

Another passive way of overlapping one's personal life with professional life was to associate with another gay teacher in the school.

Lesley is probably my best [contact]. She's taught there for four years. She's the other gay person in the office. And I associate with her outside of school and in school. But we're just like a twosome in the building. We do things together, we eat lunch together, we do everything together. And the kids know us for being together. We're the crazies in the office. (Caren)

For most participants, avoiding any overlap between their personal and professional identities was impossible and undesirable. Many viewed this kind of limited personal disclosure as a low risk worth taking. Integrating their personal and professional lives, even in small way, lessened their conflict about living in two worlds.

Active Challenging, Confronting, or Supporting in the Role of Teacher. Many participants took risks that disclosed or chanced disclosure of their lesbian identity. For example, Susan took the opportunity to challenge her students on their use of "gay."

Other than, "This sucks," or "That sucks," the other most frequently used word is, "This is gay." Everything's "gay" in junior high school. Most often when anyone uses the word gay, I talk to them, and I ask them, "What does gay mean?" It's really interesting to listen to their definitions. As a matter of fact, under my blotter on my desk, I have a piece of paper saying definitions of gay. And when somebody gives me a new definition, I write them down. They range from it's just geekish, it's something from being nerdy to two guys that love each other. But it can be anything in between. A lot of lesbian p.e. teachers would sort of shy away from that stuff, at least ones that

I know. If somebody says gay, you sort of just turn your head and make believe you didn't even hear the word. I love finding out what they're thinking. So for me, that's really exciting. (Susan)

Susan's behavior was atypical of the participant group; yet many participants took other kinds of risks. For instance, instead of avoiding students who were questioning their own sexual orientation, some participants chose to talk with them.

I had [a] kid that was on my team a couple years ago that came to me, and she said she had something really important to talk to me about, and she didn't know if she could tell me. And I said, "Well, what is it?" And she wouldn't tell me, and so I said, "Well, is it about being gay?" She said, "Yeah, how did you know?" And I just talked to her a lot about it.

We weren't talking about her. We were talking about gay in general. So I just told her how I felt about people and being different [and that] it doesn't make a difference to me. She was on my team, and she started dropping out and not coming to school. She was a really fine athlete, and I wanted to try and keep her in school. But she really couldn't, she was so out. The kids were saying things to her about her being a dyke. She couldn't stand the pressure, and she dropped out. (Caren)

With ex-students, participants were more willing to come out as a lesbian.

There was [a] kid my second year as head coach who was a senior. [Jamie] had a lot of problems at home. Her father was an alcoholic, and she would [say], "Miss King, can I talk to you?" And I just spent hour on hour, sitting and talking to Jamie and helping her through a lot of situations just [by] talking to her.

Jamie got back in contact to me after her senior year, and she spilled her guts to me. She told me she was in love with me, and she had been. She had evidently spent many emotional evenings and days and weeks and months on end not knowing how to deal with this. Keeping it inside, not knowing who to talk to, so eventually she came back to me. And boy, I'll tell you, I choked on my coffee that day.

I just didn't know what to do. I told her I was flattered. And I told her that in fact I was gay. She asked me. She knew that she had these feelings and attractions toward different women. And she was struggling with what she was feeling. I knew that there was no way I could sit there, looking across the table at this kid and say, no, that I wasn't gay. I couldn't do it. And I didn't want to. I knew that Jamie was having a lot of emotional problems herself, so I knew that I had to be very upfront and honest with her. (Toni)

With homophobic harassment, some participants chose to confront instead of ignore.

One day, I was sitting outside the local pizza place in the car, and Jeannie [my partner] had gone into the restaurant. [These students] were basically saying this to Jeannie, not to me. They called out, "Hey lezzie." It was this one girl and two other girls with her. So I watched them, and I got out of the car, and I walked across the street, and I called the girl by her name. I said, "Becky, come here." She looked, and then she turned around. So I in a sense threatened her, you know, that she was fooling with the wrong person right now. And if I heard that from her again, she would be dealt with severely. Every time after that I saw her in school, I just gave her this real bad look. I didn't say anything to her. I just stared her right in the eye. I didn't take my eyes right off of her, even if she looked. I made her eyes turn away. And I haven't heard anything from her since. (Jody)

Although considered risky, confronting was actually used by some participants as strategy to prevent suspicions about their sexual orientation. This type of calculated risk was also taken when counseling gay students or students questioning their sexual orientation.

At the high school age, it becomes a little more interesting in that there are some students that are either questioning themselves about being gay or are actually very involved. That becomes touchy in terms of how you want to deal with it. I remember having a high school student come to me and say, "Look, I am involved." She was involved with another girl. "I need someone to talk to. I know you'll understand, and I've heard about you." I remember listening to her and never volunteering any information and never confirming any of her beliefs, but just trying to understand what all of that meant for her and the struggles she was going through.

I knew what I was saying to her and what I wasn't saying to her. If she had ever said anything to her mother about me being a lesbian, I'd [say], "I don't know where you got that information from. Obviously your daughter's in pain, and I was listening to her, but none of that is accurate." So I was pretty clear about that by the time it happened. (Susan)

The participants often felt torn between their responsibilities as a teacher and their need to protect their lesbian identity. On the one hand, participants wanted to act as conscientious teachers, but on the other hand, they realized the possible consequences of their actions: they could lose their jobs. When these two factors came into conflict, participants usually based their decision to risk disclosure on the particulars of the situation. No consistent pattern of risk-taking behavior emerged.

Active Overlapping Personal with Professional. Every participant had revealed or acknowledged their sexual orientation to at least one other member of the school community during their tenure as teachers. Coming out to a teacher, colleague, student or ex-student took many forms; some participants chose to not deny the assumption others made about their sexual orientation.

One funny incident [happened] with this girl Nina who was class president, and I was the class advisor. She spent a lot of time down in my office doing class work. And one day, she's sitting at a desk, and I'm sitting at another desk doing my work, and she says, "So, are you going out this weekend?" And I said, "I don't know." She hadn't even looked up yet, now she's still looking down, and so am I. And she says, "Well, if you do go out this weekend, maybe you shouldn't go to P.J.'s," [which is a gay bar]. And slowly my head came up, and I just looked at her. I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, Bobbie's going, and she says she can get in." Bobbie was 16

years old at the time, a junior in high school. I just put my head back down and said, "Thank you, Nina."

I spoke to Nina after that one day, and she finally said to me, "I know," [referring to me being gay]. And I said, "Well, just keep it to yourself, lady, because this job is kind of nice." She said, "I know. Don't worry." (Alice)

Other participants openly shared their lesbianism.

[When] my relationship with Terri was dissolving, for the first time in my life, I couldn't get a grip on things. I lost probably 20 lbs. So there were some noticeable things that were going on. Teaching, I loved. I was still high energy. As a matter of fact, I hated for the day of teaching to end, because I really put all my energy into it.

At one point I was very close to a guy, the art teacher in this school system. I was in an activity [on the] softball field. I remember him coming out one day specifically and saying, "Susan, I'm sick because I really think my wife is cheating on me. I think my wife is going to leave me." And I remember turning and looking at him and saying, "Larry, I understand that. My wife just left me." And I remember saying it like that, and I remember him looking at me and him saying, "Are you gay?" And I said, "Yeah. And I'm going through hell." And since then we have developed a great friendship. (Susan)

For some, coming out was considered a better alternative to lying. Others came out to a colleague because they were caught off guard.

In my after school things, I have Sam who's the AD and this guy, Joey, who's the equipment manager. The three of us are always together, 'cause we always have to be at the same place all the time. Joey's this big huge guy, but he's like a real teddy bear. He used to tease me once in a while about being gay. And Sam never said a word. Well, Sam and I went one day to pick up some equipment, and he asked me if I was gay. The person who I was seeing, [Carrie] was from the [same town], and he asked around and found out that she was gay. So he just assumed that I was 'cause I was always with her. And he asked me, so I told him, "Yeah. It's no big deal."

He caught me off guard. I didn't know what to do. I was going to deny it, you know how that just runs through your head, "Oh, just say no." It was like, no, why should I? 'Cause I've never lied to him before, why should I now? So I didn't. 'Cause I figured he wouldn't say anything. 'Cause he had hired me and that would make him look like a fool, according to his standards. He said he had no problems with it 'cause it really had nothing to do with anything as long as I was professional. Ever since then, we've never had a problem. (Pam)

One might assume that the more risks a participant took, the fewer concealment strategies she employed. This was not the case. Nor was it the case that the longer a participant had been a lesbian or the more accepting she was of that identity, the less protective she was in hiding her sexual orientation. A consistent pattern with respect to how and when participants concealed or revealed their sexual orientation did not evolve; rather, each decision was made on a case-by-case basis, contingent upon numerous factors.

### Immediate and Contextual Factors

The particulars of a situation as well as the overall context affected a participant's decision to conceal or reveal her lesbian identity. The particular or immediate factors included: (a) the individual actors involved, (b) the context of the specific moment, and (c) the perceived consequence/benefit of the strategies they used to conceal or reveal their sexual orientation. For example, if a student was involved, the participants paid attention to the following details: is the student heterosexual or gay, is she currently or formerly a student, is he homophobic or supportive, is she an athlete or non-athlete, is he mature or immature, trustworthy or untrustworthy, discreet or indiscreet? In terms of the specific moment, factors such as if a participant was caught off guard or if she was feeling assertive that particular day affected her decision to conceal or reveal her lesbianism. Also taken into account was the perceived consequence or benefit of that decision. For instance, if she believed fewer questions would be raised by students about her sexual orientation, she would employ a strategy that concealed her lesbianism. On the other hand, if she needed a support system within the school, she might choose to risk disclosure of her lesbian identity to another teacher.

Overall contextual factors included: (a) a participant's personal history, (b) her acceptance level of her lesbian identity, (c) her current self definition as a lesbian physical education teacher, (d) the overall school/community/position context, (e) the stereotypes associated with homosexuality imposed by society or the school environment, (f) previous consequences and benefits of concealing or revealing her sexual orientation, and (g) the availability of support networks and/or allies. With respect to personal history, if a participant had been married, she might have been more willing to take risks since others assumed she was heterosexual. If a participant felt negative about being a lesbian, she might have done everything she could to hide her sexual orientation. In a particular situation, a participant who clearly separated her personal identity as a lesbian from her professional identity as a physical education

teacher would probably have employed a strategy that concealed her lesbianism. If a teacher had worked in the same school for many years and considered herself a respected faculty member, she might have disclosed more personal information than would a first or second year untenured teacher. The participant who believed female physical education teachers are typically stereotyped as "locker room peepers" might have used strategies to conceal her sexual orientation to counteract that image. If a participant took a risk previously and suffered no damaging consequences, she might have been more willing to take future risks. Finally, if a participant had the support of another lesbian or gay teacher, she might have felt less isolated and more willing to confront homophobic remarks.

These 10 immediate and contextual factors mediated the decisions participants made in choosing to conceal or reveal their lesbian identities. It is important to remember, however, that these decisions were made on a case-by-case, day-to-day, person-to-person basis; a participant could have acted one way one day and completely differently the next. These differences can be attributed to something simple, like whether or not she was having a good day or to something more complex, such as how deeply the negative stereotypes associated with lesbian physical education teachers affected her acceptance of her own lesbian identity.

#### Confrontation Scenarios with Administrators

Only two participants had been confronted by an administrator about their sexual orientation, but all of them considered this a possibility. Five participants speculated how they would handle a confrontation by an administrator. Even though confrontation scenarios were not talked about by six or more participants (the guideline used to qualify as a common theme), the five participants' responses are included as a common theme because they are indicative of the decision process engaged in by the participants to conceal or reveal their sexual orientation. The five participants' responses provide concrete examples of the situational nature of this decision process.

All five participants said they would respond initially to a confrontation by "playing the middle ground." They would react by asking a question or making a statement which neither denied or confirmed their lesbianism. For one participant, playing the middle ground was a way to deflect attention away from herself.

I don't think I could say [I am a lesbian], because then you're admitting to it, and you could definitely lose your job, whereas if you just play middle ground, you're not admitting it, and they really don't have any strong fact.

[The middle ground], it's not denying it, and it's not saying yes. It's kind of like, "Oh, who would say that?" or, "Oh, that must have been Patty Cerrano. She hates me. She's sending rumors, she's saying stuff about me." So in a sense, it is denying, but it's not. (Bobbi)

Another participant would use this tactic to get more information and to stall until she was forced to respond one way or the other.

If my principal asked me outward, "Are you a lesbian?", I would say to him, "Do you think I am?" I would play the teacher act. I would put the question right back to him. I would keep beating around the bush until I played with him enough to find out whether or not I should answer. I wouldn't just come out and say, "Yes, I am," or "No, I'm not," without getting the inside into why he's doing that. (Jody)

If these participants were pushed by the administrator to name their sexual orientation, the majority of these five participants stated they would deny being a lesbian. For some, this decision would cause internal conflict.

[Being accused by an administrator] would be a very tough situation, because I know in my heart, I would want to scream at the person, "Yes, I am, and it's none of your damn business. I have never done anything but my job here, so leave me alone. I've never affected any of your kids." But on the other hand, how many administrators can handle that without them going, "Oh, my God. How many young girls have you..." You know? I would probably avoid answering directly. And I hate to say it, but I probably would deny it if it was really put to me. It's very unfortunate. Maybe if I was in another profession, it would be easier, because there's less pressure. [But in physical education] you're dealing with young kids, young minds, young bodies. (Traci)

Denial was seen as a survival tactic by another participant.

If I actually said no, I think that I would be secure enough in my own head that I would know that I had to. I had to say that to save my own neck. Just like everybody else, I need the job that I have. I have to support myself. So if it comes to a point that I have to say that, "No, I am not a lesbian, if you think that I am a lesbian, then you prove it," I think that's what I would do. I would maintain a comfortable feeling in it, because I know that that's what I would have to do to survive. And I know that I'm a survivor, so I would do it. (Jody)

One participant felt her response would depend on who was confronting her.

If in fact, God forbid, that I would be confronted, I honestly don't know what I would do. It would have to depend on who it was. If it were somebody that I felt comfortable with, like if my immediate boss in the phys. ed. department who is a woman approached me in that way, I may be open minded, but to talk to my administrator at my elementary school who is also a woman, there's kind of a barrier between her and I. We just kind of strictly do our jobs. I probably would deny it with her. It would depend completely on who was asking the question. But even at that, I would be scared to death, because there's such a stigma behind a teacher. You just need a word here or there, and there could be a whole movement to get rid of somebody, and they probably could get rid of you pretty easily.

If it [were] colleagues in the physical education department that I'm very close to, if I was ever confronted with somebody that I felt comfortable with, I'd probably be pretty open. But then, other people, no. I mean would probably lie right through me teeth. (Toni)

One participant said she would admit to being a lesbian and would fight the administration if they tried to discriminate against her.

[If confronted by an administrator about being a lesbian] I'd say, "Yeah, so?" I'd have to know why. "Is there a reason for you questioning my sexual preference? I want to know the reasons." Then I'd have to take it from there. 'Cause unless they have something that I've done, like if I've been involved with a kid, there's really nothing they can do, because I do my job. And I would fight. Ann [my partner] tells me all the time, "It's going to happen sooner or later." I really dread it happening, but what could they really do? I'm a good teacher. The only thing they could do would probably get me out of [City] High school so that I wasn't visible. Plus I'm the only Black woman phys. ed. teacher in the district. So I'm in a pretty powerful position. I don't think they could do very much but make me unhappy. (Caren)

In summary, the participants viewed being a lesbian and being a physical education teacher as two distinct identities. Working toward an integration of the two identities was not considered an option, given the two assumptions they made about being a lesbian physical educator. In fact, the majority of participants spoke strongly about their right and desire to separate the two. Yet their stories revealed their daily encounters with concealing or disclosing their lesbian identity, thus pointing to the constant overlap and tension that existed between their identities as a teacher and as a lesbian. Whether by circumstance or by choice, the participants' sexual orientation affected their experiences as teachers. Their stories also revealed the reality of gay and lesbian harassment and their fear of being fired if their sexual orientation was disclosed. To

guard against personal harassment and to protect their professional livelihood, the participants believed they had no choice but to attempt to separate their two worlds.

### Section Three: A Conceptual Model of the Participants' Meaning-Making Process

The participants made two assumptions: one, that to disclose their sexual orientation would cost them their job, and two, that female physical education teachers are stereotyped as lesbians. These two assumptions provide the framework for understanding their meaning-making process as lesbian physical educators. A conceptual model of this process is diagramed in Figure 2 and is based on the data analysis and Weigert's, et al. (1986) identity-integration matrix (as explained in Chapter II).

This model is broken down into seven steps which trace the situational relationship between (a) the lesbian identity management techniques the participants' employed and (b) their self definitions as lesbian physical educators (characterized by their level of personal/professional separation or integration). The relationship was unpredictable since no consistent pattern emerged for any individual participant or the participant group as a whole. Their experience as lesbian physical education teachers was a daily process of negotiation between concealing and disclosing their lesbian identity. These negotiations, based primarily on the contextual nature of a particular situation, affected the degree to which the participants' lives were integrated personally and professionally. Their levels of personal/professional integration are reflected in the four outcomes of Weigert's, et al. (1986) identity-integration matrix: self-alienation, self-conflict, social conflict, and self-fulfillment.

The following example illustrates the conceptual model. Taken from Sara's interviews, this example portrays the cyclical nature of the meaning-making process. (Note: The performer of the concert referred to is a political activist who is involved in many feminist, environmentalist, and peace causes.)

There's one very important issue that I needed to relay because it's been a very traumatic time in my life.

The year I came back from my year off, I was at a [women's] concert with Kim, [my partner], and I saw one of the school social workers, [Trish], at the concert as well. And we got laughing and said, "Well, this will make the school day more fun." You know, [we] know something about each other and don't mind sharing it. And in fact, it's true. It has made a real difference. And she told me of an art teacher in the building who was a lesbian as well. And that was a nice little group. And it got to be fun. We did some things socially, and it was always a good time.

So anyway, I came back from my year off and met Trish at the [women's concert], and this was probably early [October]. I got to school Monday morning, and there was a note in my mailbox at school from the [superintendent]: "Please see me at your earliest convenience." Now, I had no idea. I thought maybe he just wanted to greet me back from being away. I walked into his office, and the secretary is not even there. I walk in, and I knock on the door, and he said, "Oh, Sara, come on in and close the door, would you mind?" So I walked in, and I had just clicked the door closed, and he said, "So, I hear you were at a [woman's concert] on Friday night." And I thought to myself, how does he know? And so I didn't say anything. I just looked at him. Then he said, "[This singer] is a lesbian, isn't she?" And I said, "Gee, I'm not aware." And he said, "She plugs for a lot of lesbian causes." I didn't acknowledge that I had been there at all, but I said, "No, she fights for a lot of causes. She does a lot for solar power. She does a lot for women's rights. She does a lot for minority rights. She does a lot for the handicapped rights. It's amazing to me that you just pick out lesbian rights."

And I said, "If you have something that you would really like to bring up here, I think we need to get some people in here as witnesses to this. Otherwise, I don't think we need to continue this conversation any further." He said, "Well, I just wanted to make you aware that I am watching you. I am aware of what you're doing. I'm not writing it down anywhere, but I am making notes of it." Well, I walked out of his office, I didn't say anything. I just said, "If we're not going to bring anybody else in here, I'm walking out." So I left.

I don't know how he heard that I was gay, but I went for Trish. I said, "Trish, what's going on here?" And she said, "Not from me. I'm being honest with you, that it wasn't from me." So somebody else must have seen me there that slipped it to him.

I was really shaken over that one. My stomach was in knots. I threw up when I got home that night. I was a wreck. Paranoid, but I think I did change some things in that I was always looking over my shoulder anytime I went to a women's event that was predominantly lesbian. I was looking to see who might know me whether it was a former student, whoever. I did curtail my lifestyle for a while over that one. Fortunately, he retired the next year. And from the new [superintendent], I haven't heard a word. But I think he just wanted to let me know that he could get me if he wanted to. And I believe that he could. Trish said that no [superintendent] would even touch that one with a 10 foot pole if you haven't been doing anything in your classes that would make it obvious. She said that there are too many lesbians, too many homosexuals in teaching that there would be a rallying cause. I don't want to be the center of this rallying cause. I don't mind being the center of some issues, but I'm not sure that this is the one that I feel is the most important issue to fight before a school committee. I don't know if that is a copout on my part. It could be.

This example highlights two separate, but related events that affected Sara's self-definition as a lesbian physical education teacher. Each event can be traced through the seven steps of the meaning making model. The first event occurred at the concert itself (step 1) when Sara openly acknowledged her lesbian identity to a colleague (and lesbian) from her school. Her decision to reveal her sexual orientation was spontaneous (step 2), and the context of the situation (step 3a & 3b)--a women's concert with a predominantly lesbian audience--influenced her decision to disclose her lesbian identity (step 4b). According to Sara, this decision was beneficial (step 5) because her disclosure opened up connections with other lesbians in her school. Consequently, Sara experienced self-fulfillment (step 6) as she was able to more fully integrate her personal and professional identities (step 7).

The second event was Sara's confrontation with her superintendent (step 1). In this situation, she made a decision to not disclose her sexual orientation. This decision was both spontaneous and pre-meditated (step 2). On the one hand, Sara was not expecting this specific encounter with her superintendent. On the other hand, she may have previously decided that if ever confronted by a school administrator, she would conceal her sexual orientation. The context of the situation (a one-on-one encounter with her superintendent who was making threatening accusations) strongly influenced her behavior (step 3a & 3b). Sara used a variety of strategies to conceal her lesbian identity (step 4a). One positive outcome of her decision not to reveal her sexual orientation was that her superintendent's suspicions about her being a lesbian were not confirmed (step 5). Two negative consequences, however, were the emotional turmoil she experienced immediately after the confrontation and the changes she made in her public lifestyle (step 5). Both changes are indicative of the self-conflict she experienced (step 6). This self-conflict was further demonstrated in her reflections about whether or not to be a rallying cause for gay and lesbian teachers. This experience affected her self-definition as a lesbian physical educator because she was forced to

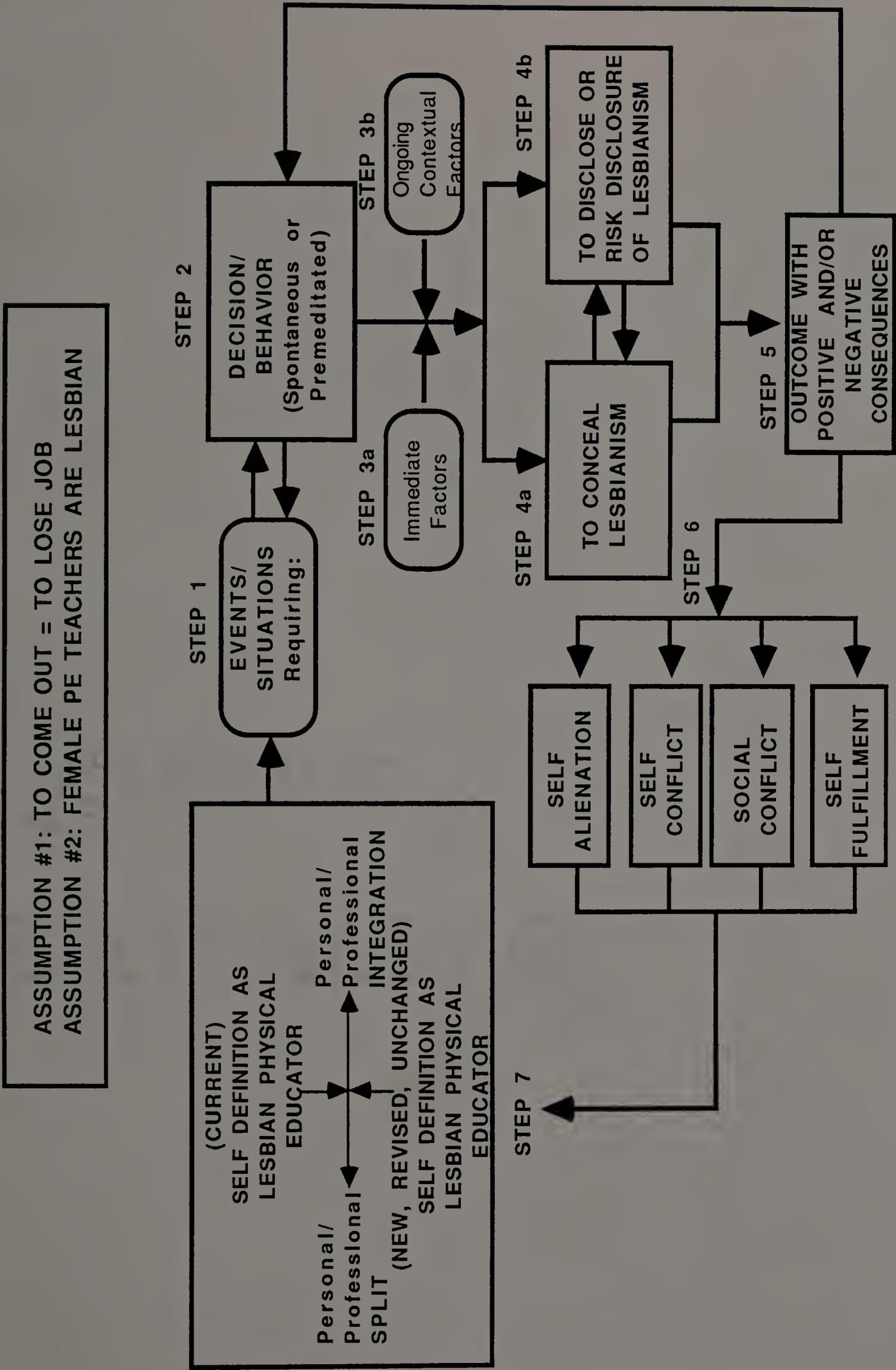


Figure 2. Meaning-Making as a Lesbian Physical Educator: A Conceptual Model

separate her personal identity as a lesbian from her professional identity as a teacher (step 7).

This incident clearly demonstrates the inconsistency of the participants' meaning-making process. The participants' self-definitions as lesbian physical educators changed from situation to situation. In one situation, a participant could experience self-fulfillment and in another, self-conflict. They made decisions based on the context of the particular situation, and these decisions were overshadowed by the two assumptions held by the participants. Their day-to-day decisions about employing strategies to conceal or reveal their lesbian identity reflected their day-to-day experience of personal and professional dissonance and consonance.

#### Chapter Summary

This chapter provided background information about individual participants and the participant group as a whole with respect to their identities as females, lesbians, and physical educators. The two assumptions made by the participants about being a lesbian physical educator, the strategies they used to hide or disclose their lesbianism within the school community, the immediate and contextual factors that affected the participants' decisions to conceal or reveal their sexual orientation, and the strategies participants would use if confronted by an administrator were described. Finally, I presented a conceptual model outlining the process by which the participants made decisions about managing their identities as lesbian physical educators.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

One underlying goal of this research is to be an impetus for dialogue and change. The participants' descriptions about the contextual realities of being a lesbian physical educator along with the meaning they made of their experiences can be used to begin this process among researchers and practitioners.

This chapter explores on a descriptive and theoretical level the experience of being a lesbian physical educator. First, major observations about the day-to-day realities of lesbian physical educators who work in the public schools are summarized. Second, the similarities and differences between the experiences of lesbian physical educators and other teachers are discussed. Third, the participants' experiences are examined from the perspectives of feminism and oppression theory. Fourth, suggestions for initiating dialogue and change within the physical education profession are presented. Finally, this chapter concludes with reflections about the use of phenomenological interviewing to do controversial research.

#### Being a Lesbian Physical Educator: An Emerging Story

The participants described school environments enveloped in homophobia and heterosexism. In their work surroundings, heterosexuality was acknowledged and celebrated while homosexuality was discredited and silenced. The participants experienced homophobia both externally and internally. Externally, they were subjected to both blatant and subtle forms of homophobic harassment, ranging from direct threats of dismissal to casual displays of heterosexual privilege. Internally, they lived in two worlds, denying and hiding their lesbian identity to survive as teachers. The participants in this study accepted living in two worlds as a necessary way of life for a lesbian physical education teacher, and they employed various techniques to manage their lesbian identity within the school. Yet their stories revealed the consequences and contradictions that were a part of their day-to-day experiences of living in two worlds.

## Consequences and Contradictions

Regardless of the degree to which the participants accepted their lesbian identities, each paid a personal and professional toll for concealing her lesbian identity in school. For some participants, the personal toll was self-hatred and non-acceptance of their lesbian identities; for others, the toll was the frustration and isolation associated with hiding their lesbian identity. Professionally, the participants felt unable to be fully functioning or fully human members of the school community. They distanced themselves from students as well as colleagues and avoided any overlap in their personal and professional lives. As teachers, they sacrificed their position to be positive lesbian role models for both gay and heterosexual students. As individuals, the participants remained a mystery to many of their peers; information about their personal lives was intentionally obscured by secrecy, mixed messages, and lies. Perhaps the heaviest toll was the energy required day in and day out to maintain their cover. For some, this became second nature (a tragedy in itself), but for others it was a daily struggle.

The participants' descriptions of living in two worlds were filled with contradictions. An underlying assumption made by the participants was that to disclose their sexual orientation would cost them their jobs. Yet every participant believed various members of the school community (including students, teachers, administrators and parents) already knew--and to some degree accepted--that they were lesbians. In addition, each participant had disclosed her lesbianism to at least one member of the school community without suffering negative professional consequences.

This contradiction can be understood by differentiating among coming out publicly, privately, or through assumption. Coming out publicly entailed openly acknowledging their lesbianism to someone in school. From the participants' perspective, the inevitable consequence of such visible and explicit disclosure would be job termination, because they believed society and school communities would not tolerate this openness. Coming out privately to individual members of the school community, however, was less

visible. Participants considered this more acceptable because it kept sexual orientation a private matter. In addition, the participants were in control of who knew what, and therefore, they believed this way of coming out was less threatening. Coming out through assumption was also perceived as considerably less risky than public disclosure. Even if colleagues or students assumed a participant was a lesbian, she could always deny her lesbianism if confronted directly. Coming out through assumption did not commit the participants to any formal disclosure. They could repudiate that assumption at any time. In addition, coming out through assumption allowed others to deal with the participants' lesbianism in a less direct and confronting manner. The unspoken agreement between the participants and colleagues was that the participants' lesbianism would be overlooked if nothing was publicly acknowledged. By assuming someone was a lesbian without actually discussing it, no one was forced to deal openly with an issue they were uncomfortable addressing.

Another contradiction that emerged from the participants' descriptions was their labeling of the personal/professional split they made as a choice. Many participants vehemently defended their right to separate their identities as a lesbian and as a teacher. From their perspective, being a lesbian had no relevance to their role as teachers, and as lesbians, their sexual relations were private matters apart from the school. Their stories, however, contradicted this "separation as choice" perspective. The participants assumed they would lose their job if they disclosed their sexual orientation. Given this assumption, their "choice" to split their personal and professional lives is, therefore, more a career requirement than an option. This separation resulted in the personal/professional dissonance they experienced in maintaining two worlds.

The participants believed that they were able to separate their lesbian and teacher identities, but their stories revealed that keeping these two identities completely separate was difficult, if not impossible. Their personal and professional worlds were constantly colliding and became intertwined either by circumstance or by choice. For

example, leaving their lesbian identity at home was not possible when faced daily with students' negative use of "gay" and "faggot" or when confronted with the decision of whether or not to counsel gay students. Their overt behavior may have communicated to others a separation of the two identities, but within themselves, this split was not possible.

The meaning the participants made of being a lesbian also included contradictions. On the one hand, they described being a lesbian as a sexual preference. From this perspective they argued that they were just like heterosexuals except for choosing sexual partners of the same gender. This argument was used to justify their assertion that being a lesbian had nothing to do with their ability to teach. On the other hand, they characterized being a lesbian as a personal identity not limited to sexual intimacy. They described their relationships with women as more caring, more equal, and not bound by traditional gender roles. This description goes beyond perceiving lesbianism simply as a sexual preference to describing it as a personal identity that challenged stereotypical gender roles. Even though they did not name it as such, this description has political and feminist implications.

These contradictions exemplify the dissonance the participants experienced as lesbians and as teachers. This dissonance occurred because the relationship between those two identities remained unresolved and ever changing. These contradictions represent the tension of their two worlds constantly meeting and parting, joining and separating.

#### Lesbian Physical Educators as Risk-Takers

Within the school setting the participants spent most of their energy concealing their sexual orientation, but many of them, on occasion, also chose to disclose or risk disclosure of their lesbianism. Their risk-taking behavior was cautious and unpredictable: how they chose to react in one situation varied from how they reacted in another similar situation. To outsiders, the risks these participants took may appear

minimal, but given the homophobic climate of their work worlds, their risk-taking behavior should not be minimized. While conducting the interviews, I became increasingly more appreciative and respectful of their courage. Participating in this study, in and of itself, involves considerable risk, and within their roles as teachers, the risks they took by coming out to students and colleagues deserve special attention.

Each participant in this study had disclosed or acknowledged her sexual orientation to one or more members of the school community. This kind of risk is the most significant, because (a) it confirmed their sexual orientation in an irreversible way, and (b) it forced others to deal directly with a participant's lesbian identity. Research about homophobia indicates that peoples' attitudes about homosexuals are affected by personally knowing a gay or lesbian person. The more gays and lesbians a person knows or is acquainted with, the less homophobic he or she tends to be (Herek, 1984). By openly acknowledging their lesbian identity to either heterosexual or homosexual colleagues, students, administrators, or parents, the participants interrupted the effects of both external and internal homophobia.

In interactions with students and ex-students who were questioning their own sexual orientation, many participants either came out directly or supported the student's choice to be gay or lesbian without coming out directly. A recent study indicates that as much as 30% of teen suicide may be related to sexual orientation confusion (Adams, 1989). This figure underscores the need for positive lesbian and gay role models in the schools. Though their visibility was limited, many participants in this study assumed this role despite their belief that doing so risked their careers.

Given the homophobic nature of schools and the lack of employment protection in most teachers' contracts, the risks taken in coming out and in counseling gay students are significant. Unfortunately, the message these participants felt forced to communicate was veiled in secrecy and caution: it is okay to be gay or lesbian, but don't be open about it and be selective in who you tell.

### Living in Two Worlds: Similarities and Differences

Separating one's personal and professional lives is not restricted to lesbian physical education teachers. Many teachers identify with this dynamic, and parallels can be made between their experience and that of lesbian physical education teachers. An argument can be made, however, that lesbian physical educators live this separation in a way that is different from other teachers, including other gay and lesbian teachers.

Many teachers subscribe to the belief that interactions with students must remain on a professional level; crossing that boundary and disclosing information about one's personal life happens rarely, if at all. The participants in this study hold this belief as well, yet the nature of teacher/student interactions in a physical education environment differs from that in a classroom setting. Unlike classroom teachers, physical education teachers are required to supervise locker rooms when students are changing clothes or taking showers. This places the female physical education teacher in a vulnerable position. If she supervises the locker room in a visible way, her behavior is often misinterpreted by students, and she is labeled as a "locker room peeper." Also, physical education teachers are often required to touch students when demonstrating the proper techniques of a skill or when spotting a student's execution of a physical maneuver. Lesbian physical educators are very conscious about how this type of touch is interpreted by students.

In addition, a less formal atmosphere exists in the locker room, the gym, and on the playing fields, and this informality invites more personal interactions between the physical education teacher and her students. This is especially true for those physical education teachers who coach. Coaches spend a significant amount of concentrated time with a small group of students. The team atmosphere encourages personal closeness, and for the lesbian physical education teacher/coach or any other coach, the personal and professional boundaries may become less clearly defined or possible to maintain.

In interactions with other teachers, the rigidness of that boundary depends on the particular school context. For example, in a smaller school teachers may be more likely to develop a personal rapport as a whole faculty group, whereas in a larger system this rapport may be present only in smaller groups of individual teachers. The nature of that rapport (the amount and type of personal disclosure) depends on the norms established by the individuals involved and determines a teacher's sense of personal/professional separation or integration. In this respect, the experience of lesbian physical education teachers is no different from that of other teachers.

In other respects, however, the experience of heterosexual and gay teachers in making personal disclosures is very different. For example, heterosexual teachers disclose a significant piece of their personal identity through assumption. Regardless of whether a heterosexual teacher brags about her child's first piano recital or talks about the fight he had with his wife the previous night, their heterosexuality is assumed and, therefore, unlike lesbian physical education teachers and other gay and lesbian teachers, they are not faced with the dilemma of concealing or disclosing their sexual orientation. Another difference is that heterosexual teachers have choices about whether or not to mix their personal and professional lives. The lesbian physical educator who wants to stay in teaching believes she has no choice: either she separates her lesbian and teacher identities or she gets out of teaching altogether.

The physical education environment also affects the nature of interactions between physical education teachers and their colleagues, but instead of inviting more informal interactions as it does with students, it sometimes encourages fewer. Many times physical education teachers teach in more than one school, and the time which might have been spent interacting in the teachers' room is used traveling from school to school. In addition, physical education offices are situated in locker rooms adjacent to gyms which are typically separated from the main buildings (and mainstream) of schools. By architectural design, physical education teachers are isolated from the rest of the

faculty. For the lesbian physical educator who wants to avoid any personal and professional overlap, this setup provides a kind of private sanctuary for her to remain invisible or hidden. For the lesbian teacher who resents feeling forced to live in two worlds, however, the physical education environment may only compound her sense of isolation and personal/professional dissonance.

The lesbian physical education teacher experiences this dissonance in ways similar to and different from other teachers with stigmatized identities. For instance, like other gay and lesbian teachers, she works in an environment where homophobia typically goes unchallenged; words like "gay" or "faggot" or "queer" are used by students, teachers, and administrators alike. To challenge the use of these slurs risks disclosure of a gay teacher's sexual orientation. Unlike other teachers with stigmatized identities (such as unmarried mothers or recovered alcoholics), gay and lesbian teachers live daily with the threat--perceived or real--of losing their job if their sexual orientation becomes known. No other stigmatized social minority group in education has received as much negative public attention as gay and lesbian teachers have. The public debate surrounding this issue often focuses on the image of gay and lesbian educators as child molesters and gay lifestyle recruiters. The negative stereotypes imposed by society along with the commonplace use of homophobic labels in school settings reinforce and legitimize gay and lesbian teachers' fears of losing their jobs.

Although many persons, both homosexual and heterosexual, assert that their sexual orientation is "nobody's business" but their own, the legal, religious, and psychological stigmas associated with homosexuality take sexual orientation out of the private realm and into the public arena of society. The social, political, and economic privileges enjoyed by heterosexuals are provided at the cost of discrimination directed at gays and lesbians. Until this condition is eliminated, a person's sexual orientation will never be simply a private matter. For gay and lesbian teachers, this reality makes their experience different from other teachers with stigmatized identities.

All gay and lesbian teachers to some degree live in two worlds, yet the lesbian physical education teacher experiences this dissonance in a different way. As noted previously, the physical education environment itself changes the nature of their interactions with students and colleagues. The primary factor distinguishing their experience, however, is the widespread assumption made by many students, teachers, administrators, and parents that female physical education teachers are lesbians. No other teacher in a school who has as much visibility or contact with students is as likely to be stereotyped as gay or lesbian. Those teachers whose subject areas are not consistent with traditional gender roles, such as the female shop teacher or the male librarian, may also be tagged with the lesbian or gay label, but their numbers are fewer. Not every school has a female shop teacher or a male librarian, but most have female physical educators. The majority of students encounter at least one female physical educator at some point during their 13 years of public schooling.

The heterosexual female physical educator also experiences the lesbian stereotyping and may compensate by exaggerating or emphasizing her heterosexual orientation. Unlike her lesbian counterpart, however, the heterosexual physical educator does not live with the fear of being fired if her sexual orientation is disclosed. For the lesbian physical education teacher, the assumption that female physical educators are lesbians intensifies her need to separate her personal and professional identities. This separation, in turn, affects her behavior as a teacher and the meaning she makes of her experience as a lesbian physical education teacher.

#### Lesbian Physical Educators as an Oppressed Minority

The experiences of lesbian physical educators can be viewed from many theoretical perspectives, such as deviancy theory and identity theory. (See Chapter II.) This section examines the experiences of the participants using the frameworks of feminism and oppression theory. From these perspectives, the participants, as lesbians and as women, are an oppressed minority. It is important to note that the participants did not

use the phrase, "oppressed minority," to describe their experiences as lesbian physical educators, and most did not call themselves feminists. Their stories, however, when viewed through the lens of feminism and oppression, reveal the pervasiveness of homophobia and heterosexism in their worlds. The goal of using a perspective grounded in feminism is to frame their day-to-day work lives in the broader social context of living in a patriarchal society. Oppression theory is used to focus the discussion of the participants' experiences more specifically on the processes by which their oppression is actualized.

As lesbians in physical education, the participants challenged the traditional definitions of females imposed by a patriarchal society. As women, they defied stereotypical definitions of femininity and as athletes, assumed roles that women historically have been barred or discouraged from assuming. As physical educators, they broke new ground for young girls and boys, teaching and modeling the athletic potential of females. As lesbians, they silently, but visibly rejected women's dependence upon men for economic support and emotional validation. Consequently, their presence alone challenged the foundations upon which sexism and heterosexism are built.

Though most participants did not accept society's negative perception of them as lesbians, they felt powerless to change the institutional and social forces that maintained their status as subordinates. It is important to view their sense of powerlessness in the professional context in which they worked. The participants' occupational ties were to sport and education. Both are conservative institutions, "serving to inculcate and celebrate selected values, rules, and behaviors believed to be necessary for maintaining society" (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983, p. 11). The selected values, rules, and behaviors within sport and education reflect those of the dominant culture. As physical educators, the participants in this study worked within the male-defined and heterosexually oriented parameters of not one, but two conservative institutions. The dominant cultural values within sport and education were mutually reinforcing, and

their combined presence made it difficult for the participants to name and challenge their oppression. Consequently, the priority for most participants was surviving within these oppressive systems, not changing them.

My intent in naming survival as their priority is not to blame the victim, in other words to judge the participants responsible for their status as subordinates, but rather to emphasize how the conditions of oppression they encountered were successful in maintaining their subordinate position. Like individuals from other subordinate groups--Blacks, Jews, persons with disabilities--these participants are part of a larger social, political, and economic system of oppression that, when successful, keeps them isolated, silent, and powerless. Blaming lesbian physical educators for accepting their oppression as subordinates is like blaming Blacks for being slaves. The focus is taken off the systemic and institutionalized forces that form the foundation of an oppressive society. Yet pointing out the participants' response to the homophobia and heterosexism they encountered is helpful in understanding the dynamics of oppression.

The lesbian physical educators in this study described school environments in which homophobia and heterosexism flourished. As individual lesbians, they felt alone and powerless to change their environments in any significant way. They also expressed their deep commitment to teaching and working with young people. Given their isolation within a homophobic work setting and their professional commitment to teaching, the participants' priority quite logically was survival. They were caught in a "catch-22" situation: challenging the system that devalued their personal worth meant risking jobs which gave them professional worth. From their perspective, they were in a no-win situation. The following description of the participants' roles as subordinates is presented in this context. My purpose is not to blame them but rather to emphasize the complex nature of oppression.

Jackson and Hardiman (1988) identified four conditions present in an oppressive society: (a) the oppressor (or dominant) group has power to name and enact reality, (b)

the oppressed (or subordinate) group internalize their own oppressed condition and collude with their oppressors in maintaining the status quo, (c) harassment and discrimination and other forms of differential and unequal treatment are institutionalized and systematic, and (d) individual members of both the oppressor and oppressed groups are socialized to play their roles and to see those roles as normal and correct (pp. 5-6). Harro (1983) described subordinates as powerless, stereotyped, knowledgeable about dominants, as looking to dominants for reward and punishment, and as outsiders by virtue of isolation and invisibility. The next section of this chapter (a) describes how the four conditions of oppression were present in the participants' lives, and (b) analyzes how these conditions functioned to maintain a successful system of oppression.

#### Dominants Have Power to Name and Enact Reality

For the participants in this study, the negative labeling of gays and lesbians was the most powerful tool used by the dominant culture to name and enact reality. This labeling can be broken down into four categories that range from blatant name-calling to subtle innuendos. First, students and colleagues commonly referred to gays and lesbians as "lezzies," "queers," "dykes," or "fags." The participants were subjected to this form of name-calling both directly (references were made about them personally) and indirectly (references were made about others assumed to be gay or lesbian). Second, "gay" was used as a generic term with derogatory connotations. Students and colleagues used "gay" as a negative label for an individual or thing without necessarily making reference to a person's sexual orientation. A third category of negative labeling is the stereotyping of gays and lesbians as child molesters, gay lifestyle recruiters, abnormal, deviants, or locker room peepers. Tagging unmarried, female physical educators over 30 years of age as old maids and lesbians also can be included in this category. The final category of negative labeling consists of the subtle innuendos made about physically active women who did not fit the traditional stereotype of femininity. Participants were

aware that adjectives like masculine, mannish, or unfeminine are code language for lesbian, and these labels were used to make negative insinuations about the sexual orientation of the participants and other athletically skilled women.

#### Subordinates Internalize Their Own Oppression and Collude with Dominants

All the participants in this study experienced internalized homophobia and colluded with dominants to varying degrees. From the perspective of oppression theory, the protection strategies employed by the participants to conceal their sexual orientation often involved collusion (conscious or unconscious actions that support and perpetuate one's oppression). From their perspective, however, these strategies were used as a way to survive within homophobic school environments. It is important to view their actions in this context and to remember that professional survival was their priority; they behaved in ways that protected their jobs as teachers.

Their internalized homophobia and collusion took many forms. For example, some participants were visibly uncomfortable with the word "lesbian" and preferred to identify themselves as "gay." For these participants, the lesbian label triggered the negative stereotype accepted by the dominant culture of an unkempt, super-masculine "dyke." In addition, few participants wanted to be labeled as feminists, and some pointedly disassociated themselves from those they referred to as "women's libbers." In this respect, they accepted the dominant culture's definition: an active feminist was a radical and blatant lesbian. Other forms of their internalized homophobia included passing as heterosexual, laughing at or telling derogatory gay jokes, remaining silent in the face of gay harassment or negative stereotyping, and denying one's lesbianism when confronted. Disassociating oneself from lesbian acquaintances when in the company of heterosexuals, isolating oneself from other lesbians, and describing homosexuality as abnormal are other examples of their internalized homophobia and collusion with dominants.

## Harassment and Discrimination Are Institutionalized and Systematic

Harassment and discrimination were deeply rooted within the cultures of the participants' schools. Some forms of harassment and discrimination were daily occurrences, while others were isolated incidents. For instance, derogatory comments or jokes about gays and lesbians were commonplace in the participants' school environments and were accepted in ways racial or ethnic slurs usually were not. These homophobic comments typically went unchallenged as did the public harassment of gay and lesbian students. The participants repeatedly remarked that gay and lesbian students had no source of support or counseling within the school setting. In addition, most faculty networks were not inclusive of primary relationships that fell outside the heterosexual norm. Teacher contracts did not include anti-discrimination clauses that protected gay and lesbian employment rights, and sexual orientation was not a protected category in state non-discrimination laws.

Many participants had either experienced first hand or witnessed isolated incidents of gay and lesbian harassment. For example, a participant was warned by a school administrator to watch her step or he would disclose her sexual orientation. One participant found, "Miss Taylor is a lesbian," spray painted in the locker room, while another encountered similar graffiti on an outside school building wall. Some participants were accused of having sexual relationships with female students. Several participants watched gay or lesbian students being verbally harassed by other students and chose not to intervene because they were afraid of jeopardizing their secret. Most participants described these different forms of harassment and discrimination as an accepted (or institutionalized) reality for gay and lesbian teachers working in the public schools.

## Individual Members Are Socialized to Play Their Roles and to See Them as Normal

The participants in this study accepted their socialized roles as subordinates. This acceptance was communicated in various ways. For example, they accepted as

unchangeable the behavioral restrictions they experienced as lesbians teaching physical education. These restrictions included avoiding (a) disclosure of one's sexual orientation, (b) personal interactions with colleagues, (c) physical contact with female students, and (d) challenges to homophobic remarks. Most participants believed that their love of teaching outweighed the personal and professional sacrifices they made by avoiding these behaviors. Again, professional survival was their priority, and survival required that they impose these restrictions on their behavior.

Many participants firmly believed that this society will not accept homosexuals, especially those who teach children. Further, the participants in this study believed sexual orientation to be a private, personal issue that others should not be forced to address publicly. Consequently, they excused colleagues for not naming sexual orientation as a salient issue in the schools. Instead, they assumed that if they were not publicly open as lesbians, if they did not make waves, their silent lesbianism would be tolerated. This assumption seemed to be shared by dominants as well. Participants described some individual dominants, many of whom were seen as supportive of the participants' lesbian lifestyles, as hesitant to openly discuss the issue of sexual orientation. Like the participants, they hinted at the issue without directly naming it. By doing so, these dominants along with the participants played their respective roles in keeping sexual orientation a censored topic, relegated to the private and personal realm of the individual.

#### Maintaining a Successful System of Oppression:

##### Consequences of Oppressive Conditions

The conditions of oppression the participants encountered as lesbian physical educators--the negative labeling imposed upon the participants by others, their internalized homophobia, the harassment and discrimination to which they were subjected, and the acceptance of their socialized roles as subordinates--all served to maintain and perpetuate an oppressive system in four basic ways. One, the participants

were silenced. Two, they feared being discovered as lesbians. Three, they isolated themselves, and four, they felt powerless. Their sense of powerlessness can be further described in three ways: (a) the participants blamed themselves, (b) they accepted their oppression as unchangeable, and (c) they formed no collective identity as an oppressed minority. These outcomes are typical consequences for subordinates who attempt to survive and live within a successful system of oppression.

The function of negatively labeling lesbians was to instill fear in the participants. The fear of exposure, of harassment and intimidation, and of being fired rendered participants powerless to challenge their oppression. Consequently, they remained silent about their sexual orientation, they were discouraged from "making waves" and upsetting the status quo, and they felt powerless to change the conditions of their subordinate status.

In a larger context, stereotyping physically active women as lesbians succeeds in keeping sport a male domain and in relegating female sport participants to a marginal status. Many women choose not to participate in sport for fear of being labeled a lesbian. If they do participate, some apologize for their physical ability by not playing to their full potential on the court or by emphasizing their femininity off the court. If they participate fully (as most participants did in this study), they are faced with consequences. One consequence for the participants was isolation. To alleviate the effects of negative labeling, most participants isolated themselves from male colleagues, heterosexual female colleagues, and the general school community. Some even isolated themselves from other gay teachers. This isolation was a key component in maintaining a system of oppression. Isolated from other gay and lesbian teachers and potential heterosexual allies in school, the participants had little power (or support) to change their status.

The negative labeling of gay and lesbian educators as child molesters or locker room peepers also disempowered the participants. To avoid accusations, the participants

remained silent about their sexual orientation, or they engaged in behaviors that led others to assume they were heterosexual. To protect themselves from being accused of improper relationships with students, the participants emotionally and physically distanced themselves from students. Maintaining silence and distance are common survival strategies among subordinates who feel powerless to interrupt a system of oppression.

Like negative labeling, internalized homophobia has similar functions in maintaining oppression. Internalized homophobia is a form of self-blame and self-hatred. Gearhart (1989) stated that internalized homophobia affects lesbians and gay men in several ways: "it silences us, it intensifies our fear of discovery, and it isolates us" (p. 8). Consequently, individuals with similar experiences stay separated from one another and do not develop a collective identity as an oppressed minority. The participants' stories revealed their internalized homophobia and for some, their non-acceptance of their lesbian identity. The silence, the fear of discovery, and the isolation were common themes in each participant's description of her individual experience as a lesbian physical educator. These lesbian physical educators did not share a collective identity as an oppressed minority, and therefore, had no collective strength to challenge their status as subordinates.

The harassment and discrimination directed at the participants also intensified their fear, silence, isolation, and sense of powerlessness. Whether blatantly threatened by administrators or subtly discouraged from bringing partners to faculty gatherings, the participants learned (and to some degree accepted) that, as lesbians, harassment and discrimination were everyday occurrences. The participants learned to accept as normal the homophobia and heterosexism that overshadowed their worlds. This acceptance is reflective of their fear and their belief that their oppression was unchangeable. For example, if an individual participant challenged the harassment and discrimination she encountered, she believed she would be subjected to additional harassment and would

possibly have to reveal her sexual orientation. If she acknowledged her lesbianism, however, she believed she jeopardized her employment as teacher. Most participants chose the "safe" route and remained silent in the face of harassment and discrimination. Their fear, their sense of powerlessness, and their silence are clear indications of a successful system of oppression in operation.

Another indication is the participants' acceptance of their subordinate roles. This group of lesbian physical educators acknowledged the widespread homophobia that is present both inside and outside school settings, but most participants felt powerless to change the oppression they experienced on a daily basis. They communicated this powerlessness in many ways, sometimes in the form of tolerance. For example, they expressed the belief that society, family, friends, and colleagues should not be forced to openly deal with sexual orientation issues and argued that the less open they were, the more likely their lesbianism would be tolerated. They dismissed the generic, negative use of "gay" as meaningless, characterizing it as just a word students currently use instead of "jerk." They restricted their behavior as teachers to avoid accusations.

Moreover, they described sexual orientation as a personal and private matter that does not need to be publicly acknowledged. They relegated their lesbianism to the private realm of the individual. When sexual orientation is viewed from this perspective, the institutional forces that shape and define oppression are not questioned, and "progress is defined by accommodating to the inducements of present institutional arrangements and forces" (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983, p. 250). The onus of change is placed on the individual and not the system. One consequence of a person-change perspective is person-blame. A few participants blamed themselves for being lesbian and grudgingly described their lesbianism as a personal reality they had to accept. These same participants expressed a desire to be heterosexual so they could assimilate into the dominants' world.

In summary, the conditions of oppression present in the participants' worlds succeeded in keeping them silent, fearful, isolated, and powerless. Pointing out their role in maintaining their subordinate status is not to blame them, but rather to acknowledge the complex and overwhelming nature of oppression. Together, the silence, fear, and isolation they experienced--compounded by the conservative natures of sport and education--reinforced their sense of powerlessness and prevented the participants from seeing the broader social context of their experience and from believing change is possible. This, in turn, deterred them from developing a collective identity as an oppressed minority. A collective identity is critical in eliminating a group's oppression as subordinates.

Next Steps: Understanding One's Consciousness as a Subordinate and  
Developing a Collective Identity

Though we are justified in our acknowledgement and response to external homophobia and often have little control over it, we do have control over what we choose to internalize as true. The challenge is to bring internalized homophobia to consciousness, examine it, and set ourselves free from it. (Pharr, 1988, p. 69)

Jackson and Hardiman (1988) have proposed an oppression/liberation development model (O/LDM) that describes the sequential process engaged in by dominants and subordinates to achieve a liberated social identity in an oppressive environment. The O/LDM model is used in this study to identify the participants' current stage of consciousness as subordinates. In addition, it is used as a reference for suggesting next steps in developing a collective identity as an oppressed minority among lesbian physical educators.

Step One: Understanding One's Consciousness as a Subordinate

The O/LDM consists of five stages of consciousness: (a) Naive, (b) Acceptance, (c) Resistance, (d) Redefinition, and (e) Internalization. Jackson and Hardiman (1988) metaphorically use eyeglasses of different prescriptions to describe the transition from one stage to the next.

At each stage of development, it is as if the person or social group...takes off one pair of glasses and puts on another pair with a completely different prescription. This new pair of glasses provides a different view of the world than did the pair that was removed. This change of glasses, or consciousness, can have a dramatic effect on the way that the person thinks, feels and behaves. With each change of glasses, the person or group will view their condition in terms of oppression differently. (p. 16)

The naive stage of consciousness is characterized by little or no social awareness about conditions of oppression. Individuals at this stage do not recognize their social group memberships (such as those related to race, gender, or class), and issues related to these social groups appear irrelevant. A person at the next stage, acceptance, has consciously or unconsciously accepted the dominant's logic system. They have "accepted the messages that have been given to them about the nature of their social condition, the superiority of the dominant group members and the dominant culture, and the inferiority of subordinate peoples and cultures" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1988, p. 18). The resistance stage is marked by individuals first acknowledging and then questioning the existence of oppression and its negative effects. During this time, they begin to recognize their own power and become more proactive in challenging their oppression. Persons within the fourth stage of consciousness, redefinition, have rejected the dominant's logic system and have begun the process of empowering themselves individually and collectively to rename their social group experience. Part of their renaming experience is to reclaim their group heritage, a process which engenders collective pride. The final stage of internalization is characterized by persons integrating their redefined sense of social group identity fully into their lives. They develop skills to nurture this new sense of positive group identity as they continue their fight to eliminate oppression.

A person is motivated to move from one stage to the next when she or he recognizes that "the world view of the current stage is either illogical, detrimental to a healthy self-concept, impractical or in general no longer serving some important self-interest"

(Jackson & Hardiman, 1988, p. 16). When the exit phase of one stage overlaps with the entry phase of another, a person or group may appear to be in two stages simultaneously.

With respect to a social group identity as lesbians, the participants in this study can be classified as being in two stages of consciousness: acceptance and resistance. Both stages are manifested either actively (consciously) or passively (unconsciously), and each is characterized by three progressive sub-stages which mark a person's entrance into, adoption of, and exit from the stage. For example, a person within the acceptance stage at first consciously or unconsciously identifies with the dominant's logic system, then rationalizes or denies the existence of oppression, and finally acknowledges some overt forms of oppression. To some participants, being a lesbian was not normal, and this form of internalized homophobia is one manifestation of their identification with the dominant's logic system. Others rationalized or denied their oppression by saying that society was not ready for lesbians to be public about their sexual orientation. Most participants were able to recognize the blatant forms of oppression they experienced, but not all were able to identify the more subtle manifestations of their oppression, such as their own internalized homophobia.

Persons in the resistance stage move from initially questioning and challenging oppressive practices and policies to experiencing feelings of frustration, pain, and anger about their oppression. The final phase of this stage is characterized by individuals discontinuing a pattern of collusion with their own oppression and realizing a sense of power in developing a clearer sense of "who I am not" and "who I am" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1988). For instance, many participants shared the feelings expressed by one participant who remarked, "What does being homosexual have to do with being a teacher?" This participant was questioning the dominants' belief that homosexuals are unacceptable for the teaching profession solely because of their sexual orientation. Most participants did not challenge the homophobia they encountered on a daily basis, but all of the participants voiced their frustration, pain, and anger about being negatively

stereotyped and harassed as lesbian physical education teachers. Although most participants chose to ignore the use of "faggot" by students and the demeaning jokes about gays or lesbians told by teachers, a few participants were becoming more proactive in addressing the homophobia they experienced in the schools.

### Step Two: Developing a Collective Identity

Movement from the resistance stage to the redefinition stage is facilitated by dialogue. Members of the same social group join together to rename their experience. As Jackson and Hardiman (1988) explain:

They become clearer about the uniqueness of their group. They come to understand that they are more than the victims of oppression, more than just people who are not the same as the dominant group. They are no longer bound by a sense of self that is determined by how well or how much they can assimilate into the dominant group. These subordinates come to experience their sense of groupness in a way that engenders pride. (p. 23)

The lesbian physical educators in this study did not share this kind of collective identity as a subordinate or oppressed group. Homophobia and heterosexism silenced and isolated them, and a public group identity as lesbians instilled fear not pride. To be publicly associated with other lesbians was perceived as a threat to their safety and job security. Privately, many of the participants were part of a sub-culture of lesbian physical educators, but their social interactions with one another were carried out discreetly in private homes or gay bars. Rarely, if at all, did these participants come together to discuss with each other their experiences as lesbian physical educators. Many of the participants shared that their participation in this study marked the first time they had talked about what it is like to be a lesbian physical educator.

One purpose of this research has been to break the cycle of silence, isolation, and fear that currently exists among lesbian physical educators. By openly acknowledging their presence to each other, lesbian physical educators can begin the process of developing a positive collective identity. This collective identity is essential for

interrupting the effects of homophobia and heterosexism within physical education and sport.

For lesbians to experience freedom, individually and collectively, we have to free ourselves both from within and without. Freedom does not come from the struggles of a few leaders in isolation...Great strides for freedom come when large groups of oppressed people come to believe that they deserve freedom and then work together to achieve it. (Pharr, 1988, pp. 82-83)

### Dialogue and Change: Implications for Individuals and the Profession

By breaking the silence surrounding the lesbian presence within physical education, this study can be used as a catalyst for dialogue and change. The following section contains suggestions for actualizing this process of dialogue and change. Included are recommendations for what we--as individuals, as lesbian physical educators, as teachers, as heterosexual allies, and as professionals--can do to challenge the homophobia and heterosexism that exists within physical education.

#### Educating Ourselves

Homophobia and heterosexism affect not only lesbian physical educators but all physical educators: heterosexuals as well as homosexuals, men as well as women. These are issues that must be addressed individually and organizationally by the entire physical education community. For instance, education is the best tool for counteracting misinformation and lack of information about lesbians and gay men. The fear associated with homophobia is perpetuated by ignorance; it can be neutralized by knowledge. As individuals--whether lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual--we need to read, to listen, and to share with each other (see Appendix D for a reading list). We each need to unlearn the negative messages we have received about sexual orientation differences and replace these with new lessons celebrating our diversity.

#### Developing Support Networks for Lesbian Physical Educators

As lesbian physical educators, we need to address as a group the silence, fear, and isolation that continues to affect our personal and professional lives. Informal networks of lesbian physical educators can be used as sources of support, but formal networks are

necessary to publicly acknowledge and embrace the lesbian presence in physical education. The goal is to move away from private discussions veiled in secrecy and coded language toward more visible and open exchanges distinguished by honesty and directness. Risks must be taken, and we must openly acknowledge our sexual orientation. Our closet doors must be opened, perhaps cautiously at first, but eventually they must be taken off the hinges.

### Challenging Homophobia within School Environments

As teachers--irrespective of our sexual orientation--we need to stop ignoring and begin confronting those students and colleagues who use the words "gay," "faggot," "queer," and "lezzie" in their daily interactions. We can no longer rationalize our silence by stating that overuse has rendered these slurs meaningless or that students just use them as innocuous name-calling. Regardless of how they are used, these terms, if unchallenged, validate and support a climate within schools that perpetuates a fear and hatred of homosexuality.

### Examining Gender Socialization within Physical Education Classes

As physical educators, we need to examine within our classes the role of gender socialization in perpetuating homophobia and heterosexism. For example, the labelling of athletically skilled girls as "tomboys" and athletically unskilled boys as "sissies" are manifestations of homophobia and heterosexism. Behind these labels are negative innuendos about one's sexual orientation. As long as those individuals who do not qualify as "real men" are differentiated from those who do, sport is maintained as a masculine rite, and as Griffin (1989) maintained, females and unathletic males are treated as intruders: "marginal participants in an alien environment" (p. 18).

### Providing Support as Heterosexual Allies

As heterosexual allies, we need to lobby for anti-discrimination clauses within teachers' contracts. Until lesbian and gay teachers can disclose their sexual orientation without fear of being fired, the public demand by heterosexual colleagues for

employment rights for lesbian and gay teachers is imperative. A united front of heterosexual and homosexual teachers is a powerful medium for role modeling the acceptance and appreciation of diversity. Without that alliance, homophobia and heterosexism will continue to divide and isolate heterosexual and homosexual physical educators.

#### Studying the Effects of Homophobia and Heterosexism within Physical Education

As researchers, we must systematically study the effects of homophobia and heterosexism within our profession. We must ground our research in the contextual realities of people's experiences, using a theoretical perspective that acknowledges gender construction in maintaining homophobia and heterosexism (Griffin, 1987). The perspectives of both homosexual and heterosexual, male and female physical educators who work at the elementary, secondary, college, and university levels should be solicited. A variety of methodologies should be employed to understand the complexities of homophobia and heterosexism. Researchers should give special consideration to the type of empowerment research recently undertaken by Griffin (1989) as a way to document experience and effect social change. In addition, universities and physical education organizations must show their commitment to the study of homophobia and heterosexism within physical education by providing professional and financial support.

#### Making a Commitment as a Profession to Combat Homophobia and Heterosexism

As professionals, we must make education about homophobia and heterosexism within physical education a priority. Homophobia workshops have been offered at recent national conventions of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD). More are needed at the district and local levels to facilitate the learning process that is necessary to recognize our roles as both dominants and subordinates in perpetuating homophobia. Subgroups within AAHPERD, like the National Association for Girls and Women in Sport (NAGWS) and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), have begun to address critically the issue of

homophobia within physical education and sport, but more open dialogue is necessary to bring this topic fully out of the closet.

Related groups like the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) should also be at the forefront of efforts to address homophobia within physical education and sport, but until recently, the WSF has cautiously avoided the issue. This may be because as a private organization, the WSF is dependent upon funding from corporate sponsors who demand that the "L-word" be avoided at all costs. By consenting to these demands, the WSF, an organization formed to celebrate and encourage all women's participation in sport, has colluded with the very system that restricts and discourages certain women (i.e., those who do not fit the feminine, heterosexual athlete image) from participating. As a professional organization, AAHPERD is not dependent upon private corporate sponsors for funding, and therefore, can and should take a leadership role in initiating dialogue and funding relevant research.

The potential impact of this research will depend upon its reception by the entire physical education community. The "L-word" is a very powerful word that historically has been avoided, rejected, and feared by homosexuals and heterosexuals alike within physical education. This study may fall victim to the same kind of reaction, or it may begin a process of personal and professional reflection and exchange that is long overdue. For those within physical education, the challenge is to stop rejecting the "L-word" and to begin embracing it. Homophobia and heterosexism affect all physical educators, not just lesbian physical educators. Lesbian is a very powerful word, but until we individually and organizationally take the opportunity to use it and to own it, the power lies with others outside the profession and not within ourselves.

I have often referred to the interviews with the 12 participants as the "gems of their lives." Their stories and experiences are precious gems and represent a history, a present, and a future that must be claimed with collective pride and not rejected with individual silence. More stories need to be heard, but given the risks at this time, most

lesbian physical educators choose not to publicly come out and talk about their experiences. For that reason, this research serves a critical role. Even though the number of participants in this study is small, going public with these 12 women's stories, with the gems of their lives, begins the process of dialogue and change.

### Using Phenomenological Interviewing to Do Controversial Research:

#### Process, Content, and Ethical Issues

Undertaking a dissertation of any kind is no casual endeavor. The process of choosing a topic, employing a research methodology, analyzing data, and preparing a final document represents a significant time in the life of any novice researcher. Add an element of controversy to this typical dissertation scenario, however, and the whole ball game changes. The priorities become different as do the issues one faces as a researcher. This section reviews the process, content, and ethical issues that arose for me in doing a phenomenological study about lesbian physical education teachers. The goal of this section is to provide guidance for researchers who are interested in undertaking similar research. My reflections are divided into seven areas: (a) choosing the topic, (b) gaining faculty, peer, and family support, (c) selecting a methodology, (d) conducting the research, (e) choosing and working with a theoretical perspective, (f) writing the dissertation, and (g) pondering the future.

#### Choosing the Topic

My own experience as a lesbian physical educator and my commitment to social change inspired me to pursue this dissertation topic. I chose to leave public school teaching partly because I could not accept living in two worlds. The silence, fear of discovery, and isolation I encountered (and eventually submitted to) as a lesbian physical educator went against everything I had committed myself to as a social change agent. This dissonance influenced my decision to study the experience of lesbian physical educators. This topic had personal meaning for me as well as political relevance for the

profession. Also, I viewed this study as a way to effect social change by breaking the silence about the lesbian presence in physical education.

At the same time, choosing this topic was a very difficult decision. Before making a final decision, I had to address a number of ethical issues that surfaced about the possible impact of this research on the participants, the researcher, and the profession. Questions about the possible impact of this research on the participants were obvious. For instance, what happens if their identities become public? Will they lose their jobs? Do I, as the researcher, have the right to ask lesbian physical educators to participate in this study knowing that I cannot guarantee their anonymity? Is this a reasonable risk for others to accept in helping me complete my dissertation? Could I in any way be forced to reveal the identity of the participants?

With respect to the impact of this study for the researcher, again, the concerns that surfaced were obvious: could I be sued by participants if their identities become known? What effect will this choice of dissertation topic have on my future career plans in physical education? What possible harassment and discrimination will I face by coming out as a lesbian in a profession entrenched in its own homophobia? Will I be ostracized by both heterosexuals and closeted lesbians?

Other ethical issues that were raised focused on the use of this research by persons both within and outside the profession. For instance, how might the information in this study be distorted and misused? Will this study be used as evidence to strengthen the stereotype that female physical educators are lesbians? Will this study place all female physical educators (and especially lesbian teachers) in a vulnerable position, causing more silence than dialogue? Given the current societal non-acceptance of homosexuality, will going public with the experiences of lesbian physical educators only serve to discredit a profession that is already struggling for credibility? Will school administrators and communities use this research as justification for a witch hunt to find and fire lesbian physical educators?

When making my decision to study the experience of lesbian physical educators, I knew the possible impact of this research was full of unknowns. My response to these ethical issues is this: I believe the possible positive impact of this research outweighs the risks involved for the participants, myself, and the profession. Silence perpetuates ignorance and inaccurate stereotypes, not honest portrayals of people's experiences. The goal of this study is not to prove that most female physical education teachers are lesbians. By no means is there any evidence to suggest that. Rather, the goal is to acknowledge that there are lesbian physical education teachers and this is what some of their experiences are like. I chose to study the experience of lesbian physical educators because I am interested in generating an honest dialogue about homophobia within physical education and sport. Personal and professional exchange, not continued silence, will help to actualize that goal.

#### Gaining Faculty, Peer, and Family Support

Very simply, I could not do a dissertation on this topic without the support of faculty, peers, and family. I was bound to trigger within in myself and others an emotional response, and I knew I could not hide behind the label of detached, objective researcher in undertaking a study about lesbian physical educators. By choosing this topic, I assumed a considerable amount of personal and professional risk, and the public support of my faculty committee and fellow graduate students was crucial in helping me not feel isolated in assuming these risks. Their support was manifested in various ways: individually by examining their own homophobia, collectively as a graduate program by encouraging honest and relevant research, and professionally by presenting a united front of lesbians and heterosexual allies interested in challenging homophobia within the physical education community.

Another critical source of support came from my own family. Discussions with them about my research have been open, frank, and productive. Their support and encouragement provided me with strength to pursue this controversial research.

Although the support of faculty, peers, and family may appear to have little relevance to the actual research process itself, I cannot underestimate their importance and necessity.

### Selecting a Methodology

When I chose this topic, I knew my research would be the first to explore the experience of lesbian physical educators. Consequently, I took special care in selecting a methodology that matched the objectives of my research and could be used in the context of controversial research. I chose phenomenological interviewing for several reasons. First, the pre-interview process associated with phenomenological interviewing (as detailed in Chapter III) lays the groundwork for treating each participant with dignity, respect, and care. Providing this kind of safe and respectful environment was imperative given the risks each participant assumed by agreeing to be interviewed. Second, phenomenological interviewing provides a previously silenced population an opportunity to share their perspective. One way this perspective was communicated in this study was by presenting the data in the participants' own words. Third, participants are in control of what they choose to disclose or to not disclose. Given the risks involved for them, I felt this element of power was crucial for the participants. Finally, the data gained from phenomenological interviewing is grounded in the individual context of each participant's experience. Presenting contextually rich and thick data is a powerful tool for dispelling inaccurate stereotypes and generalizations that are made about lesbian physical educators.

I had two concerns about using phenomenological interviewing for this study. First, the data rely primarily on the subjective experience of the participants; without any form of triangulation, this methodology could be criticized for producing nothing more than anecdotal stories. I have addressed this concern in Chapter III by documenting the philosophical underpinnings and trustworthiness of phenomenological research. Second, phenomenological interviewing depends upon an interactive relationship between the

participant and the researcher. The researcher is an influential player in the interview process. Given the open ended interview format, I was concerned that my personal and political investment in the topic might overly influence the course of the interview. To avoid this, I consciously monitored my role throughout the interview process. I also continuously solicited feedback about my interview style from the participants and from my dissertation chairperson who reviewed interview transcripts.

### Conducting the Research

Several issues emerged for me while conducting the series of three interviews with each of the 12 participants: (a) the profound sense of responsibility I felt toward protecting the participants' anonymity and safeguarding the interview data, (b) the depth and openness of disclosure made by some participants, and (c) the recognition of my own internalized homophobia. From day one of undertaking this research, I knew protecting the participants' anonymity was an important priority. Before conducting my first interview, I had carefully thought through the measures I would take to protect their anonymity during each step of the research process. I appreciated the risks each participant was assuming in consenting to be interviewed, and I respectfully accepted a potential participant's decision not to be interviewed. (Six individuals chose not to participate after talking with me by phone or in person.) It was during one of my first introductory meetings with a potential participant, however, that the full weight of the risks the participants were assuming really hit home for me. In expressing her concern about the possibility of losing her teaching job if her identity became known, she summed it up in four words: "Teaching is my life." At that point, I began to really understand their vulnerability and my responsibility to protect their anonymity. From then on, each set of interviews represented to me the "gems" of their lives that I had to safeguard.

Although I had taken a course specifically about phenomenological interviewing and had practical experience using this methodology, I was not prepared for the depth and

openness of disclosure made by many of the 12 participants. I was continually moved by the quality and richness of information phenomenological interviewing produced. For some participants, these interviews represented the first time they had shared about their experience as a lesbian and a lesbian educator. Their stories were often emotionally charged, full of anger, pain, and hurt. Others disclosed to me, a perfect stranger, experiences in their lives they had revealed to very few other people. At these times, I was unsure about how to proceed and found it difficult to remain in my researcher role. For instance, I wrote the following in my research journal after my first interview with Bobbi:

In talking about her relationship with guys, she disclosed she had been sexually abused two times when she was in the seventh/eighth grades. She said she had only told one other person. I asked if she could share more, and she said no. She did begin to say that she wondered if that's why she's now involved with women. I chose not to pursue that at this point but to wait.

I could tell Bobbi had trouble in general talking about her feelings. I wonder how much of that is tied up to the sexual abuse issue, especially since she's only told one other person. Now, what is my responsibility here? How can I get enough information in order to help me understand without prying into sensitive areas that I'm not going to be able to supportive of once I leave. I'm still amazed how willing people are to share about their lives. The honesty and bravery amaze me.

After the third interview with Bobbi I wrote,

The sexual abuse stuff came up. I waited for her to mention it, but then I did ask about it. I told her I thought this was still an unresolved issue for her. She acknowledged that it was. I told her I didn't need to know the specifics of what happened, but rather how what happened affected/affects her. She talked--it was obviously difficult for her. (Part of me wanted to encourage her to seek therapy, because she acknowledged carrying around a lot of guilt.) Anyway, I felt okay about how I handled her and me. I did try to be supportive, but at the same time, I pushed her to share her feelings.

After the interview, I congratulated her on her bravery and thanked her for her honesty. I felt I wanted to give her support for sharing something that was obviously very difficult for her to share. I did wonder, though, if being supportive was for her or for me? Clearly, I'm still learning about what my role should be.

Using this methodology was an on-going learning experience for me. There was no single interview formula to use with all the participants; the style and nature of the interviews changed with each participant. Even after my 36th interview, I still felt like I was learning something new about my role as a phenomenological interviewer.

The third issue that arose for me while conducting the interviews was the recognition of my own internalized homophobia. Some participants shared experiences that triggered a subconscious fear in me: their stories would confirm the negative stereotype of lesbian physical educators. For instance, one participant shared that she had been intimately involved with a student. At first, I found myself not wanting to ask follow-up questions about her relationship with this student. I figured the less information I had, the better. My private reaction was one of disappointment, "How could you? That's what gives lesbians a bad name." However, after recognizing that I was reacting with my own internalized homophobia, I pushed myself to ask for more information about the relationship. By doing so, I gained an insight into the participant's perspective that I would not have gained if I had avoided the topic. This insight helped me go beyond my own generalized, negative stereotype to understand the specific context of this participant's situation. Although I personally still have strong negative opinions about any teacher becoming involved with a student, the more information she shared, the more I was able to understand why this relationship evolved.

#### Choosing and Working with a Theoretical Perspective

I initially chose the oppression model as a theoretical perspective from which to frame my research for two reasons. One, it emphasizes the connections between all forms of oppression, and two, I believed a diverse audience of educators could appreciate and identify with the connections. Making a commitment to a single theoretical perspective, however, posed a dilemma for me. As my research progressed, I began to see how a radical feminist perspective was needed to frame the specific oppression of lesbian physical educators as women and as lesbians. I was especially influenced by Kitzinger's (1987) book, The Social Construction of Lesbianism, and her criticism (as a radical lesbian feminist) of "gay affirmative" research. She presented a very convincing argument that liberal humanistic research, which asserts that homosexuality is as natural, normal, and healthy as heterosexuality, "functions to remove lesbianism

from the political domain" (p. 45). She criticized liberal humanism because it does not challenge the underpinnings of patriarchy.

Although I strongly identify with radical feminism, I was hesitant to use a strictly radical feminist perspective for three reasons. First, a radical feminist perspective asserts that patriarchy is the original oppression from which all other oppressions (racism, Jewish oppression, classism, etc.) are modeled. At this time in my political development, I cannot fully commit myself to that perspective. Second, a radical feminist would argue that sexual orientation is a socially constructed identity and is not biologically determined. This issue is currently being debated within the gay and lesbian community, and the political ramifications of this debate mirror the radical feminist vs. liberal humanist discussion. One position emphasizes system-change and the other stresses person-change. Personally, I appreciate and support the strong, political statement behind a social constructionist position, but at the same time, I cannot state with certainty that sexual orientation for all individuals is socially constructed. For instance, many of the 12 participants described their lesbianism as innately determined. Third, I feared using a radical feminist perspective would alienate the very audience I had made a decision to address: heterosexuals and homosexuals, females and males, blacks and whites, young and old. Consequently, I chose to integrate a feminist perspective into an oppression framework. Although I felt this decision was somewhat politically ambiguous, I also believed it best represented my current viewpoint (which is still developing, and is, in fact, somewhat ambiguous).

Another issue that arose for me was how to use in my data analysis and discussion section the theoretical perspective I had selected. One goal of using phenomenological interviewing is to describe experience and meaning from the perspective of the participants. Could I jeopardize this goal by choosing oppression theory as my theoretical perspective before any data had been collected? In other words, instead of

letting the participants' stories generate theory about what it is like to be a lesbian physical educator, would I be forcing their words to fit the oppression model (and my view of the world)? All research is influenced and interpreted by the researcher, and my role in this study is no exception. For that reason, it is important to retrace my steps with respect to using a theoretical perspective.

I initially used oppression theory as a broad way to frame this research and to identify my view of the world. This did not mean, however, that during the interviews, I asked the participants to describe their experiences as an oppressed minority. My goal for the interviews was simply to have them reconstruct and make meaning of their experiences as lesbian physical education teachers.

When analyzing the interview transcripts for common themes, I tried to let their stories shape my analysis. For instance, the primary focus of Chapter V is on the strategies the participants used to conceal or disclose their sexual orientation. I borrowed from labeling theory and identity theory to describe their identity management techniques. My decision to use Jackson and Hardiman's (1988) oppression/liberation development model to frame part of my discussion section was not predetermined. In fact, this decision was made after my data had been collected and analyzed. This model fits the participants' experiences as lesbian physical educators and can be used as a useful tool in generating dialogue.

Upon reflection, I feel comfortable with my choices. I believe the selected theoretical perspective complements and supports the participants' words and stories. I also believe it allows my voice as a researcher to be heard.

#### Writing the Dissertation

Numerous issues emerged in the actual writing of the dissertation, and most of these issues revolved around the question, "Who will my audience be?" I have chosen to write this document for an audience of educators and physical educators. Although this

research has relevance to the lesbian community as well, I decided the educational community was my priority for the dissertation document.

#### Pondering the Future: A Vision of Change

I end this written document with the hope that the impact of this research is just beginning. As a lesbian physical educator who did not survive in the public schools, as the graduate student who has spent years on this project, and as a woman who is committed to social change, I have a vision for the changes this dissertation--the content and the spirit of its message--can spark. By educating ourselves, by dialoguing with one another, and by standing firmly together, we can end the homophobia that threatens the core of our personal and professional integrity. By honestly looking into the lives and experiences of lesbian physical educators, we can end the inaccurate and negative stereotypes that have plagued and hurt all physical educators, regardless of sexual orientation. By taking risks, by coming out, and by being allies, we can end the silence, fear, and isolation that lesbian physical education teachers live on a daily basis. And by embracing and celebrating the lesbian presence in our profession, we can end the needless and destructive denial that separates us. This dissertation was conceived with a vision of change. The 12 participants in this study brought life to this vision by courageously sharing their stories. Their courage will hopefully inspire others of us to now continue what they have begun.

APPENDIX A  
WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

## WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

### Lesbian Physical Education Teachers: Describing Their Experience

I. My name is Sherry Woods, and I am a doctoral student in the Physical Education Teacher Education program (PETE) at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. For my dissertation I am conducting research about lesbian physical education teachers. The major objectives of this study are to describe the experience of lesbian physical education teachers and to understand, from their perspective, the meaning they make of that experience. To do this, an in-depth interviewing process will be used.

I would like to interview between 12 and 20 lesbian physical education teachers. My plans are to interview both elementary and secondary lesbian teachers of various ages, races, and social class backgrounds who work in rural, urban, and suburban public school settings.

II. I am asking you to be a participant in this study. I will conduct three in-depth interviews with you, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. The series of three interviews will be conducted over a two to three week period.

In the first interview, you will be asked to provide personal and professional background for describing your experience as a lesbian physical education teacher. You will be asked in the second interview to recreate the concrete details of your day to day experience as a lesbian teacher. The objective of the final interview is to have you reflect on the meaning you make of your experience as a lesbian teacher in physical education. The interviews will be audio-taped, and complete transcripts will be made. I am happy to answer any questions you may have concerning the research procedures.

III. The materials from your interviews will be used primarily for my dissertation but may also be used in presentations for graduate school classes, professional conferences, and written publications. In all written materials and oral presentations, pseudonyms will be substituted for names of persons, schools, school districts, cities, towns, and counties.

IV. In a study of this nature, the anonymity of participants is a priority. Although anonymity can not be fully guaranteed, the following are steps taken at each stage of the research process to protect your anonymity.

A. Access to participants has been gained in two ways: (a) my personal contacts, and (b) contacts given by those being interviewed. All initial contact with a potential participant will be made by the person or participant suggesting the teacher to be interviewed. I will contact the potential participant directly only if she has agreed to discuss the possibility of being interviewed.

B. All interviews will take place in a safe space to be designated by the participant.

C. The researcher will not interview more than one teacher employed in a single school.

D. With the exception of the dissertation committee chairperson, I will not discuss with the dissertation committee or anyone else any names, teaching locations or identifying particulars of the participants.

E. Interview transcripts may be completed by two persons: (a) myself, and/or (b) a reputable and discrete transcriber. If someone other than myself transcribes the audio-tapes, I will erase from the audio-tapes all names and identifying particulars before submitting them for transcription.

F. As stated, pseudonyms will be substituted in the transcripts for all names of persons, schools, school districts, cities, towns, and counties. Every step will be taken to adequately disguise the participant's identity and teaching location in any published materials or oral presentations.

G. The transcripts will remain in the direct physical possession of the researcher. All audio-tapes and consent forms are kept in a safety deposit box. Tapes will be destroyed upon acceptance of the dissertation or, at your request, will be returned to you.

V. While consenting at this time to participate in these interviews, you may withdraw at any time during the interview process. In such case, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed at once.

VI. Furthermore, you may withdraw your consent to have excerpts from your interviews used in any printed materials or oral presentations if you notify me within two weeks after the final interview.

VII. In signing this form you are agreeing to the use of the materials from your interviews as indicated in section III. If the materials from your interviews are to be used in any way not consistent with what is stated in section III, you will be contacted for

additional written consent. If you do not wish to give such consent, the material will not be used.

VIII. In signing this form, you are also assuring me that you will make no financial claims on me for the use of the material in your interview.

IX. Finally, in signing this you are thus stating that no medical treatment will be required by you from the University of Massachusetts should any physical injury result from participating in these interviews.

\*\*\*\*\*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read this statement carefully and thoroughly and agree to participate as an interviewee under all the conditions stated above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of interviewer

APPENDIX B  
DATA ANALYSIS FORMS

SELF DEFINITION

- Comfort/uncomfort level; acceptance/non-acceptance of lesbian label
- Early self awareness
- Coming out process
- Characteristics of lesbian relationships
  - in and of themselves
  - as compared to heterosexual relationships
- Self definition as affected by imposed definition

IMPOSED DEFINITION

- Family
- Society
- Religion

GENDER ROLE INFORMATION

- Sex stereotypical activities
- Sex non-stereotypical activities
- Gender role understanding

ROLE OF SPORTS/ATHLETICS/PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- Early involvement in sports
- Decision to be PE teacher
- Significant role models

UNIQUE THEMES

CONCEALMENT STRATEGIES

RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOR

CONSEQUENCES

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL

FAMILY/CONTEXTUAL INFO

GENERIC CATEGORIES FOR: [Name]

TAPE #2

SELF DEFINITION:

- Comfort/discomfort level; acceptance/non-acceptance of lesbian label
  
- Relationship between being lesbian and PE teacher/coach/athlete identity

IMPOSED DEFINITION

- Family
  
- School environment
  
- Society

STRATEGIES FOR CONCEALING LESBIAN IDENTITY

- With heterosexual students, colleagues, parents
  
  
  
  
- With gay students, colleagues, parents
  
  
  
- Type of interactions: one-on-one, group, indirect
  
- Consequences/benefits

RISK-TAKING BEHAVIORS

- With heterosexual students, colleagues, parents
  
  
  
  
- With gay students, colleagues, parents
  
  
  
- Type of interactions: one-on-one, group, indirect
  
- Consequences/benefits

UNIQUE THEMES

RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENTS

RELATIONSHIP WITH TEACHERS

CONTEXTUAL INFO

SELF DEFINITION

- As self
- As lesbian: comfort/discomfort level; acceptance/non-acceptance
- As lesbian PE teacher
- Coming out/being confronted scenarios:
  - with family
  - in school environment
  - with whom; why/why not come out?
- Self definition as affected by imposed definition

IMPOSED DEFINITION

- Family
- School environment
- Society
- Being young, unmarried PE teacher vs. old, unmarried PE teacher

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN BEING IN PE/ATHLETICS AND BEING A LESBIAN

PROTECTION STRATEGIES

- With family/friends
- Within school environment
- Consequences/benefits

RISK TAKING

- With family/friends
- Within school environment
- Consequences/benefits

UNIQUE THEMES

CONTEXTUAL INFO

APPENDIX C  
DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS STEPS

## DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS STEPS

### PART ONE: Initial data management method

- Conduct all interviews with 12 participants
- Complete pre- and post- interview log
- Transcribe tapes
  - Two mini-profiles completed for APA presentation (Mona and Jody)
- Read through complete transcript, highlighting compelling passages/phrases
- Make first working document
  - Delete extraneous words
  - Delete unrelated passages
  - Delete researcher's questions/remarks
- Organize data by following categories: (using chart, pasting copies of relevant passages in key events/salient topics section)
  - Actors/relationships
  - Key events/salient topics
  - Time frame
  - Possible patterns and themes
- NOTE: Process used with four participants' transcripts; subcategories emerged
- Identify subcategories related to study focus for each interview; see below under common themes
- Code by subcategories excerpts from working copies of four transcripts
- Develop form for each interview to index coded excerpts; see Appendix B

### PART TWO: Revised data management method

- Make second working document of all 12 transcripts related to subcategories
- Analyze remaining eight transcripts according to subcategories
  - Code transcripts
  - Add to/refine subcategories
  - Complete index form for each interview
- Transfer data from forms to central pieces of newsprint

### PART THREE: Data organization

- Common themes
  - From central newsprint, transfer selected subcategories to single sheets for all participants
  - Complete selected subcategories
    - Behaviors that risk disclosure of lesbian identity
    - Strategies for concealing lesbian identity
    - Meaning making as a lesbian PE teacher
    - Self definition as lesbian: comfort/discomfort, acceptance/nonacceptance levels
    - Self definition in relation to lesbian relationships
    - Imposed definition for society/school environments
    - Self definition as affected by imposed definition
    - Connections between being a lesbian and PE teacher
    - Early role of sports, athletics, and physical education
    - Gender role understanding

- Non-stereotypical gender role activities
- Stereotypical gender role activities
- Decision to be PE teacher
- Early self awareness about being a lesbian
- Unique themes
- Significant role models
- Family/contextual information
- Academic performance in school
- Re-read each complete transcript to complete selected subcategories analysis
- Identify relationships among/between subcategories
- Profile making** (completed concurrently with common theme analysis)
  - Take second working document of each interview and identify compelling passages
  - Work and rework to make profile draft
  - Have selected committee members review/make editing suggestions
  - Prepare final profile

APPENDIX D  
SUGGESTED READINGS

## SUGGESTED READINGS

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