

## Classroom Experiences. A Qualitative Study with (and about) Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Teachers

Experiencias en el aula. Un estudio cualitativo con (y sobre) profesorado lesbiano, gay y bisexual

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### Abstract

*The growing visibility of the LGTBI collective and the claim for their rights have drawn the attention of the academic community, shedding light on a still discriminatory reality; for lesbian, bisexual, and gay teachers experience their sexual orientation and its visibility problematically. The aim of the article is to compile and interpret the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, and gay teachers to make their teaching experiences visible. To do this, 19 Primary and Secondary teachers were interviewed in depth. The inductive analysis yields results in accordance with the international literature on the matter: giving visibility to sexual orientation is decisive in the teacher's perception while at work. Although 'coming out' implies liberation and gives teachers the possibility of being a model for other colleagues and students, many factors lead lesbians, bisexual, and gays not to make their sexual orientation known, especially*

*to the students and their families. The fear of discrimination, the type of educational centre, the relationship with the rest of the teaching staff and with families, or the wish not to reveal intimate details about their lives lead some teachers not to disclose their sexual orientation. As such, it is concluded that it is necessary to improve initial and ongoing teacher training programs to provide educators with the necessary tools to develop educational materials and proposals that make diversity visible and fight against LGTBI-phobic attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, the involvement of heterosexual teachers and the publication of additional research on the matter is also deemed under a positive light.*

*Keywords:* sexual minorities; visibility; discrimination; teachers.

## **Resumen**

*La creciente visibilidad del colectivo LGTBI y la reivindicación de sus derechos han llamado la atención de la comunidad académica, cuyos datos apuntan a una realidad todavía discriminatoria. Así, docentes lesbianas, bisexuales y gais experimentan de forma problemática su orientación sexual y la visibilidad de esta. El objetivo del artículo pasa por recopilar e interpretar las experiencias de las profesoras lesbianas y bisexuales, y los profesores gais, para visibilizar su realidad como docentes. Para ello, se entrevistaron en profundidad 19 docentes de educación Primaria y Secundaria. El análisis inductivo arroja resultados acordes con la literatura internacional al respecto, en la cual destaca el hecho de dar o no visibilidad a la orientación sexual como elemento nuclear. Así, aunque ‘salir del armario’ suponga una liberación y dé la posibilidad de ser un referente en el centro educativo y para el alumnado, muchos factores llevan a lesbianas, bisexuales y gais a no visibilizar su orientación, sobre todo con el alumnado y sus familias. El miedo a la discriminación, el tipo de centro y la relación con el resto de profesorado, la relación con las familias o la simple voluntad de mantener en la intimidad su orientación llevan a algunos y algunas docentes a seguir ‘en el armario’. Como conclusión, se propone mejorar la formación inicial y permanente del profesorado, de manera que adquiera las herramientas necesarias para desarrollar materiales y propuestas educativas que visibilicen la diversidad y que luchen contra actitudes y conductas LGTBIfóbicas. Además, se hace necesaria la involucración del profesorado heterosexual y más investigación al respecto.*

*Palabras clave:* Grupo sexual minoritario; visibilidad; discriminación; profesorado.

## **Introduction and objectives**

The last decade has seen great legal advances in relation to the recognition of the rights of LGTBI people, both in most European countries and in Spain (Piedra de la Cuadra et al., 2014). However, legislative changes do not seem to be sufficient (Piedra de la Cuadra et al., 2013) and, despite the legal prosecution of hate crimes (Amigo-Ventureira et al., 2022), they continue to increase exponentially (Muniesa-Tomás et al., 2022). The rise of far-right and reactionary transphobic movements that appropriate feminism has not favoured the

collective either (López-Sáez et al., 2023). Thus, although legal advances and the struggles of the LGTBI collective have made sexual and gender diversity visible and have ensured that LGTBIphobic attitudes and behaviours are now 'frowned upon' (Pérez-Testor et al., 2010), they have not disappeared, although some may have become subtle (Borrillo, 2001; Penna Tosso and Sánchez Sáinz, 2015).

In the educational context, it is worth noting that the growing visibility of homosexuality has been accompanied by an increase in academic interest in the subject (Landi et al., 2020). In this context, numerous studies have noted the persistence of various types of discrimination in the international context (Bishop and Atlas, 2015; De Witte et al. 2019; Edwards et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2020). Spain is no exception, as discrimination, mockery, humiliation and even physical aggression against LGTBI people continue to occur (Freitas-Puppo, 2018; Piedra de la Cuadra et al., 2014). Furthermore, research has shown how, when faced with homophobic acts, a large proportion of teachers are either unaware or do not act to stop them (Amigo-Ventureira et al., 2022; Kosciw et al., 2020; Piedra de la Cuadra et al., 2014, 2016; Romero and Gallardo, 2019).

This fact allows us to focus on the role of teachers, which brings us closer to the interests of this study. Numerous texts have coincided in pointing out the potential of teachers in the reproduction of inequalities related to sexual and gender diversity, but also in the possibilities of challenging heteronormative assumptions, promoting respect and thus tackling LGTBIphobic attitudes and behaviours (Freitas-Puppo, 2018; Hall and Rodgers, 2019; Sáenz-Macana and Devís-Devís, 2020). For example, the particular sensitivity of lesbian teachers and gay teachers to all types of discrimination has been made explicit (Griffin, 1992). In this sense, the need for lesbians and gays to 'come out of the wardrobe' in order to act as positive role models for a diverse and respectful education has been pointed out. In Huerta's words "...it does not work well to hide what we think and feel... it would be better to make dissidence visible, our particular ways of understanding the world..." (2021, pp. 9-10).

However, 'coming out' in the educational context has been described as a dynamic, contextual, complex and problematic process, and thought of as an accumulation of constant decisions. In this respect, the work of Pat Griffin (1991, 1992) stands out, who established a number of stages for understanding this process. She described: a) *passing*, whereby a homosexual teacher tries to appear heterosexual, b) *covering*, whereby one does not try to appear heterosexual, but tries to hide one's homosexuality, c) coming out implicitly, i.e. assuming that some people know one's orientation, and d) coming out explicitly, even if it is to specific people. Following Griffin, a number of other studies have used these stages to show the strategies that teachers deploy and their consequences. Thus, the data suggest that staying 'in the wardrobe' is a protective strategy against the threats that come with visibility, such as the fear of losing one's job, isolation or suffering various forms of discrimination, loss of credibility or the idea of not being able to be a reference for students (Edwards et al., 2016; Goicoechea-Gaona and Goicoechea-Gaona, 2018; Mayo, 2008; Sparkes, 1994; Toledo and Maher, 2021). Griffin (1992) described it as 'wearing a mask' which, among other things, allows teachers to survive in their day-to-day lives at school. Conversely,

constantly deploying strategies to portray an image of heterosexuality, or hide homosexuality, can have high costs, such as feeling disingenuous (Edwards et al. 2016; Griffin, 1992) or taking energy away from the act of teaching itself (May, 2008).

The decision to make one's sexual orientation visible can have benefits for teachers, becoming a real exercise in personal liberation (Borrillo, 2001; Gray, 2013). Although visibility is not reversible and places the teacher in a situation of vulnerability that he or she did not previously suffer (Jackson, 2006), making one's sexual orientation visible allows teachers to become a point of reference for their students, not only for homosexual students, but also for the development of education in diversity. Thus, such visibility, especially in less tolerant environments, is a challenge that enriches teaching and becomes, as Gray (2013) argues, a political act. For DeJean (2007), teachers who 'champion' gay and lesbian visibility not only undertake an exercise in coherence, but also develop a more honest education with their students, establish more open dialogues and thus become a point of reference.

In this context, there are still lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) teachers who choose not to make their sexual orientation visible in the classroom. In some cases, they dissociate their status as teachers from their status as homosexuals (Connell, 2015; Edwards et al., 2016) and, in the words of Sparkes (1994), treat their sexual orientation as an exclusively private matter. Thus, coming out or remaining in the wardrobe is not an easy or clear-cut decision, but a problematic one that often oscillates depending on the specific situation (Edwards et al. 2016). For example, the private and religious nature of schools has a negative influence, given the positive correlation between Catholicism and homophobic attitudes, as reported by Penna Tosso (2012). At this point, it is stigmatising to place the responsibility for developing respectful education exclusively on homosexual teachers, when this should be shared by the entire teaching profession (DeJean, 2007; Mayo, 2008). This argument focuses attention on the influence of the education community as a whole, and heterosexual teachers in particular, on their LGB colleagues, and on students.

All studies point to the fact that teachers suffer from deficient training when it comes to acting in each and every one of the moments associated with homophobia and its eradication, such as identifying homophobic attitudes and behaviours, however subtle they may be, tackling insults and discrimination, using inclusive language or developing an education that shows social diversity through models and images different from the heteronormative one. This is true both internationally (Bishop and Atlas, 2015; De Witte et al., 2019; Toledo and Maher, 2021) and in Spain (Amigo-Ventureira et al., 2022; Moreno, 2005; Piedra de la Cuadra et al., 2014, 2016; Romero and Gallardo, 2019).

This being the case, teachers become a core element in achieving an inclusive and respectful education that embraces diversity (Penna Tosso and Sánchez Sáinz, 2015; Sáenz-Macana and Devís-Devís, 2020). In this direction, it is essential to have allied, heterosexual and queer teachers who favour the creation of affirmative spaces for the LGTBI collective (Fuentes-Miguel et al., 2023). However, today this collective has not received the academic attention it

deserves, especially if we refer to homosexual teachers (Hall and Rodgers, 2019; Sparkes, 1994; Toledo and Maher, 2021), which only obscures their experiences in the work context and their way of dealing with homophobia in schools. Herein lies the relevance of this study.

At this point, the aim of this study focuses on collecting and interpreting the experiences of lesbian and bisexual teachers and gay teachers in order to make their reality as teachers visible and, specifically, to a) reflect on the process of 'coming out', b) describe their actions and decisions, taking into account their arguments and repercussions and c) discuss the school context and potential as teachers.

## **Method**

This study falls within the interpretive tradition, which aims to capture and understand the experiences, thoughts, ideas, fears and expectations of the interviewees. Specifically, the in-depth interview was chosen because of its usefulness in this type of initial study, and because it allows for a greater understanding of the experiences of the interviewees (King et al., 2019).

## **Population and Sample**

The selection of the participants was somewhat difficult, given that the aim was to interview explicitly LGB teachers. Thus, the selection of participants was done either through people we knew (snowball technique) or through social networks such as Twitter or WhatsApp. The use of the latter is considered an effective research technique for locating potential study participants (Costa, 2018). In this case, participation, which was completely voluntary, was determined by the condition of being active Physical Education (PE) teachers in the Primary, Secondary or Baccalaureate educational stages and, obviously, being lesbian, bisexual or gay. Finally, 19 people were interviewed, 10 from the Basque Country and 9 from the Valencian Country, 14 of whom were women and 5 men. The origin of the teachers was determined by the area of residence of the research team, thus using criteria of convenience and accessibility to the study population. Likewise, the fact that they were PE teachers responded to the initial interests of the research, which were to find out about their experiences in this particular subject.

In all cases, the participants worked in non-religious centres, mostly public or subsidised, although some of them had previously worked in centres belonging to the Catholic Church. Table 1 lists each of the interviewees with other data of interest.

Table 1

*Characteristics of the interviewees*

Pseudonym	Profile	Educational Stage	Age	Years of teaching experience
Maialen	Lesbian	Primary	43	20
Miren	Lesbian	Primary	41	15
Lourdes	Lesbian	Primary	39	6
Amaia	Bisexual	Primary	24	2
Andoni	Gay	Primary and Secondary	34	8
Nerian	Lesbian	Primary	39	14
Sara	Lesbian	Secondary	29	1
Iñaki	Gay	Secondary	47	23
Ainhoa	Lesbian	Primary	36	5
Aratz	Gay	Primary and Secondary	33	8
Pere	Gay	Primary	39	12
Maria	Lesbian	Secondary	36	11
Lola	Lesbian	Secondary	35	11
Ferran	Gay	Secondary	32	3
Andrea	Lesbian	Primary	56	15
Irene	Lesbian	Secondary	44	17
Ana	Lesbian	Secondary	46	20
Inés	Lesbian	Secondary	56	38
Diana	Bisexual	Primary	34	2

**Data collection procedure**

Data collection was carried out exclusively through in-depth interviews. The lack of similar studies with teachers made it difficult to establish the interview script. For this reason, two factors helped: on the one hand, the contribution of the authors of this article who are part of the LGTBI collective and, on the other hand, the consultation of similar studies with homosexual female coaches and athletes (Vilanova et al., 2022).

The interview script began by addressing the personal details of each participant, including his or her background as a teacher, and then went on to address specific issues related to his or her sexual orientation. The questions ranged from social relationships outside the school, such as those with other teachers, students and families mediated by their sexual orientation. Finally, questions were asked about possible homophobic and biphobic incidents, the actions taken, the training received and the educational plans developed in the classroom.

The interviews were conducted on the days and in the places indicated by the participants, and were recorded.

## **Data analysis**

The analysis process followed the parameters of qualitative research and obeyed the objectives of the study, being closer to induction. The thematic analysis developed followed the procedures established by Clarke and Braun (2017) and Braun and Clarke (2012) and began with the leisurely reading of the transcripts, followed by the identification of the units of analysis and their subsequent coding. Once the data had been coded, themes were established to facilitate both the ordering of the data and their subsequent interpretation.

A matrix was established to organise the data, which was intensively scrutinised to come up with a list of categories that answered most of the data. This was followed by the subsequent decontextualisation and recontextualisation (Sparkes and Smith, 2014), prior to the interpretation required to write up the results. All in all, the final matrix for the analysis can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

### *Content analysis*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Subcategories</b>
Identification and recognition process	Acceptance
	Identification
	Exit from the cupboard
	Positive experiences
	Negative experiences
Training contexts	Experiences in clubs, teams
	Type of centre
	Religious centres
Promotion and Foresight	Educational projects and plans
	Protocols and Regulations
	Foresight
	Training received
Social relations	Teaching strategies. Curriculum
	Teaching strategies. Dealing with homophobic comments and attitudes.
	Difficulties. Stereotypes
	Difficulties. Changing rooms and playgrounds

## **Ethical and credibility criteria**

Ethics and credibility go hand in hand in qualitative studies, as participants' honesty is mediated by their calmness as informants (King et al., 2019). To increase this, participants were informed of the aims of the study, the treatment of transcripts and data, and the basic ethical commitments: confidentiality, anonymity, academic use of the results or the possibility of terminating the interview without explanation. In addition, to increase peace of mind, the conversations were always conducted in the time and space determined by the

interviewee. Moreover, as DeJean (2007) did in a related study, the interview transcripts were returned to the respective participants for review; in no case were changes suggested. Finally, the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Catalan Sports Council (023/CEICGC/2021).

The discussions held and the subsequent outcome of these discussions are in line with our prior commitments and the objectives set, without violating the dignity of the participants.

## Results

As has been indicated, the teachers who participated in this study were teachers of the subject of PE; however, the results shown here do not refer to the specific part of their didactics, but rather to teaching in general.

The data, previously ordered according to the matrix shown in table 2, are described below under two main headings: a) To come out or not to come out of the wardrobe, and b) The lack of training: actions and proposals. This description does not follow the order shown in the matrix, as it obeys expository criteria.

### To come out or not to come out of the wardrobe

The question of the visibility of sexual orientation was one of the most common themes in the conversations held with the participants. On this point, the data show two positions that form a continuum in which each teacher navigates according to his or her personal positioning and context: a) concealment: "when you arrive at a place, when you introduce yourself, you're not going to put a label on yourself, are you? However, the organisation of the data into two groups (in and out of the wardrobe) has more of an expository purpose than an aim of obviating nuances: the existence of ambiguous situations that fluctuate from one end of the continuum to the other.

### Hiding homosexuality and the reasons for it

Teachers who have taken the decision not to make themselves visible and have opted for concealment have put forward various arguments. In the first place, the most important ones are those that allude to a personal decision:

*... It's just that I don't open myself up to students, I'm very clear about that... I am the way I am and at no time do I show off my condition (Ana).*

*...I see that we don't have to tell our lives to the students (Amaia).*

*I accept and I know that I don't have to share it with the students (Iñaki).*

The testimony of a lesbian teacher further explores this decision:

*...I know that many women or many homosexual men do feel comfortable or think they should communicate it, they are free to do so, but I don't have any need to. Why? Because I have normalised it since I was 10 years old (Ana).*



In this regard, it is not only the teacher's capacity for agency that plays a role in deciding to remain in the wardrobe, as the context plays an important role. Thus, the type of school in which teaching takes place has an influence, resulting in a clear association: visibility seems to be incompatible with teaching in private schools, especially religious ones:

*... it's a private school... I didn't say anything. Very top people, very elite (Inés).*

*... I would have kicked myself out on the street (Irene).*

*Fears, yes... that they would throw me out, obviously, that they would throw me out right away. It was sacrilege to be a lesbian! (Maialen)*

The data show how the visibility of sexual orientation is a chimera in religious schools, while it is plausible in public schools: "Then in public schools, I decided that... when I opened up publicly, that I refused to go on like that (Maialen)". According to one of the participants, "public education is very plural" (Lourdes).

The data also emphasise the importance of social relations in the work context. In this sense, the data show how LGB teachers deal every day with diverse homophobic and biphobic situations, often clear and categorical and other times subtle, which influence their decisions: "...in teaching there are machistas, machistas at the level of mentality, there is homophobia, and comments that you hear in the teachers' room that you say 'oh my God'" (Ana). Here is a list of some of them:

*...expressions such as 'that's a fag', or 'she's a real tomboy', or 'this girl is such a dyke' (Ana).*

*I've often heard them say 'fuck off', or inappropriate comments: 'that's faggy' (Aratz).*

*In an evaluation session a teacher said, 'that kid is half faggot' and I looked at him and said 'excuse me, does it have something to do with his grades?' (Nerian)*

*I have experienced super macho and super sexist situations at school. There is also a lot of resistance. Some students can't even see me (Lola).*

LGB teachers are influenced by these facts in their daily lives. The relationship with the pupils' families is also an aspect that worries them: "The Arab community knows it and everyone knows it, at first I was a bit shy with that community because of the culture shock" (Maialen). In a way, there is a constant concern that goes hand in hand with a certain fear: "It has crossed my mind... a bit of fear that maybe some family will go to the head office to complain.... But it hasn't happened. But well, it's fear, it's a part of fear" (Aratz).

### **Visibility, between normality and becoming a point of reference**

The other position is to give visibility to one's own homosexuality. In these cases, the testimonies reflect not only a need to normalise diversity in terms of

sexual orientation, but the result of a personal struggle against the barriers that limit this diversity:

*...when I started telling people around me I saw that I was empowering myself (Amaia).*

*With co-workers, now, for example, I feel very liberated. Why? Because I don't care about anything (Ana)*

*To experience it so naturally is a luxury, yes, a real treat, a prize (Maialen).*

However, beyond the personal dimension, the people interviewed who have made their sexual orientation visible highlight the desire for their visibility to contribute to social change, as one lesbian teacher said: "That the repression I have experienced should not be experienced by anyone else" (Sara). At this point, given the teaching profile of the participants, it is clear that they are aware of the potential they have to become a point of reference for diversity and tolerance in their schools, especially with their students. This possibility has been recurrent:

*... I know that having a homosexual teacher helps a lot, I know that. I know it's better for society (Iñaki)*

*... in the end, if a teacher stands up and says I am gay or I am a lesbian, he or she becomes a reference point for the pupil in front of him or her... having a reference point in school can be a good way forward (Inés).*

*It is very important that students have references, and if they are not visible, they do not have them (Lola).*

However, the testimonies have not remained in the sphere of possibility, but rather, as a reinforcement of this idea, they have described concrete cases in which being a reference of sexual diversity has facilitated the coexistence and the very existence of homosexual students:

*... these students are always very close to you and there is always a special feeling... I understand... you can share from the peace of mind that everything is going to be fine (Lola).*

*I think that in the centre... as you know that I understand, it's like everything flows more (Andrea).*

This is also the case for those teachers who, while remaining in the wardrobe, and without claiming to be a spokesperson for any status, end up empathising significantly with homosexual students:

*In the face of any personal adversity, moments of sadness and so on, they come to me... I talk a lot with the students... you also carry a baggage of having suffered social isolation, and so you immediately detect these things. I am very empathetic (Ana)*

## **The training gap: actions and proposals**

To a large extent, most of the comments in relation to the training received on affective-sexual and gender diversity denote a gap: "Zero, zero. I would say that I have trained on my own" (Iñaki). None of the interviewees could refer to any kind of action during their initial teacher training, as these two comments highlight:

*There is nothing, I didn't receive any training. Neither on gender, nor on inclusion...* (Maria)

*... I think that there is a lack of training for teachers on this subject and, of course, if there are very few who fight to work on this, it is difficult to get there* (Pere).

On the contrary, the people interviewed allude to lifelong learning, at least as far as the development of actions related to sexual and gender diversity is concerned:

*Yes, we had a training session with an organisation that works with trans children, working on different concepts within the LGTBI framework...these issues are gradually being included in the curriculum, but they are not yet implemented in the centres* (Ainhoa).

*I have done some courses. So it was the treatment of LGTBI students in the field of teaching* (Ana).

Given the lack of initial teacher training, courses and other activities have recently been set up to provide teachers with certain tools. As one teacher testifies: "Now there are lots of them, there are many courses" (Lola).

In this sense, in addition to teacher training, we have the teachers' own capacity for agency. One of the most recurrent actions in the interviews was the holding of specific activities on the days indicated in the calendar:

*25 November against gender violence, 8 March women's day...* (Ana)

*For three years now, on 25 November we have been putting on a powerful performance with the students* (Lola).

These activities have been criticised by teachers, given their one-off nature: "...it's like 'come on', here comes the 8th March and a pill, here comes I don't know what, and it's a bit pointless..." (Maialen). This type of symbolic action on a single day ends up tiring the students, as one teacher explains: "but you know what happens with the students? There comes a time when it's like listening to a broken record" (Diana). Moreover, this lack of reflection and pause about the actions that are organised even affects the teaching staff: "What happens is that we have so many coexistence issues that I don't have much time to get involved..." (Andrea). The teachers' self-criticism in this respect points to the lack of "a specific plan or extensive work" (Amaia).

Sometimes it is the teaching staff themselves who are the source of resistance, as explained by a teacher who, after proposing activities for coeducation, was rejected by her colleagues on the faculty on the grounds that it was 'ideology':

"What do you mean, ideology? Let's see, we are talking about rights, aren't we? It's not ideology. So it's very difficult, because you meet a lot of resistance". (Lola).

Even so, the participating teachers have been enthusiastic about introducing these topics in their classes, at least according to the proposals described. We present these grouped into three categories:

- **Teacher training:** as already mentioned, the lack of initial teacher training is perceived as one of the main problems: "The university should work on a line that trains students who are going to be teachers and thus be able to transmit values, experiences, experiences and things that will be useful for children" (Inés). Initial training could be complemented with ongoing training "that reaches the centres, not just arrives, that it is necessary to receive this type of training whether you want it or not" (Ferran). In this direction, one of the proposals refers to the creation of seminars, "a working group, interested in the subject. I would create a powerful, powerful working group" (Miren).
- **Curricular standards and materials.** On the one hand, the need for the legal framework in education to make it compulsory to deal with diversity in education has been raised. The comment made by one teacher called for this, referring once again to religiously oriented schools: "If the school thinks it is an important issue, then it will apply it. But you go to a religious school and they still say: turn around and leave" (Nerian). On the other hand, in the day-to-day classroom, teachers lack materials with which to develop inclusive education: "I could be interested in materials that are already prepared to work on these kinds of issues. But right now I don't have any material, nor have I prepared it, nor have I done so" (Andrea). In this sense, they extend the demand for didactic units: "to make a DU, a programme to work directly in schools" (Miren).
- **Specific actions:** specific celebrations could improve their educational scope if they incorporated, for example, the presence of "a transgender teacher. For the pupils it would be great, it's true, in the end, the more you see, the more normalised they will be" (Maialen). Thus, it is seen in a positive light that "the references we use are diverse" (Aratz). For example, in the case of PE, one teacher suggests varying the content and "doing other types of sports that are not so macho, football, pelota... there is a huge range..." (Nerian). In any case, and as has already been discussed above, "these subjects are subjects for life... so they should be worked on every year... with continuity and depth. And not on specific days or tutorials..." (Amaia).

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The results of this research highlight, firstly, that 'coming out' is a complex process. Although the data have been grouped under two broad headings, the teachers' experiences suggest that it is a dynamic and contextualised process, as studies in other contexts (Button, 2004; Connell, 2015; Cutler, 2023; Griffin, 1992)

have shown. In addition to the criticisms that have been made of the metaphor of the wardrobe for ignoring other intersectional nuances or for implying a division that reinforces binarism (Connell, 2015), it must be borne in mind that people from sexual minority groups in general, and the homosexual community in particular, are 'forced' to reveal part of their orientation, in this case sexual orientation, to other people (Gray, 2013). This, in a way, puts stigmatising pressure on LGB teachers who, in many cases, have argued that they do not feel this need or even try to draw a clear separation between their sexual orientation and their teaching, as some of the data has shown.

The stance of not 'taking off the mask', referred to by Griffin (1992), is due to various conditions, and is not always the result of a free decision, but, on the contrary, is the result of a still LGBphobic context. In this sense, the interactions between teachers, the school's explicit support for LGTBI rights or the visibility of diversity are important factors (Connell, 2015). Another relevant aspect is the public or private nature of the schools. In fact, among the main reasons lesbians and gays cite for remaining in the wardrobe is the fear of losing their jobs. This has been found in some international studies (Griffin, 1991; Toledo and Maher, 2021). Perhaps, in the Spanish context, due to the weight of public education, this fear is less relevant, although it still exists among homosexual teachers who work in religious centres, as the above data show, and as corroborated by other studies (Huerta, 2021; Moreno, 2005; Penna Tosso, 2012).

The separation of a teacher's personal life from his or her activity within the school is highly contested. Thus, criticisms of considering teachers' sexual orientation as a private matter that should remain outside the educational sphere have been manifest (Gray, 2013; Griffin, 1992; Sparkes, 1994). Going further, making one's homosexuality visible is seen as a challenge to heteronormativity and an exercise in honesty (DeJean, 2007; Gray, 2013; Lynch et al., 2022).

In this sense, several teachers in this study have alluded to the personal liberation of 'coming out of the wardrobe' (Borrillo, 2001). In these cases, confronting the homophobic reality, full of subtle comments and actions that try to remind us of belonging to a minority (Pérez-Testor et al., 2010), and becoming a point of reference for students, has been liberating. The data suggest that, from visibility, it seems easier to act against homophobia, as it denotes a loss of fear of being identified with something that 'one already is'.

However, it is necessary to differentiate what it means to 'be visible' to peers compared to coming out as LGBTI to students or their families. Thus, the literature agrees that it is safer and more comfortable to be open with other teachers (Connell, 2015; Gray, 2013), which fits with Griffin's (1991, 1992) stage four, that of explicitness. Visibility to students appears to be more complicated. The study data reinforce the arguments of previous research that allude to the difficulty teachers have in being completely honest with their students (Connell, 2015; Gray, 2013; Griffin, 1991; Müller and Böhlke, 2023). In addition, the role of families or, often, the homophobic role that teachers anticipate their families will play must be taken into account (Connell, 2015). In this final push towards total visibility, there are powerful variables whose intersectional influence should be deeply and sensitively analysed, such as ethnicity or religion: the data collected

coincide in linking homophobia with high levels of religiosity (Hall and Rodgers, 2019; Penna Tosso, 2012; Romero and Gallardo, 2019), belonging to certain ethnic groups or cultures, such as the Roma (Penna Tosso, 2012), or adherence to conservative ideologies (Romero and Gallardo, 2019).

With all these facts on the table, it is not surprising that LGB teachers experience this situation in a problematic way (Goicoechea-Gaona and Goicoechea-Gaona, 2018); it does not seem that placing oneself in one or the other strategy is dichotomous, but rather fluid and contextual (Button, 2004; Connell, 2015; Cutler, 2023).

On the other hand, the results of this research also show that the role of all teachers is fundamental in the development not only of one-off actions, but also of education in diversity. As the data show, it seems that students have learned to read 'one-day' activities as superficial, and these end up wearing out the teachers and the activities themselves (Freitas-Puppo, 2018). Thus, the symbolic incorporation of multiculturalism, as bell hooks (2021) would say, becomes repetitive year after year, forcing a rethink. The problem, in this sense, is the lack of teacher training in affective-sexual and gender diversity (and other diversities as well), both at the initial and permanent levels. And although in the latter case, teachers have the perception that the situation is beginning to change, we still have a teaching staff that recognises that they do not have the necessary tools to comply with what is clearly set out in the regulations and laws. Consequently, it is pertinent to review initial training in order to incorporate diversity as a core element of an education in values capable of recognising and respecting differences. The potential of well-trained teachers in this respect is unanimously supported by previous studies (Bishop and Atlas, 2015; De Witte et al., 2019; Penna Tosso and Sanchez, 2015; O'Connell et al., 2010). Adequate training relates, among other things, to the ability to identify homophobic attitudes and behaviours, which still exist in the eyes of homosexual students (Kosciw et al., 2020; Myers et al., 2020), address them and incorporate diversity into educational projects.

Finally, it is relevant to note the originality of this study. Internationally, the study of the experiences of lesbian or bisexual teachers and gay teachers has been far from academic interests (Airtton and Koecher, 2019). In this sense, the Spanish context is no exception, so the reality of this group in schools is still far removed from research interests, which, on the one hand, makes us take these data with some caution. However, the coincidence of the arguments put forward with those reported in other Anglo-Saxon studies gives a glimpse of a fairly clear reality.

In relation to the limitations of the study, it is worth pointing out the lack of transgender, intersex or queer participants who, going beyond lesbians and gays, offer a broader view of this group. Also, the low presence of gay teachers and the absence of bisexual men limits the possibilities of this study to develop more specific interpretations.

However, it seems appropriate to develop more in-depth research which goes into detail on the experiences of homosexual teachers and goes into, for example, each of the specific didactics, each of the stages, the differences between men and

women, the special relationship with the pupils or the description of specific individual cases.

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