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"I am what I am…"

comparing the experiences of openly gay and lesbian PE teachers with non-specialist peers in a period of declining homohysteria

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Climates

Hostile
- Section 28
- Homohysteric

Conditionally tolerant
- Glass closet
- Don't ask, don't tell
- Edwards et al. 2014 - teachers

Open and inclusive
- McCormack 2011 – students
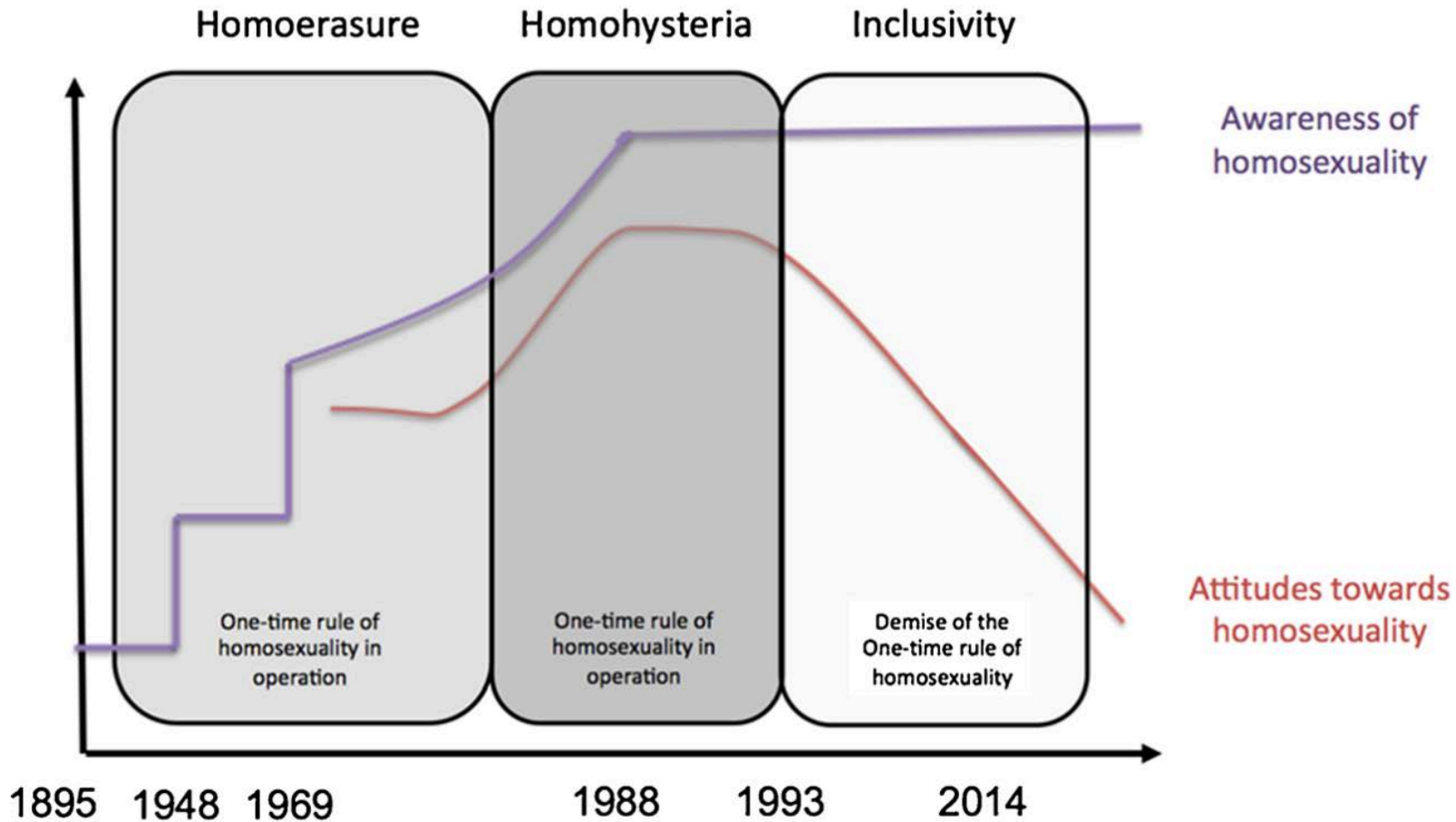
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Stonewall Teachers' Report 2014

While most of the gay pupils I have known have felt safe coming out in school, all but one of my gay colleagues have concealed their own sexuality for fear of this being used against them by pupils and their parents.

Thomas, secondary school teacher, independent school (South West)

I have worked with a gay teacher and staff were more hostile to him than the children.

Zainab, primary school head teacher, special school (Scotland)

Stonewall Teachers' Report 2014

→ There has been **no real improvement** in the proportion of teachers who believe that their head teacher or school governors (in England and Wales) demonstrate clear leadership in tackling homophobic bullying.

Stonewall Teachers' Report 2014 Physical Education specific:

In other schools the macho expectations (sport) or feminine role models can be quite specific and unforgiving.

Marie, secondary school teacher, independent school (East Midlands)

Stonewall School Report 2017

'Equality for LGBT staff and pupils must not be a 'nice to do if you have time' issue for schools'

Anne Lyons
28th June 2017 at 16:06

Schools desperately need to take a zero tolerance approach towards homophobic and transphobic bullying, writes one heads' leader

I was shocked to read the latest research from Stonewall, the organisation that campaigns for better rights for LGBT people, which says that nearly half of all students still face homophobic bullying.

The figure is falling, so we are making progress. But it's still way too high.

Homophobic bullying in schools falls by a third in a decade, study finds

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and transgender pupils are still at risk, charity warns, with as many as two in three trans children reported to have attempted suicide

Rachael Pells Education Correspondent | @rachaelpells | Tuesday 27 June 2017 13:20 BST

Generally, children are more likely to be taught about LGBT issues in the classroom than they were a decade ago

Young less likely to suffer bullying over sexuality than decade ago, says report

Stonewall said that while the findings showed an improvement for young people in many ways, there is still much more to do.

Last updated: 27 June 2017, 08:10 BST

School Report: open survey of over 3000 participants (intended sample = LGBT students in school)

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Stonewall school report 2017 (p. 6)

SUPPORT

- **More than half** of LGBT pupils (53 per cent) say that there isn't an adult at school they can talk to about being LGBT

- Just **four per cent** of LGBT pupils know of an openly bi member of staff, and **three per cent** know of one who is openly trans. **One in four** LGBT pupils (27 per cent) know of an openly gay member of staff, and **22 per cent** know of an openly lesbian member of staff

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SCHOOL REPORT

The experiences of lesbian, gay, bi and trans young people in Britain's schools in 2017

Stonewall

THE DECLINING SIGNIFICANCE OF HOMOPHOBIA

How Teenage Boys are Redefining Masculinity and Heterosexuality

MARK MCCORMACK

OXFORD

University of Worcester

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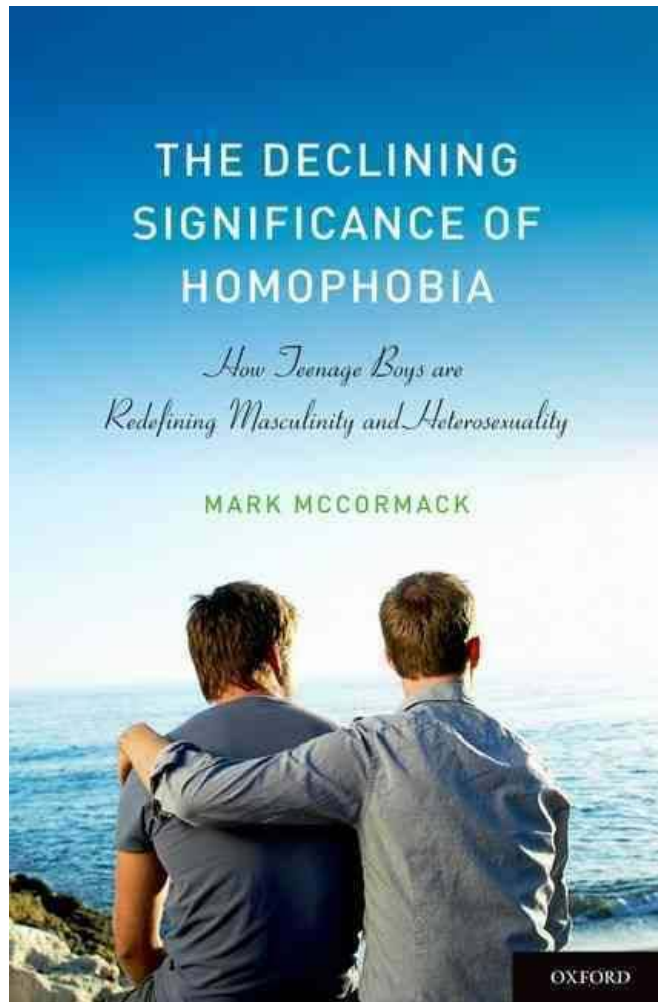
Previous research

- Countries
    - Australia (Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013)
    - England (Gray, 2013) - data from 2008
    - Ireland (Neary, 2012; Fahie, 2016)
    - America (Connell, 2015)
- Subject specific
    - Physical Education teachers (Sykes, 2009; Edwards et al., 2014)
    - Music teachers (Palkki, 2015).

- Edwards et al., (2014) state, 'One such knowledge gap is in understanding the lived experiences of lesbian and gay teachers working in schools following the abolition of Section 28' (p. 3).

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Cultural change

Participant overview

	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Years teaching	Types of school	Subject Area	Leadership position
Participant 1	30	Male	White British	3 years	Secondary, Private	P.E	No
Participant 2	31	Female	White British	2 years	Primary School	Primary	No.
Participant 3	34	Male	White British	14 years	Multi-academy, secondary, comprehensive	English	Yes – SLT (Dept)
Participant 4	24	Male	White British	3 years	Primary school	Primary	No.
Participant 5	39	Male	White European	15 years	Secondary, independent	English	Yes – Head of 6th
Participant 6	30	Female	White British	8 years	Secondary, faith school	P.E	Yes - pastoral
Participant 7	26	Female	White British	4 years	Secondary, comprehensive, academy	P.E, DT	Yes – pastoral
Participant 8	44	Female	White British	16 years	Secondary	P.E	Yes – pastoral
Participant 9	23	Female	Traveller British	2 years	Primary	Primary	No
Participant 10	46	Female	White British	22 years	Primary, faith school	Primary	No
Participant 11	54	Female	White British	15 years*	Secondary/FE	Business	No
Participant 12	46	Female	White British	21 years*	Secondary	P.E.	Yes – SLT (Asst)

Changing use of language
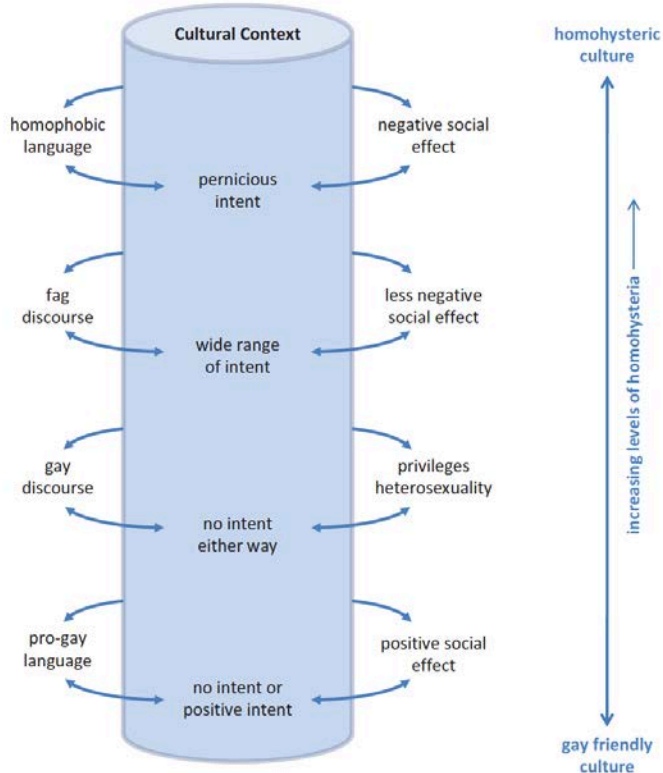
Participant 3: "Things students are saying you know 'that's so gay' used to be **endemic** like it is a lot all over society and that as an **indicator that's steadily declined**"

Participant 5: "with pupils it's mainly the **kind of thoughtless** 'oh that's so gay' which is never directed at me"

Participant 7: (PE) "One of the boys came in and said '**argh miss I used gay as a descriptive word, I didn't mean it negatively**' …. he got really quite upset that he'd upset her"

Changing use of language – time lag
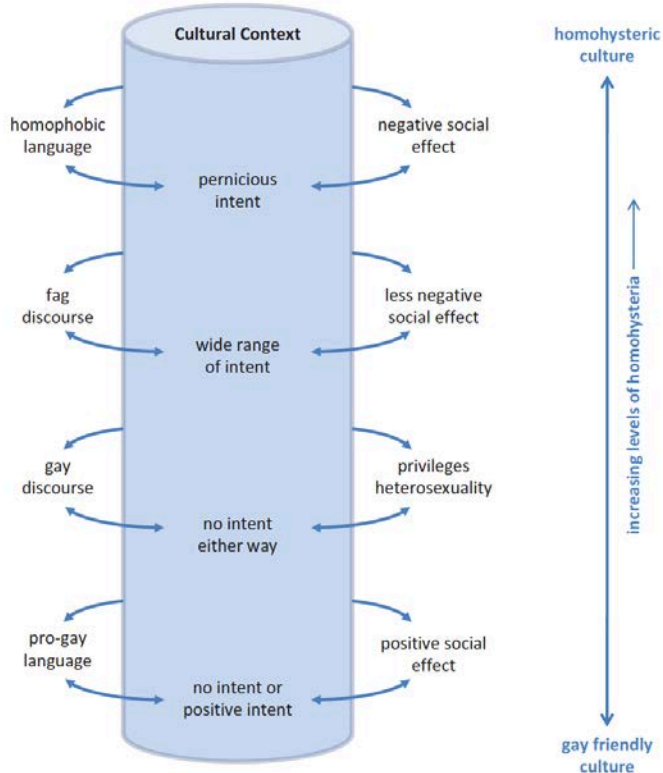
Participant 10: "I'm very quick to say, 'you can't say you're gay', I'm **very quick to stamp** on that, certainly quicker than others."

Participant 11: "I'm a big one for language being really really important so I must have been one of only a handful of teachers at [college] **that would pick kids up for saying the word gay**, gay being 'oh that's stupid' - 'oh that's really gay'."

Participant 12: (PE) "it's important that we challenge something that isn't right and isn't acceptable so if I hear someone shout 'oh that's so gay that is' **I will pick up on it**. You know, I'll just say 'do you know that can be quite an offensive term actually and you're not using it in an appropriate way?'"

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Effects on pupils – Teaching

Participant 3: "I think I'm a **much better teacher** than I ever have been before" "I think that **openness** does help to build trust."

Participant 4: "I always saw myself as different at school if anything I am **more aware and more supportive** to children who might have those differences or might not quite be fitting in with the other children, so if anything it makes me more aware."

Participant 9: "As a teacher I'm **very open** we talk about anything and there's no question you can't ask in my classroom and I'll always answer"

Participant 10: "I'm **very aware of difference** in my children, I think that makes me a better teacher."

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Effects on pupils – Teaching (PE)

Participant 1: "If anything they're probably a **little bit more engaged and actually talkative** and they've just been very positive with it all."

Participant 6: "Perhaps I've **built better relationships** with some because they know, you know because they don't have a support group you know. Certain kids come to extra-curricular clubs because you know they **feel a connection** with me simply because, you know, maybe they're going through their own identity issues, so I've picked up on that before you know, certainly more so, you know pupils who, especially girls who maybe are questioning their own sexuality, **maybe tend to build a stronger relationship with me**"

Participant 7: "I think the kids are **more open and confident to talk** about and know they can speak to me. I mean I'm quite an open person about anything really, especially, well anything, yeah, they can talk to me about anything, they know they can."

Participant 8: "However I do feel that also that the ability to be confident to come out in front of kids or to talk to other members of staff gives them the **ability to have confidence** if they have those sorts of feelings and they see you probably being a little bit more as you say of a trailblazer in terms of saying, you know 'it's alright, I'm happy with myself'"

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Coming out

Participant 1 (PE): "I've got feedback from pupils in different years - there's a few of them that on the notes they gave me saying you know **'thank you'** without them saying their names they say that **they're part of the LGBT community** so they felt supported so there are definitely out pupils within the school for sure."

Participant 7 (PE): "I would say in the last few years there's been **more of an open kind of talking point.** I mean I've got year 7 lads that are out I've got a year 10 girl that's transgender"

Participant 3: "I've **only had 3 pupils** come out to me"

Private vs public debate

Primary -

Participant 2: "It's not something the children...if it was raised, if the children asked questions then yes it would be something that we come across. **I would not be unhappy or uncomfortable to talk about, but it's not something 4 year olds really raise**"

Participant 4: "It's just purely something personal to me, I don't feel like...even if I was straight I don't think I'd mention it in front of the children **I don't feel like bringing too much of your home life in is a good thing to me I just don't**"

Secondary -

Participant 3: "Whereas now I will **just casual like** just kind of drop the 'oh my husband drives me insane when he does that' just that sort of thing so I think that builds trust with people"

Private vs public debate (PE specific)

Participant 6: "As a teacher I don't think it affects you know my lessons or my teaching but certainly I am more cautious you know when **I teach gymnastics and you have to support**…you know I'm very careful about that and you know, I make sure that I'm very clear about how I'm going to support them and which perhaps if I wasn't gay I wouldn't, I wouldn't be as worried about it"

Participant 7: "I just said you can't, obviously in a position of loco parentis and a position of care, student care, you can't tell the kids how to act upon their feelings but obviously **we want to act as a support network** so it's a fine line really, it's a fine balance of getting it right and also making sure the doors open at the same time kind of thing"

Participant 1: "I wouldn't have taken it upon myself to make it public knowledge because it's, you know**, none of their business really** but you know I don't mind them knowing it was just the fact of how it all came about really."

Participant 8: "Obviously been conversations about it but never ever directly to me but if a child did say that to me I think I'd definitely**, at this point in my teaching, would say yes to them**"

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General conclusion

- Language is changing

Positives

- Teachers are coming out
- Pupils are coming out
- Positively affecting teaching
- From hostile to conditionally tolerant/open and inclusive

Negatives

- Climate – hostile, conditionally tolerant, open and inclusive
- Reverse relative deprivation
- Fear of reprisal – PE context
- Public vs private – primary and PE

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